

# QDI STRATEGIES

*20/20 Vision for Marketing Breakthroughs*

## QDI's 50 Questions to Rate Your Launch Plan

By Steven D. Bassill

As companies develop new products and services, more is at stake than just incremental revenue. A poor product launch can damage a company's image in terms of alienating the sales force, lowering customer satisfaction, and reducing your overall credibility. Thus, while companies have invested millions to build their images, a few poor product launches could negate all these efforts.

Companies that actively engage in the process of product planning, whether they undertake this process within their marketing or product development groups, need to be acutely aware of the risks to their reputations. A poor product launch can erode decades of good will and quickly have a negative impact on morale.

Often companies place most of the planning effort on determining "which" products and services to offer. While product planning to select the right products and services to market is critical to success, "launch planning" is equally critical. Products fail not only because they are poor products, they fail because of poor launches. For companies who are entering new markets, the risk of failing because of a poor launch is greater than the risk for a company that has established marketing channels and resources to support these channels in place.

A poor launch destroys more than the product's market. Poor launches damage your credibility with the customer and the channels, including your brand as well.

It takes even less time for your sales organization to lose confidence in the marketing group! If you are offering the sales force a new source of income and new tools to delight the customers, the sales representatives will champion your products. However, once they are "burned" because of a poor product or launch, as long as they have something else to sell that pays their salary and commissions, they will sell it instead of your products.

Products that customers refuse to buy are less damaging than products that are purchased, but they disappoint your customer. The sales force risked its reputation by supporting your product. If

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*QDI's launch planning checklist to put the odds on your side.*

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your product fails to delight the customer for any reason, the salesperson loses. The result is that the sales force fails to trust you and won't support your next offering.

## What is a Poor Launch?

A poor launch occurs when:

- The offering is targeted at the wrong customers.
- The customers are not provided the information required to make a decision.

- The customers are not supported in the installation and use of the product.
- The product does not perform as promised.

Any of these problems can cause a poor launch. Good launch planning can help minimize these problems. From working on scores of product launches, QDI has developed a "Utility Launch Planning Checklist." Use this checklist as a guide to ensure that you have considered the key success / failure issues in your product plans.

## QDI's Launch Planning Checklist

Rate your knowledge on the following items using a scale of 1 to 5. A score of 1 means you haven't thought about it, 3 means you have thought about it but have done nothing to address the issues, and 5 means you have already answered the question.

### What's the Offering?

- The product – specifically what products and services you offer the market. 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- Product mix – what additional products / models / services do you have to provide to be a credible supplier to the customer and the channels? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- Price point – what is your pricing strategy at the end-user level, and for the channels are you competitive or leaving money on the table? 1 2 3 4 5 NA

### What's the Competitive Offering?

- Who are the competitors? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- Who offers these products and services for sale today to customers? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- Where do these products and services fit into their overall product line? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- What other products and services do they offer their customers? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- What is their competitive advantage / disadvantage? 1 2 3 4 5 NA

### Value Proposition

- Positioning – What's the unique value proposition that you offer? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- Define the product / service value to each potential audience in terms of benefits and costs. 1 2 3 4 5 NA

### What's the Composition of Your Business?

- What model of business are you?
  - ◊ Consulting firm 1 2 3 4 5 NA
  - ◊ Systems integrator 1 2 3 4 5 NA
  - ◊ Manufacturer 1 2 3 4 5 NA
  - ◊ Dealer / distributor 1 2 3 4 5 NA
  - ◊ Third party service provider 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- Will you provide installation services? Will you use your staff or subcontract out services? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- Will you stock inventory, buy direct, or buy from a local distributor? 1 2 3 4 5 NA

# Marketing Breakthroughs

## What Markets Will You Serve?

- New construction or retrofit? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- Commercial / residential / industrial / government 1 2 3 4 5 NA

