

Product Management at Nielsen Media: Tuned in to customer needs

“Who is watching TV?” and “What are they watching?” These age-old questions are answered by the NielsenTV ratings, which provide an audience estimate for just about every program seen on television. Nielsen Media Research is the company behind the ratings, measuring homes, TVs, programs, commercials, and people. Clients use Nielsen Media Research’s television audience research information to make program decisions and to buy and sell more than \$60 billion of national and local television advertising in the U.S. each year.

Over the last several decades, television viewers and the media industry alike have changed dramatically—more TVs, changing audience demographics, new choices like cable and satellite, advances in technology and the measurement methodologies keeping track of it all. Today the heart of the Nielsen Media Research ratings service is an electronic measurement system called the Nielsen People Meter. Placed in a random sample of 5,100 households in the U.S., the meters collect national audience estimates for broadcast and cable networks, syndicated programs, and satellite distributors. Local ratings estimates are also produced for television stations and regional cable networks in major markets throughout the U.S.

The evolution from Nielsen’s traditional household measurement to the People Meter—which collects specific characteristics for every person in the household—has created an explosion in the volumes and granularity of data Nielsen Media now offers its customers. Beyond the hardcopy ratings information, the company is also expanding and enhancing its suite of software tools that customers use to analyze the data and turn it into pertinent

information. Today, Nielsen boasts nearly 200 diverse product offerings, both data and software. For the national and local product management teams, that can add up to a monumental challenge.



The mandate: Forge stronger connections with customers

Two long-time media industry experts are meeting the product management challenge at Nielsen Media: Roy Worman, Senior Vice President of National Product Management, and Gary Finch, Vice President of Local Product Management. Each is tasked with keeping a finger on the pulse of customers and translating customer feedback and market information into effective product and service planning efforts. But it wasn’t always that way. Over the last several years, Nielsen has reinvigorated product development and reinvented product management.

According to Worman, “In the late 1990s, we had a product planning and development function that was primarily a liaison between our Marketing department and IT infrastructure people. At that time, Marketing owned the relationship to the client. To handle rapidly changing market and customer dynamics, we realized we needed much stronger ties with our customers to understand their business better, as well as more discipline, structure, and process. Toward that end, we began morphing our product planning and development department into classic product management.” →

Case Study

Finch adds, “The television business is very dynamic. We have many disparate customer sets, most with unique needs. As we began building and strengthening product management, we needed to know the answers to some core questions: How can we better meet the needs of our customers and better understand their business challenges? How should we develop software to meet those needs? How can we articulate the value that our products demonstrate in the marketplace? How can we ensure profitability for those products? As a fairly new organization at Nielsen, we realized many of our product managers needed skill sets to answer those questions and take product management to the next level. That’s where Pragmatic Marketing® came in.”

Real-world experience makes the difference

“At Nielsen, we often look to getting outside perspectives for best practices and disciplines,” says Worman. “For help with product management training, we scoured the market, discovered Pragmatic Marketing, and I went and previewed the seminar. I found the instructor not only to be amazingly entertaining, but also very informative. The material seemed to hit a chord, and I thought, ‘We can really apply some of the things they’re talking about.’ I felt the Practical Product Management™ course was comprehensive in a way that could teach our product management groups how to become more effective product managers.”

For Nielsen, the depth and breadth of product management knowledge conveyed in the Pragmatic Marketing courses has been invaluable. “Understanding how we collect the data, apply business rules, and publish our data is a very complex process,”

explains Finch. “It’s difficult to find talented professionals who understand the media business and have a strong product management background. So our approach to building the team is to leverage the domain knowledge of people in the business and teach them how to be good product managers. Pragmatic is a terrific fit for us, because there are very few courses in the marketplace today that address software product development. The instructors bring real-life experiences and analogies to show where things work and where they don’t work. That lends tremendous credibility to the class.”

Nielsen has embraced the Pragmatic Marketing methodology across the board, requiring all product planners and product managers throughout the company—in both the national and local markets—to attend the Practical Product Management seminar at least once. Many people, including Worman and Finch, have been to the course several times.

Keep your customers close and your prospects closer

When asked about the key takeaway from the seminar, Worman has a ready answer, “It’s the importance of putting the client at the center of the process. In the past, we were not as connected to our clients as we needed to be—or more importantly, to our prospects. In the end, clearly

understanding where the market is moving will determine your ultimate success; rather than basing decisions on a hunch. One of the sayings from the course that we really hooked onto was, ‘Your opinion, while interesting, is irrelevant.’ To me, that is profound. It’s about recognizing what’s happening in the market, when it’s happening. Now a lot of my people will say, ‘That’s one opinion, but what do the facts say?’ That’s a much more compelling argument.”

Finch agrees, “One of the key things we learned from the class is that a product manager is the voice for the marketplace. I encourage our product managers to be out listening to clients and industry groups to understand the changes and dynamics in the media business. We have to make sure that our data and software reflect and can handle those changes. The Pragmatic Marketing class also teaches product managers how to be good stewards of their products—everything from product profitability to writing good requirements and providing market feedback back to the developers.”

He continues, “Toward that end, we have also embraced the Requirements that Work™ class. We’re trying to do a much better job of identifying personas and the problem statements that our



The Strategic Role of Product Management™

clients face in using our products. That has been a very effective class to help us understand how we can produce better software. Across the board, we are consistently raising awareness for the responsibility a product manager has for his or her products and how to better address the needs of our clients.”

Strategy, strategy, strategy

Both Finch and Worman agree that while the product management teams do a good job of tactically serving their products, they must get better on the strategic front. “We recently launched a product strategy group,” says Finch. “We have a three-year plan, and we are taking a look at our client segmentation, doing a client needs analysis, and updating the competitive landscape. We are taking a hard look at our portfolio and examining the software products we have today and looking at future needs and revenue opportunities. I’m very proud of the strategy work we are doing now. We are trying to change the paradigm to be more proactive as we look at our products and listen to the market. We are working to get better at learning from our win-loss scenarios and closing the gaps.”

Worman concludes, “The Pragmatic Marketing Framework has been instrumental in helping us become more strategic. The course laid a very solid foundation in terms of where we are—and where we need to go. We began to recognize that we were spending more time doing presentations and demos and whitepapers rather than the competitive analyses and business cases and the strategic things we really needed to do. I would highly recommend Pragmatic Marketing to anybody involved in product management. If there’s anything the framework says to you, it’s this: It’s all about the client and being market-driven. That can’t be said enough.”

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Nielsen
Media Research

To feature the product management success at your company, contact editor@productmarketing.com

Free seminar!

This seminar is open to anyone currently employed in high-tech marketing, including senior management, product marketing managers, and product managers.

There is no fee to attend, but registration is required via our website.

www.PragmaticMarketing.com

Seats are limited, so early registration is recommended. See available dates on back cover.

As a high-tech executive, are you unclear about the strategic role of product management?

Does the role of product manager in your company need to be defined to the CEO so support can be given to strategic activities?

As a product manager, do you strive to lead the organization rather than react to it?

This half-day session is a subset of the Practical Product Management™ seminar and introduces the industry standard for high-tech marketing, the Pragmatic Marketing Framework. Refined over ten years and implemented by hundreds of technology companies, this framework shows how Product Management and Marketing personnel can move from tactical activities to quantifiable, strategic actions that deliver tremendous value to the company. This session includes immediate actionable ideas about how to best establish the role of Product Marketing/Management and define market-driven products that make customers want to buy.

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