

Collaborative Conversations

Using social media in product management



brainmates

www.brainmates.com.au



Collaborative Conversations

Using social media in product management



Overview

The topic of Social Media is one that is highly relevant to product managers. It provides new opportunities and challenges in how products are designed, developed and deployed.

Traditional boundaries are being dismantled and customers are able to share their thoughts and views with brands – and each other – more quickly and easily than ever before. Smart product managers monitor trends and sentiments and keep tabs on competitors.

Social media provides product managers with opportunities to engage in collaborative conversations with customers, colleagues, partners and the wider community. New tools and technologies help facilitate these conversations and can help the product manager achieve their goal of defining, developing and deploying products that are more relevant and compelling for customers.

brainmates has conducted research into the use of social media within product management. through focus groups, interviews and surveys. We have explored what is being done in practice by observing and researching social media initiatives for a range of products and services. We have looked across multiple industries including subscription TV, sports, software, financial services, travel, entertainment, fashion, medical devices, automotive and industrial goods.

brainmates 2011 Social Media Survey

For the second year running, brainmates has conducted a survey into the use of social media by product managers and marketers in Australia, New Zealand, the USA, Europe and Asia. This edition of the Social Media Whitepaper has been updated to include the 2011 survey results.

Respondant Profiles

We received 85 responses for the 2011 survey which ran for three weeks in February 2011. The breakdown of respondents roles were as follows:

- 63% were purely product management
- 8% were product marketers
- 29% worked in roles involving both product management and product marketing functions

Although there were some respondents who worked in small businesses, over 80% worked in organisations with 50 or more employees.

Collaborative Conversations

Using social media in product management



Survey Goals

Our survey goal was to understand how product managers use social media. Through engaging our global network of product managers we have over the past two years identified four functional applications of social media. These relate to many aspects of product management, from assessing new market opportunities and competitor moves, testing out ideas and new concepts, to developing products with internal and external collaboration as well as the launch and ongoing management of 'in-life' products.

Survey Findings

Social media is used by almost all product managers and marketers. The degree to which the four functional applications are used varies. Simpler and more outward focused efforts such as monitoring and sharing of information were more commonly used. More collaborative efforts were less frequently used but there was still a view that this would increase in the next twelve months.

Compared to the 2010 study we see that the use of social media tools, and the intention to increase usage of social media tools is growing. Feedback from discussions with product managers and marketers suggests an increased willingness to try out new things at both an operational and a strategic level. Senior executives are recognizing that social media has the potential to provide many benefits to business.

Functional applications of social media in product management and marketing

We asked survey respondents to state their use of social media in four functional applications as well as outline whether they intended to increase or decrease these activities in the coming twelve months. The functional areas investigated were:

- 1 Monitoring and Listening
- 2 Promoting and Sharing
- 3 Gathering feedback
- 4 Collaborating

This paper describes how these four functional applications relate back to core product management functions. We use a number of examples including three unique and distinct case studies to illustrate how these are being put into practice in different business situations.

We also provide an action plan, developed in line with the brainmates Product Delivery Cycle to illustrate how product managers can immediately begin to use and benefit from social media.

Collaborative Conversations

Using social media in product management



What is social media?

While there are many definitions of social media, we like to describe it as follows:

Social Media is...

- Conversations across boundaries
- Sharing of ideas and opinions
- Instantly accessible and spread virally
- Permanent
- Owned by the audience
- Facilitated through technology

Social media is pervasive. Five of the world's top 10 websites are social media sites (facebook, YouTube, Wikipedia, Blogger and Twitter). People are accessing social media at home, at work and on their mobile devices on their way to work (or on their way anywhere for that matter).

Like it or not, everyone is talking about your product or service. It's not just customers that are talking; competitors, critics, fans, investors, shareholders, government, media, journalists, suppliers, partners and bloggers are all engaged in conversations about your product and brand.

Many large organisations are now proactively hiring new people into product teams with titles such as "Social Media Product Manager".



Product managers must join online conversations to understand what customers like, what they don't like, what they want and how they want it. This insight helps in the design, development and deployment of products that are relevant, compelling and competitive.

