

Strategies

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How to Strengthen Tech PR Through Market Research

"Build a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door!" That assumption, which used to drive new product development for high tech companies, is fast fading.

Technology companies are increasingly seeing that it takes a **combination** of innovation and market knowledge to design, build and market products and services that customers desire.

While the idea of using market research to aid the process is "old," many high tech companies continue to make the mistake of bringing out new technologies or products without knowing the market pulse.

The introduction of the Poqet PC, a one-pound, MS-DOS computer, for example, illustrates the pitfalls in store for an innovative product whose application was not clearly articulated to, or understood by, the target audience. The product, which incorporated brilliant advances in miniaturization and battery life, did not gain acceptance in spite of wide publicity. It was perceived as an expensive executive calendar rather than a fully functional computer. (It has since been relaunched with communications capability and repositioned.)

In contrast, Compaq, faced with competition from the mail-order channel, recently brought out its low-priced ProLinea PCs that combined the features and high quality expected from the company. The entry was widely reported in the media, and its benefits accurately stated. The

result: a huge backlog of demand. Compaq recognized the market forces and addressed them.

For sure, market research can't always substitute for instinct and plain good business judgment in predicting how a new technology will be received. The personal computer industry might never have come about if that were the case -- nor such developments as spreadsheet software, CD-ROM, LANs, massively parallel supercomputing, and other successful product categories. The industry is constantly in a state of reinventing itself.

The classic positioning of Avis as #2 is an example of a victory of instinct over the conventions of marketing which prescribed never emphasizing an inferior position to the market leader.

However, if used properly, in most instances market research should influence development in the total product life cycle. This is especially true as the industry continues to mature, and the invention of so-called new "killer applications" becomes the exception rather than the rule. In such an environment, product and service differences become more challenging to identify -- and to communicate. Thus, continuous research

Ongoing market research becomes a critically important tool to keep public relations campaigns persuasive.
