

Making Sweet Music:

Why a Project Manager Is a Powerful Business Asset

By Deborah J Hoard

Imagine an orchestra full of talented musicians without a conductor to lead them. How would the symphony sound without a guiding hand to help them create a cohesive sound?

Project managers are very much like orchestra conductors. The conductor leads the talented musicians to successfully communicate the symphony's vision to the audience.

Similarly, the project manager (PM) leads the creative team to effectively communicate the key marketing messages to the customers and achieve the business objectives. Project managers are considered to be one of the key factors for marketing program success and essential for improving the bottom line.

The True Value of a Project Manager

To fully understand the value of a project manager, ask yourself these questions:

- What is the cost of not producing a successful marketing program?
 - Missed market opportunities?
 - Reduced revenues?
 - Smaller market share?
- What will you lose by not keeping the marketing project on track?
 - Being over budget?
 - Taking resources away from other important projects to redo portions of this one?
 - Delivering a less-than-successful project?

- What else could you accomplish if you were freed from managing the daily details of the project?
 - Develop strategy?
 - Work on other projects that would generate additional revenue?
 - Be more productive?

A Powerful Business Asset

An experienced project manager can be a powerful asset on your marketing programs.

Your PM can:

- Increase the project ROI:

In an article titled “Beyond the Bottom Line,” published by the Project Management Institute, PMI found that project management provides both amazing hard and soft return on investment (ROI).

Among the ROI results are money saved or better spent and increased productivity and efficiency, which lead to more profit. Soft ROI results include better-quality products and projects that regularly deliver on time and on budget.
- Achieve your business objectives:

According to the “Extreme Chaos” research report issued by The Standish Group International, Inc., the most successful projects are led by project managers who have a firm grasp of the business objectives. Their research showed that having solid business skills is the number-one trait of an exceptional project manager.

- Greatly contribute to a project's success:

The same Standish Group report found that an experienced project manager is the number two-factor that determines a project's success (number one is executive support). Their research discovered that 97 percent of successful projects were led by an experienced project manager.

Orchestrating the Project

The PM has five main responsibilities:

1. Ensures that the vision is successfully communicated to the audience.

Each symphony tells a story, and it's up to the conductor to tell the story clearly to the audience, using the combination of music, talent, and tempo. It's much the same for the project manager. Through words, design, and execution, the PM ensures that the key marketing messages that support the business goals are conveyed successfully and consistently to the target audience through the marketing materials.

2. Prevents obstacles from damaging the project results.

Egos, hidden agendas, the wrong combination of talent, and other factors can make the symphony uneven and ruin the experience for the audience. The conductor can spot impending trouble and prevent it from negatively impacting the finished performance.

Having years of managing projects, the experienced PM also can identify the red flags that can spoil the project success. Through specialized management techniques, the PM tames the potential chaos and makes certain that the project moves smoothly toward the established goals.

3. Leads the team to work cohesively toward the same project goals.

An orchestra is a team of talented musicians. However, each musician may have his or her own interpretation of the music and even have plans for a solo at the expense of the entire performance. The conductor's job is to keep the overall story in mind and to break it down for the individual musicians so they can create a cohesive sound and story.

The PM also provides the guidance for the various project team members. By producing a creative brief that outlines the project goals, the PM sets the overall tone for the project. Through a variety of management tools, the PM then expertly steers each team member by breaking down each of their goals to achievable "bite-size" objectives to produce successful end results.

4. Delivers the project on time and within budget.

The conductor sets the tempo and the tone of the symphony to ensure that the musicians create a unified sound and that all finish the piece at the same time. By the same token, the PM is in charge of making sure the project meets its key milestones and delivers by the deadline. In addition, the PM can recommend solutions to keep the costs within the budget or to save money.

5. Manages the day-to-day details.

What are the odds of a conductor creating a successful symphony without being involved in the rehearsals?

The same goes for the project manager. By being involved in the daily project details, the PM develops an intimate knowledge of the project. This gives the PM the unique ability to balance the project objectives with the individual team member goals, identify and prevent potential problems, and develop creative solutions to produce successful marketing materials.

A Symphony of Sweet Music

Through a powerful combination of experience, skills, knowledge, techniques, and tools, an experienced project manager can increase your project's ROI, assist you in achieving your business objectives, and greatly contribute to the success of your project. All which leads to improving your bottom line.

And doesn't that sound like sweet music to your ears?

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Deborah J Hoard, Founder and President of Net Results, has over 16 years experience of successfully turning around critical marketing communications projects that are in danger of not making their deadlines, for such top companies as Apple Computer Inc., Cisco Systems Inc., Informatica, Inc., Maxtor Corporation, and Oracle Corporation. To find out more, visit her Web site at www.get-net-results.com.