Collaborative Conversations

Using social media in product management

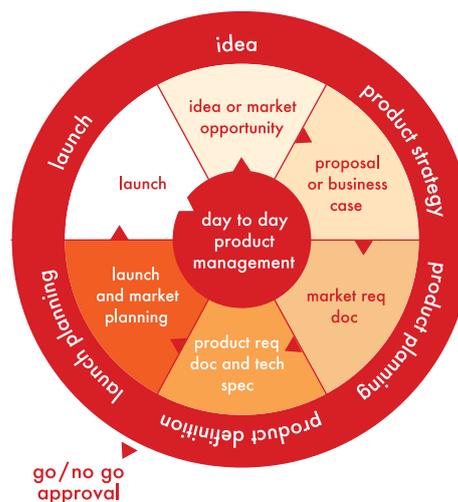


Applications for product managers

When we look at the role of product management we see the primary function is to deliver products to the market place that return a financial benefit to the business. To do this successfully, the product manager must continue to deliver and maintain products in their target markets that:

1. Deliver more value than the competition (user focus)
2. Create a sustainable competitive difference (buyer focus)
3. Generate business benefit to the organisation (financial focus)

There are a number of key tasks, actions and steps that product managers work through to define, develop and deploy compelling products and services. These are illustrated at a high level below in the brainmates Product Delivery Cycle model.



Social media can be used at any stage of this model to help product managers achieve their goals. We have found that those product managers who have made the best use of social media are the ones who identified how social media can fit into their existing job tasks and responsibilities.

April Dunford, Founder and Principal Consultant at Rocket Launch Marketing explains:

“Now we’ve got social media that allows both B2C and B2B marketers to engage in dialogue with individual customers and users to give them a much deeper, more nuanced understanding of the products and services being offered and in turn gain a deeper understanding of what customers like and dislike about the offerings.”

*Source: Rocket Watcher Blog - <http://bit.ly/9Yuy5W>

Collaborative Conversations

Using social media in product management



How product managers are using social media

Denise Zimmerman of NetPlus Marketing says “Social media can be an enabler and an accelerator of existing core capabilities, values, attributes and plans. It can even be a catalyst for change. But it can’t magically create what doesn’t exist.” This echoes for those in the product management profession.

It’s one thing to recognise and understand customer problems, needs and wants. It’s another to create products and services that satisfy these customers. Social media provides product managers with new ways in which to help improve the definition, development and deployment of products and services.

Our research suggests that product managers **use social media in four ways:**



It’s not about tools and technology

Product managers must focus first on the problems, needs and wants experienced by customers. Social media can help in all stages of defining, developing and deploying solutions that satisfy customers.

Collaborative Conversations

Using social media in product management



1 Monitoring and listening

A critical part of social media in product management is monitoring and listening. New tools and technologies present efficient and low-cost ways to improve our understanding of the problems, needs and wants that customers and non-customers are experiencing.

Rather than simply use official communication channels such as company websites, support numbers or brochures, customers are now using blogs and microblogs, social networks, review sites and online communities to share their thoughts, comments, concerns and ideas.

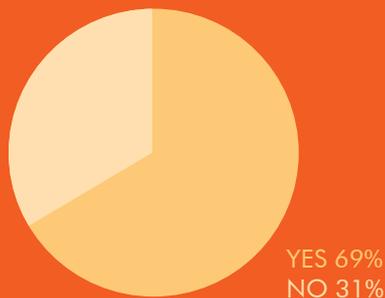
“The massive impact of social media and online communities enables customers to connect with each other to propose new ideas, share trusted recommendations, and get faster and better-informed answers.” Alex Dayon*

A few hours spent searching online can reveal a huge amount of information about the sentiment of people in your target market. It's not important – or possible – to take heed of every single reference to your product or every reference that is relevant. It's more important to take a high-level view and be aware of the key thoughts, sentiments, feelings and conversations taking place. These 'trending' topics can alert you to potential opportunities or flag any issues that may have or may in future have an impact on your operations.

