How Beta Can Give Your Product a Competitive Edge
About Pragmatic Marketing

- Experts in technology product management and product marketing
- Specialize in training
- Trained hundreds of thousands of people at thousands of companies since 1993
About the Presenter

Emily Hossellman

- Director of marketing at Centercode
- Speaker, writer and educator about customer validation and beta testing
- Works with companies like GoPro, Fitbit, Autodesk and hundreds more to build and release better products
Webinar Objectives

• Understand the value of a successful customer validation program and what it contributes to your product and your bottom line

• Discuss the keys to running a successful beta test

• Outline how to run competitive tests of other products in your market

• Show how to analyze that feedback to find your competitive edge
Who is Centercode?

We’ve been helping companies build customer validation programs since 2001

1. Fully managed beta tests and programs
2. Complete beta-management platform
3. Access to prequalified candidates
The Current Landscape
The Current Landscape

» Tech environments are more complex
» Customers have higher expectations
» The spotlight is bright

You need a competitive edge
Tech Environments Are More Complex

- More devices are talking to each other
- Products themselves are more complex (hardware + software + app + service)
- Hardware products do not function in a silo anymore
- Constant growth and increased fragmentation
- You're building for an ecosystem
Customers Have Higher Expectations

- Decreasing tolerance for friction
- Do everything they want
- Be intuitive and easy to set up
- Instant answers to questions
- Personalization and flexibility
- Customers are vocal (with the good and bad)
The Spotlight is Bright

- Press speculation about who will be the big players
- Buzz around product announcements can build hype
- A failed launch can be catastrophic to a brand—especially a new one
- Tons of companies trying to get into the space
- This creates a perfect storm for tech companies
The Role of Beta Testing
Beta Testing = Customer Validation

- Targeted customers using your product in real environments
- Increases quality, improves user experience, validates performance
- Many names: CAT, UAT, FUT, customer evaluation, field trials, pre-release
What Beta Brings to the Table

1. Introduces you to your target audience
2. Facilitates a real, meaningful conversation
3. Gives you the opportunity to listen
What Beta Brings to the Table

Not just technical check → customer validation

» Sanity check/will they use it
» Out-of-box experience
» Test for interoperability/compatibility
» Prepping support processes
» Marketing insights
» Diversity—more eyeballs, environments, use cases
Typical Beta Challenges

- Project design and scoping
- Allocating qualified resources
- Recruiting ideal testers
- Persistent user engagement
- Collecting useful feedback
- Discovering and delivering insight
Running Your Beta Test
The Process

- Planning
- Recruiting
- Distribution
- Managing
- Closing
Planning

» Build a complete plan
  • Set objectives and methods
  • Determine schedule (consider phases)
  • Plan out your tester team (core criteria and segmentations)

» Get stakeholders involved early

» Have some flexibility
Recruiting

- Recruit targeted testers
- Build a detailed qualification process
- Look for enthusiasm and good writing
- Fill the toughest segmentations first
- Be efficient with your selections to get a wide variety
Distribution/Shipping

- Create a process for shipping/tracking
- Plan for failed units/downloads
- Do two-day shipping
- Keep your testers in the loop
- Confirm shipping addresses
- Make sure they have any accessories
- Complete the new user experience
Managing

» Collect the right feedback
  • Collect a variety of feedback
  • Check alignment from the beginning
  • Solicit feedback about usability/appearance
  • Get the right details
  • Mimic real-world feedback

» Create a great testing experience
  • Have a support process in place
  • Have a feedback loop

» Triage feedback on the back end
Closing

- Get final feedback
- Manage incentives
  - Decide whether testers get the product
  - Hold onto rewards until the test is over
  - Say thank you
- Manage the data
  - Clean and organize the data
  - Pull out interesting insights
  - Get prioritized data to your stakeholders
Testing the Competition
Why Run Competitive Tests?

- Same reason you run beta tests
- Direct comparison with your product in a controlled environment
- See how customers use the products, where each is falling short
- Provides you with powerful intel
Look at Your Position in the Market

Are you
- Challenging a gorilla?
- Concerned about a newcomer in the market?
- In a crowded market place?

What kind of product?
- Hardware
- Mobile
- Consumer Software
- Business/Enterprise Software
Pre-Product Testing

» Before you enter the market
» Challenging a gorilla or entering a crowded space
» Look for weaknesses in the product
» Identify underserved segments

Audience
• New faces
• Customers of your competitor(s)
Side-by-Side Testing

- Run in parallel with private beta
- Match up surveys, tasks, objectives and features
- Run it like it's your product
  - Consider potential branding issues—need an unbranded experience
- Fresh faces—no evangelists, already biased
- Focus on the new user experience for both groups
Comparative Testing

- Useful if the product is hard to get your hands on
- Using existing customers (yours or your competitor’s)
- Already have the product and experience with it
- Ask them about their experience with the product and then switch out for the other product
- Ask the same questions for both products
- Be aware of bias—survey them on satisfaction before you start
Piecemeal Testing

- If you don’t have access to your competitor’s products
- Use screenshots or messaging—survey potential customers
- Compare the reactions and experiences to find problems and opportunities
What to Look For

- Where are the experiences different?
- What are my competitors doing better? What can I learn from that?
- The feedback might not be universal—that doesn’t mean it’s not useful
  - Dig in and look at differentiation among segments
- Are there underserved markets I can leverage?
- Are they themes of dissatisfaction (quality, functionality, training, support)?
Leveraging the Results
Improve Quality

- Prioritize your bugs using scoring
- Attach test platforms
- Use the data to justify changes
Prepare Support

- Build the customer experience your customers want
- Improve documentation based on hurdles testers faced
- Prepare for known issues
- Build in more customer feedback mechanisms
Fuel Marketing & PR

- Build a trove of user-generated content (quotes, videos, testimonials)
- Find what testers loved about your product (and disliked about your competitor’s)
- Use data to back up marketing claims
- Find new use cases
- Leverage your commitment to customer feedback
Plan for the Future

- Build/validate your product roadmap
- Look for new marketing angles and messages
- Start planning for new markets
Final Thoughts

- A solid customer validation program is its own competitive advantage
- Plan out your priorities and stakeholders
- Set up your tests well and the feedback will come naturally
- Trends will emerge, look for alignment
- Listen to the feedback
Contact Us

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Thank you for attending!

**NEXT MONTH’S WEBINAR**

Redefining Product Owners to Deliver Great Software

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