## Who Will Be Your Customers?

- Who are the early adopters? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- What are the influencers and decision-makers – the audiences you have to work with? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- What is their “buying process”?
  - ◊ Presale activities to become aware and educated about the product benefits and alternative solutions 1 2 3 4 5 NA
  - ◊ Transaction activities that make it easy for the customer to specify your product, purchase it, receive it and pay for it 1 2 3 4 5 NA
  - ◊ Post-sale activities that support the customer in installation, on-going service, parts, training, etc. 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- How long will the average transaction take?
  - ◊ How many days, months or years will it take from the time the decision-maker is aware of his need until he purchases? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
  - ◊ How much sales time will be involved during this process – number of sales calls, total days of sales time per call? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
  - ◊ What is the necessary mix of sales resources during this time frame – field sales, technical support, contracts, etc.? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- What are the decision criteria?
  - ◊ Help the marketing communications department know what to stress in advertising, promotion, packaging, etc. 1 2 3 4 5 NA
  - ◊ Help the salespeople know what will be important to each buying influence within the customer’s business 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- What support will you provide at each stage?
  - ◊ Identify who is involved at each stage, including third parties like contractors & installers, and be sure they have the motivation, tools & training to be successful in what you ask of them 1 2 3 4 5 NA
  - ◊ Specifically identify what activities need to be completed to support the customers as they educate themselves and ultimately use / service your product 1 2 3 4 5 NA

## Your Sales and Marketing Organization

- Who will provide these marketing activities? Who will oversee that they are done correctly internally, and who will perform them externally? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- How will you use the following sales channels?
  - ◊ Direct mail 1 2 3 4 5 NA
  - ◊ Telemarketing 1 2 3 4 5 NA
  - ◊ Sales force 1 2 3 4 5 NA
  - ◊ Catalog 1 2 3 4 5 NA
  - ◊ Advertising / promotion 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- What kind of customer service will you have? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- How extensive will your technical support be? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- Have you determined any policies regarding shipment, logistics and returns? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- How will you handle billing and inventory? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- What do you need to do to get the time and attention from each of these groups? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- What will be your compensation structure? What kind of training program will you have? 1 2 3 4 5 NA

### How Big? How Fast?

- How fast can you ramp up revenue growth? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- What type of sales / marketing resources are required? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- What revenue per salesperson and revenue per marketing dollar spent can be generated in years one, two and three? 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- What are the biggest risks? What are you doing to overcome them? 1 2 3 4 5 NA

### Performance Measurement

- Overall program
  - ◇ Sales, gross margin dollars, reduced churn, increased loyalty, satisfaction, market share, etc. 1 2 3 4 5 NA
  - ◇ Internal performance 1 2 3 4 5 NA
- What metrics do you use to measure the performance of your processes that deliver channel performance?
  - ◇ Channel performance 1 2 3 4 5 NA
  - ◇ Customer satisfaction 1 2 3 4 5 NA
  - ◇ Channel satisfaction 1 2 3 4 5 NA

### Evaluating Your Answers

If your answers are mostly in the 4s or 5s, you did your launch planning homework. If your answers are scattered all over, you have some potentially dangerous holes to fill. If your answers are mostly in the 1s or 2s, you have your work cut out for you and are risking more than you can afford!

For help in launch planning, QDI offers a variety of services:

- Launch planning workshops with your management team (up to 20 participants)
  - ◇ Use your organization's "knowledge base"
  - ◇ Assess your market knowledge and the degree of planning you have done to date
  - ◇ Develop group consensus of the steps necessary for a successful launch
- Market research and consulting services to build your knowledge base
  - ◇ Primary research that identifies early adopters, their buy scenario, and the criteria driving their decisions
  - ◇ Value comparisons of your offering versus the customer's alternatives
  - ◇ Identification of all the customers and channel support requirements – what's needed and who will perform them
  - ◇ Metrics development – identification of the necessary measurements to track and improve channel performance

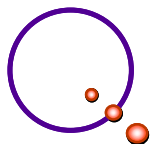
### About QDI Strategies

QDI Strategies is a marketing consulting firm that specializes in helping companies make breakthroughs in product, brand and channel strategies. Our consultants have helped clients develop and implement breakthrough decisions across numerous industries over the last twenty years. Our experience provides you with the expertise to develop market-driven answers to your business issues.

### For More Information

If you would like to receive additional information on how to develop a successful product launch or if you would like to arrange an informative presentation, contact Steve Bassill at 847-566-2020, or visit [www.qdistrategies.com](http://www.qdistrategies.com).

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