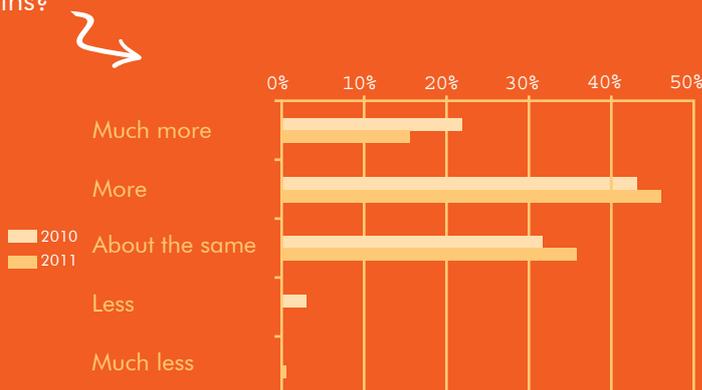
It's also possible to keep tabs on what your competitors are up to, as well as what's happening in your market from a community perspective.

*Source: CRM Magazine "From Deflecting Customers to Embracing Them", Aug 2010 <http://bit.ly/aWeNfp>

Do you use social media to MONITOR references about/ relevant to your product?



Do you expect to change your use of social media tools for MONITORING in the next 12 months?



Monitoring & Listening: What product managers are doing today

70% of respondents indicated that they used tools to monitor online references to their product, or that were relevant to their product. This was a 3% increase from the previous year. Commonly used tools include Google Alerts, RSS feeds from relevant sites, Radian 6 and other term reference services.

Respondents expected to significantly increase their use of tools used to categorise monitor multiple references in the next twelve months, with 63% expecting to do more, or much more. This figure was about 30% than in the previous year, suggesting increased understanding of this function and the relevant tools.

Source: brainmates social media in product management survey, February 2011, n=83

Collaborative Conversations

Using social media in product management



CASE STUDY: Building a brand via fan engagement

Shoes of Prey is an innovative start-up based in Sydney Australia that provides a unique twist on women's shoes. Customers use a simple tool on the website to design their very own unique pair of shoes. Top quality materials are used and the shoes are hand-made in reputable workshops before being packed and shipped anywhere in the world, all for very competitive prices.

Michael Fox, Director of Operations & Co-Founder, Shoes of Prey says:

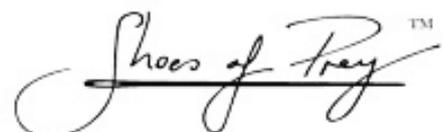
“As a new business with limited marketing funds, Shoes of Prey had to invest wisely to not only build up brand awareness, but also create demand for the product. From day one, we nurtured relationships with customers via social networking sites facebook and through regular updates via Twitter.”

Shoes of Prey recognised the power of video with its target audience when an independent Video Blogger on YouTube posted her thoughts on the site and generated a whopping 450,000 views and 90,000 comments. This drove over 500,000 visits to the Shoes of Prey website in one week. Conversions were initially low given the profile being on average, 13-17 year old girls so Shoes of Prey made changes to their website to encourage these younger users to share pictures and reviews of their shoe designs on their favourite social networking sites. This introduced the brand to Shoes of Prey's 25-55 year old target customer and sales followed. Within 2 weeks of the promotion ending Shoes of Prey's website traffic and sales had tripled and have remained at that higher level.

Shoes of Prey also uses social networking to seek and collect feedback from customers on its fundamental product and has introduced improvements to its shoe-design tool based on customer feedback and requests.

Having recognised the potential of online video and in particular YouTube as a marketing platform, Shoes of Prey is now hiring in-house resources to publish video content and manage this platform as a marketing and engagement tool.

www.shoesofprey.com



Collaborative Conversations

Using social media in product management



2 Promoting and sharing

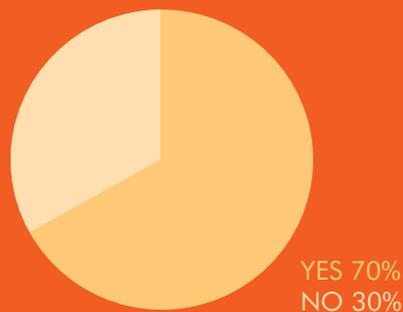
One of the more commonly known and used functions of social media is to promote and share information about a brand, product or service.

