Chapter 12

Acquiring and Applying Market Knowledge for Large Software Purchases: Products, Personas, and Programs

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ABSTRACT

Persona profiles of the top managers in a corporation help marketers to position and promote large software products. Sales calls are more targeted and cordial, aligned with the needs and communication styles of the prospects. The methods applied in the archetype discovery are complemented by knowledge of corporate structures and influence networks. When the key customer concerns and constraints are clarified, the software vendor can craft informational programs, sales plans, and product improvement projects to outperform their competition. The added persona-model knowledge complements the vendor’s existing knowledge of their software products, helping to build compelling marketing programs and to significantly improve software sales.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter details the methods for deriving and using buyer personas, and the value of these personas in the marketing and sales of a large software product. Background is offered on personas in general, including clarifications of terminology and some background on persona use in other areas. The major thrust of the material relates to knowledge. It is emphasized that sellers should know their buyers better- that this knowledge is central to effective marketing and sales efforts. Key steps in persona determination are discussed, as well as methods for using them in a measurable manner. Sketches of a few typical corporate buyer personas are outlined to illustrate their nature at a high level. Finally, potential pitfalls are suggested and best practices are offered.

The sale of a large product to an enterprise typically involves an extended process with
many stakeholders. Software products for office productivity, manufacturing control, or financial discipline are as central to a business as its buildings and talent pools. The very organization of a modern company is enabled and directed by its computer tools. So, when new applications are determined to be important, the corporation has a great deal to consider. In addition to the desired improvements in efficiency and profitability, there must be a clear recognition of the disruptions and adjustments that will need to occur, and the duties of the various stakeholder areas and role-players.

Major decisions in companies are made by one or more of the company officials using methods that have varying degrees of structured, carefully balanced, and emotion-free consideration. In each situation, a person plays a role for their department or area of responsibility and expertise. Among all of the people involved in the deliberations is a subset who are typically most important. These persons are the ones that a vendor’s sales force contacts, and those to whom marketing efforts are directly or indirectly targeted. The characteristics of these key individuals include the set of ranked objectives for their departments and the company at large. Yet just as influential in certain cases, are the predispositions of the individual to certain software characteristics like the user interface or brand name or salesperson’s trustworthiness. The individual frameworks for decisions and their influential motives are precisely the sorts of understanding that the persona process addresses.

Knowledge is the key in persona value. To use an archetypical extract of a purchase actor, the extract must first be accurate and succinct. Knowledge acquisition is therefore focused on the key players, and for these persons it is further focused on their most useful attributes with respect to the purchase decision. Knowledge Management (KM) here includes the acquisition, as well as the representation of the acquired knowledge, and the location and use of the representation-encoded knowledge in subsequent business activities. KM should also include the measurement of how useful the information is in producing more desired results like trouble-free sales. First, the seller must know the customer. The seller combines this knowledge with appropriate portions of knowledge regarding their software product. This knowledge combination is used to build a better appeal to the customer, and then to track the results of the modified appeal. Knowledge on the resulting sales success is then useful in validating the accuracy and utility of the persona extraction.

For some, an effective persona lends itself to an honestly deeper appreciation of the users of a product, and even identification with their lifestyles and temperaments. In industries such as resorts, empathizing with the guests is a necessary service offering. Many enterprises claim in their advertising to care for their customers, to feel their pain and happiness. Such allospection, or other-oriented viewpoint adoption, supposedly has the seller actually experiencing the effectiveness and even frustrations of the purchaser of their goods. For such a level of intimacy, a compelling persona is the ideal vehicle for vicariously experiencing the product and the sales cycle as well. Most of this is earned by the oldest of sales effectiveness tools- simply listening. Listening to the customer and taking their concerns to heart.

In the following material, the knowledge management challenge is addressed for best practices in:

- Determining persona targets by organizational understanding
  - Knowledge Management
- Developing interview and survey instruments for honing attributes
  - Marketing and its goals
- Applying the driving themes to contact plans, printed promotions, conference pitches, and personal appeals
- Feeding back archetypical concerns to product development teams
- Measure the utility of the added knowledge elements
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