

Best Practices Help Grow a Grocery Store Automation Business

The TCI Solutions story is short and sweet: the company builds software that helps supermarket operators increase their top and bottom lines. Today more than 400 chains count on TCI software to automate complex pricing strategies, streamline inventory management, and execute more consistently—from headquarters to store.

To compete in today's complex retail environment, grocers must be able to respond rapidly to market changes, connect with their customers, and improve their chain's overall image. And the product management team at TCI can help. This senior group of marketing experts has its finger on the pulse of the grocery retail market space and is guiding the company's flagship software solution, TCI Retail™, to a place of prominence.

The product management organization at TCI was formed over three years ago to help codify and simplify product management processes to build software with market-driven functionality. According to Randy Brengle, vice

president of product marketing, "When the company was founded in 1983, we were, by necessity, development-driven for a long period of time. Later, as the market matured, we moved into being a sales-driven organization, where we were determining what a major customer or prospect wanted and building a product or feature set to suit. Now our business model is market-based—where product management determines market needs and drives the product to solve those pervasive problems."

Best practices simplify product management

When the product management group was first launched, however, the team initially struggled with creating a process to describe requirements for the software it wanted the development organization to build. "We were thrashing about a bit. We had no idea how to identify and define best practices and procedures for market-driven product management. We had trouble identifying and segregating

"Now we have confidence that we know exactly what to provide to Development. There in an incredible sense of freedom that comes from understanding what we needed to do—and, more importantly, what we *didn't* need to do."

Randy Brengle
vice president of product marketing
TCI Solutions



the roles and responsibilities—both within Marketing and for clean handoffs to Development.”

TCI’s team was not the first to wrestle with articulating the “who, what, when, and why” of product management. That’s when they discovered Pragmatic Marketing® and its suite of high-tech product marketing seminars. “Our new senior vice president of marketing introduced us to the Pragmatic Marketing courses,” Brengle remembers. “Two of us on the team initially attended the Practical Product Management™ class to evaluate. And we came back completely energized by what we saw and heard. Finally, somebody had verbalized all the things we had been trying to do—with a process that makes sense. From that point forward, the excitement caught on, and we drove the entire organization down this path.”

The first step was to put the entire product management team through the Practical Product Management course, followed by the Requirements that Work™ course. Along the way, Brengle

and the team made some eye-opening discoveries. “We discovered we were making product management too hard. We were trying to go down to a level of a functional specification: getting into the ‘how.’ The Pragmatic Marketing courses brought us back up to a higher level—the ‘what’ and the ‘why.’ Looking at their framework, we could easily see what was above the line, what was below the line, what we need to be doing, and what others in the marketing organization need to be doing. They put us exactly in line with what we needed to do to become more strategic and market-driven.”

The results have been dramatic. “Now we have confidence that we know exactly what to provide to Development. There in an incredible sense of freedom that comes from understanding what we needed to do—and, more importantly, what we *didn’t* need to do. The bottom line is, with everything we’ve learned from the courses, we’ve been able to start delivering meaningful requirements documents to our development

organization that describe not the ‘how’ but the ‘who, what, and why’ of what we want them to build.”

Creating a culture shift

TCI’s product managers have spent considerable time laying out their Product Development Process—one that is rooted squarely on top of a Market Requirements Document, complete with problem statements and personas. “We have institutionalized our personas,” explains Brengle. “Whenever I mention Tito, everybody in the organization knows I’m talking about a grocery store receiving clerk, including what he does, what’s important to him, and what will make his day perfect. That knowledge is extremely helpful to those people who might not understand the grocery business as well as the product management staff does. Now our Development folks have the benefit of that knowledge, which puts a little context behind what they are trying to accomplish.” →



FeaturePlan software helps put the methodology into practice

An innovative software package is helping the TCI product management team drive the Pragmatic Marketing methodology throughout the organization. Based on a recommendation by one of the Pragmatic instructors, Brenge looked to software tools to help institutionalize its practices. The answer came in the form of Ryma Technologies, Inc.[®] and its FeaturePlan[™] software.

FeaturePlan is an automated, collaborative enterprise product management platform for the collection, organization, tracking, analysis, and distribution of detailed customer and market data across the entire enterprise. It is also the first strategic knowledge management tool designed expressly to support the best practices of the Pragmatic Marketing framework.

“We found FeaturePlan to align almost exactly with the Pragmatic Marketing principles we follow,” Brenge emphasizes. “At TCI, we are managing about nearly three million lines of code, and a lot of the MRDs we produce are redesigns of existing systems. FeaturePlan expedites the communication process with Development by allowing us to organize and manage the personas, the problem statements, and all the supporting documentation available to us—all in one place and based

on the processes that Pragmatic has recommended. It’s organized, and it’s easy to navigate and find the information you need.”

He adds, “Beyond that, it helps us be consistent. I recently delivered eight MRDs; every one was formatted in the same manner. I can now make my work available to every other product marketing manager—and vice versa. We can collaborate and learn from one another. Refining the MRD processes is a big part of our focus going forward. It’s a process, not a happening. We will get better as a team and a company as we learn how to communicate better with the development organization.”

Discipline paves the way for corporate growth

Following the Pragmatic Marketing methodology has brought a new consciousness within TCI about the path to becoming more market-driven as well as a disciplined approach to getting there. The company has implemented a solid market requirements process—where every product or enhancement is tied to a user profile and a problem statement.

Concludes Brenge, “I believe we have become more successful as a product management organization and a company by following the Pragmatic Marketing principles as closely as we can. We don’t need to create processes and procedures anymore. It’s clearly defined for us based on best practices. That discipline gives us confidence as a company that we are able to grow the company and be scalable to meet increasingly explosive market demands.”

pm.c

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