Tapping into online conversations has the potential to spread your message across your target market. As interested individuals learn more about what you're saying, they may pass this on to their networks. The interest in your message, increases traffic which helps those searching for your product to find it more easily

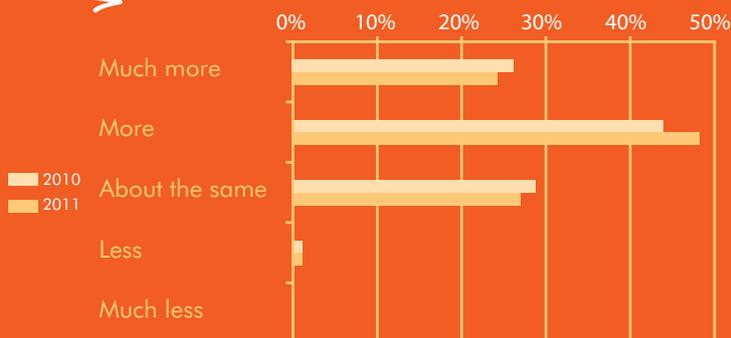
In discussions with members of the product management community, this function is often regarded as a stepping stone to developing and managing a comprehensive social media strategy. As such, it's unsurprising that this function rated highly as it requires very little effort to begin to implement and results can be seen fairly quickly – although accurate measurement poses a tougher challenge.

We'd point out that product managers should ensure that their social media efforts don't amount solely to 'talking' – i.e. blasting out statements, messages and press releases. No one likes a conversation where one person does all the talking. As we've stated, it's equally – if not more – important that product managers listen as well as talk.

Do you use social media to PROMOTE and SHARE info about your product?



Do you expect to change your use of social media tools for PROMOTING or SHARING in the next 12 months?



What product managers are doing today

70% of respondents indicated that they used tools to promote and share information about their product. This included simple efforts such as sharing product release notes through to more advanced methods of distributing news to target audiences. This was a 4% increase from the previous year.

Additionally, the respondents expected to significantly increase this in the next twelve months with over 70% expecting to do more or much more. This figure was similar to the previous year suggesting continued increased use and activity.

Source: brainmates social media in product management survey, February 2011, n=83

Collaborative Conversations

Using social media in product management



CASE STUDY: Building a product via collaboration

Hailing from Wellington, New Zealand, Moon Over Martinborough is a boutique producer of olive oils. Founder Jared Gulian explains that in his case, social media preceded the business. Using a Wordpress blog, Jared shared his experiences in starting up his farm and built a group of fans who followed his virgin growing season with interest.

When his first small batch of olive oil was produced, many of Jared's readers were interested in buying it. He involved his fans in the efforts to design the packaging for the product and used his blog and facebook fan page to incorporate their feedback. Jared made the product available via a locally based international distributor and found the more he blogged about his product, the more people demanded it.

Reflecting the point that it's perhaps more important to listen than to talk when blogging, Jared interacts with other bloggers on their own sites. He seeks to post useful comments on their topics of interest and never overtly promotes his own products or embeds links. This has led to a sense of trust and involvement from fans and has taken Jared from the blogosphere into other traditional marketing channels – Moon over Martinborough has been showcased in magazines, via radio interviews and podcasts and a host of travel and food focused blogs.

This engagement has helped shape a product and fuelled solid growth such that Jared is now expanding operations to keep up with demand.

Jared Gulian, Founder, Moon Over Martinborough Olive Oils says:

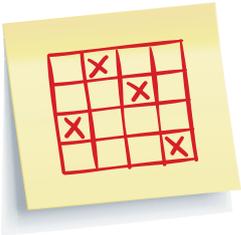
“Good social media focuses on what can be provided beyond the core product. It's about giving something back to others; Engaging and inspiring your fans and customers, your partners and suppliers and fellow producers.”

www.moonovermartinborough.com



Collaborative Conversations

Using social media in product management



3 Gathering feedback

A fundamental aspect of product management is to understand what problems customers are experiencing and what they need and want. Talking with customers is a powerful way to do this but can be complex, costly or time-consuming.

Product managers are beginning to use new tools and technologies to help test idea concepts, refine business cases and define market or product requirements. These tools help synthesise large volumes of information and provide the insight needed to ensure product development and ongoing product management remains customer-centric.

More and more product managers are beginning to invite customers into earlier stages of product development using these tools. Concerns raised include keeping confidential information from competitors so some product managers are inviting customers to use secure and gated tools so that feedback can be gathered without information easily leaking.

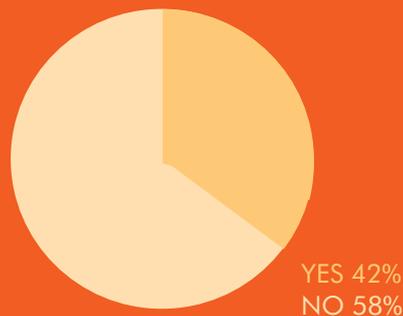
Tom Grant of Forrester Research says:

“Social media – blogs, wikis, forums, social networking, RSS feeds, and so forth – can supplement traditional sources of product requirements, filling in many of the gaps. This data will not only allow you to create a more accurate overall picture, it will also expand that picture’s scope, providing better insights about customers.”

*Tom Grant, Forrester Report, “Social Media Lower The Risks Of Bad Requirements”, June 2009 - <http://bit.ly/cmUzVO>

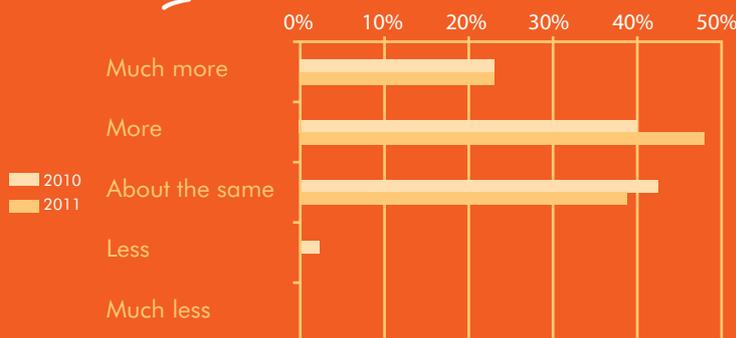
Do you use social media to GATHER FEEDBACK about your product?

Do you expect to change your use of social media tools to GATHER FEEDBACK in the next 12 months?



What product managers are doing today

This was the least frequently used functional application of social media being used by just 43% of respondents. Likewise, product managers expected to continue to use of social media tools for gathering feedback. 60% reported expecting to do more or much more in the next twelve months.



Respondents have told us that they are increasingly using tools like Userveice, Wikis and even services such as Twitter and Facebook to poll their audiences, ask for comments and suggestions and share these responses.

Source: brainmates social media in product management survey, February 2011, n=83

Collaborative Conversations

Using social media in product management



4 Collaborating

Social media provides an opportunity for product managers to collaborate directly and effectively across internal and external organisational boundaries. Tools such as wikis allow product managers to involve others in the process of defining, developing and deploying new products and services.

Service teams can provide direct input based on their interactions with customers; marketing teams can get involved in the process of establishing value propositions and messaging and loop back with creative campaign concepts; operations teams can help ensure that product requirements are understood by and incorporated into business process.

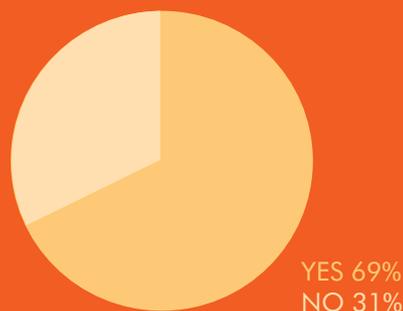
Saeed Khan from On Product Management explains:

“Social media provides the means to create ongoing connections with people. For any ongoing project, use it to create and build communities of people who can help move your project forward.”

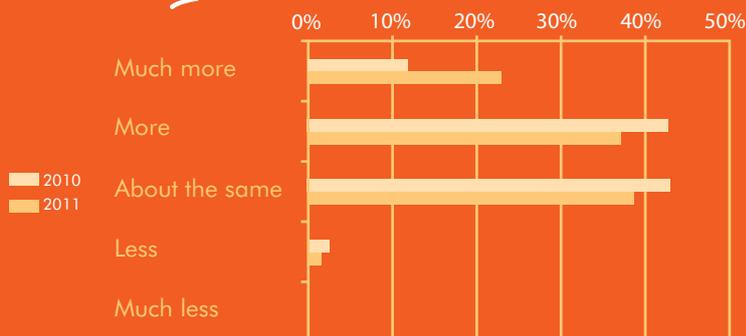
Externally, suppliers, partner organisations, customers and the wider community can be invited to take part in the entire product delivery process. Fans and power users can be invited to help define and develop new services and various product or marketing concepts can be tested with different audiences.

*Source: On Product Management Blog - <http://bit.ly/a9kHqF>

Do you use social media for COLLABORATION?



Do you expect to change your use of social media tools for COLLABORATION in the next 12 months?



What product managers are doing today

Collaboration was a commonly used functional application of social media being used by 69% of respondents, a 4% increase on the previous year.

The commonality of collaboration via social media revealed that many respondents felt comfortable with this activity. 59% indicated that they expected to do more or much more in the next twelve months. This was a significant increase compared to the previous year when only 43% indicated they would do more or much more.

Source: brainmates social media in product management survey, February 2011, n=83

Collaborative Conversations

Using social media in product management



CASE STUDY: User collaboration in product development

GreenHopper is a software tool published by Atlassian that helps project managers schedule and prioritise their project backlog, plan sprints and track progress through the entire release process.

The GreenHopper team use social media in many ways, from product development prioritisation to gathering feedback from users as well as promoting and sharing information and insight that can help users use GreenHopper more effectively. GreenHopper uses a range of tools including their own blog, user forums, a Twitter account and a publicly available development backlog.

GreenHopper has used customer collaboration to fundamentally drive the product's development. This was demonstrated recently with the rollout of a new user interface.

From inception, the team invited users to provide input as to what features they wanted most and why. Users were able to test the new user interface as it evolved and give real use-case experience that helped expedite development. This feedback was combined with traditional insight gathering efforts such as user interviews and focus groups and enabled the product management and development teams to focus their efforts on delivering the best possible product to users.

Nicholas Muldoon, GreenHopper Technical Product Manager, Atlassian says:

“The customers determine our product roadmap. They tell us which features they need most and provide feedback on our ideas and developments. It's a collaborative effort that helps us ensure we deliver quality and value to our customers.”

www.atlassian.com/software/greenhopper



Collaborative Conversations

Using social media in product management



Using social media throughout the product delivery process

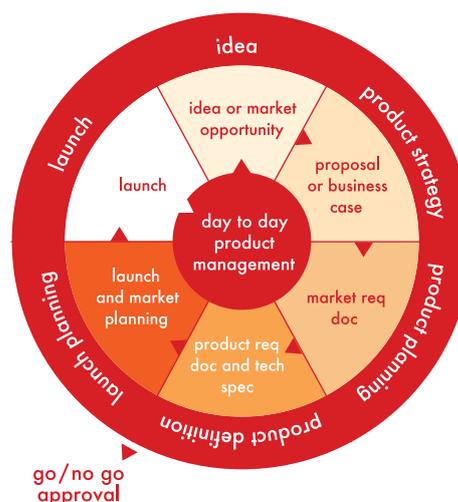
Social Media can be used at all stages of the product delivery process, from ideation and concept testing through to product launch and day-to-day product management. Many of the discussions surrounding social media focus on who should own social media initiatives.

High profile cases are frequently reported in which organisations find their social media activities put them off-side with customers or the wider community. As organisations become more involved in their use of social media, it is important to ensure that employees who will be involved are aware of their responsibilities and the potential consequences of these. There are risks associated with social media, as with all product management and marketing activities. It is important that organisations seek to establish policies and guidelines and to provide training for employees and collaborators who will use social media in their roles.

Both product managers and product marketers should have ownership of these initiatives as they relate to their products. That said, associated colleagues from customer service to PR and marketing communications should be involved and asked to contribute when this helps provide more value to customers and others with whom the brand is interacting with.

The brainmates Product Delivery Cycle model below illustrates key steps in the product definition, development and deployment process and we outline a number of potential opportunities and challenges involved at each step.

The brainmates Product Delivery cycle



Collaborative Conversations

Using social media in product management



Stage	Opportunities	Challenges
Idea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen out for customer demands Investigate market problems Ask market for feedback on your ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most vocal customers may not be representative of your target audience Finding pertinent content amongst high volumes of conversation data Balancing espoused market requirements with commercial constraints
Product Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate internal and external input and feedback on ideas Develop more rigid business case and platform pre-testing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opening up to market presents competitive risks Challenging established processes and politics can distract stakeholders
Product Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Validate assumptions and unearth new facets about market problems Develop more realistic personas Tap into customers, community, partners and others for early-stage feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involving more stakeholders adds time and cost pressures Can create expectations that all proposed ideas will end up in final product – potential let-down
Product Definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Validate features and benefits via internal and external stakeholder reviews Prioritise elements on product roadmap Provide guidance for internal colleagues who work on subsequent stages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional inputs can impact on timeframe and cost of product definition and development Focusing on ‘moving target’ can distract product team Finding balance between market requirements and commercial feasibility
Launch Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Test marketing messages and ideas with evangelists and fans Compare with competitive offerings and position your product on its strongest points Develop pre-awareness and excitement within the market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting the messages to your target audience via the right social media channel can be complex Pre-awareness can provide competitors with insight to your product and plans
Launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maximise awareness within target audience and create buzz Tap into tools to spread word via conversations and engagement with customers Immediately capture and act upon feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overly ‘selling’ a product via social media channels can lead to backlash Not sticking to promises or assumptions by customers can lead to disappointment Products that fail to meet customer requirements will be mercilessly grilled
Day-to-Day Product Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage your target audience and transform them into evangelists Alert customers of new features Listen to what people say about your product and act on this 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional time and effort required to stay across social media In certain segments or industries, customers may still not be that ‘connected’ into social media

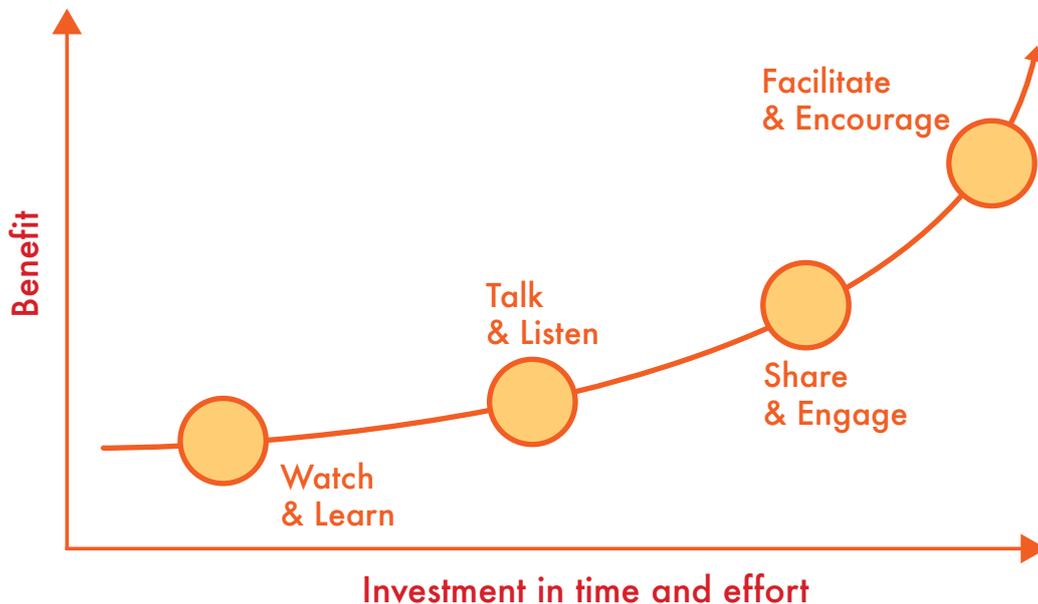
Collaborative Conversations

Using social media in product management



Social media can appear complex, challenging and risky. Product managers can follow a logical process to gradually increase both their use of social media and the resultant benefits.

The model below is derived from our research into the functional applications of social media in product management and marketing and presents a 'journey' that can be followed. No matter where they are in this journey, we encourage product managers and marketers to consider new ways in which social media can be integrated into their role.



Collaborative Conversations

Using social media in product management



<p>Watch & Learn</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Find the forums and online communities where your customers, competitors, partners, fans and critics are conversing. Listen to these conversations.• Set up monitoring tools such as Google Alerts, RSS feeds and Radian 6 to monitor references about your product or that are relevant to your product (industry/market segment etc).• Allocate some time each day to learn more about how social media tools work and think how these relate back to your strategic and tactical product management responsibilities.
<p>Talk & Listen</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Try out relevant social media tools. Be cautious and quiet to begin with until you feel comfortable to join the conversation. Consider using these tools personally before establishing professional product related accounts• Join the conversation by registering with relevant social media tools. Provide comments when you can to add value to the conversation.• Activate your professional accounts and provide useful background information. Feel free to let the world know that you are learning as you go. Honesty is greatly appreciated.
<p>Share & Engage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share and engage with others more directly and more consistently.• Give your ideas, opinions and comments across all relevant social media tools.• Ask customers for their opinion. Invite them to share openly and honestly with you.• Apply more functional goals such as testing concepts, announcing product updates and providing additional useful resources.• Introduce other members of your team and organisation to these tools and help educate them.
<p>Facilitate & Encourage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop thought leadership around your product or service offering.• Go out of your way to provide value to your customers and the broader community.• Look for internal and external opportunities to use social media in other business functions such as customer service, operations, crisis management and community engagement.• Share and help others grow. You'll learn more and feel good too!

Collaborative Conversations

Using social media in product management



Conclusion

Social Media brings new opportunities to product managers. It is enabling more open, collaborative conversations between sellers, buyers, users as well as partners, collaborators and wider communities.

At the same time however, this restructuring of traditional buyer-seller relationships means that customers are more able to talk, learn from and share with each other. Review sites generally outrank product information sites; blogs and tweets reach wider audiences than official marketing messages and open-source software has demonstrated how users are collaborating with each other to develop their own products and services.

It appears that product managers are noticing these changes and developments. Their use of social media is becoming more significant in both breadth and depth of application. Product managers are engaging with customers in ways that were unimaginable just a few years ago.

These collaborative conversations will continue to enable product managers to improve their understanding of customer problems, needs and wants. Social media tools facilitate more discussion and testing of requirements and enable more accurate and focused efforts. Done well, this can help in the definition, development and deployment of products and services that are more relevant and compelling for customers.

Collaborative Conversations

Using social media in product management



About the author

Paul Alex Gray, Senior Consultant, brainmates
(MBA AGSM, BCom UOW)

Paul has more than ten years experience in crafting and executing strategic marketing initiatives in B2B and B2C blue-chip organisations in Australia, New Zealand and in Europe. As a senior consultant at brainmates, a boutique product management and marketing services agency in Sydney, Australia, Paul has defined, developed and deployed new products and services in a range of industries. He's helped clients such as AUSTAR, The Starlight Children's Foundation, PayPal and Veda Advantage. Paul's research focuses on new product development, disruptive innovation and social media and he has written extensively on these topics via the brainmates blog, brainrants.

pgray@brainmates.com.au

Twitter [@paulalexgray](https://twitter.com/paulalexgray)

About brainmates

brainmates leads companies to define, develop and deploy customer-centric products and services. We offer professional services and training and have helped leading clients enhance their products and services. Our clients include industry leaders in media, communications, financial services, medical devices, software and hardware manufacturers. Contact us today to find out how we can help you.

+61 (0)2 9232 8147

info@brainmates.com.au

Twitter [@brainmates](https://twitter.com/brainmates)

www.brainmates.com.au