

OPINIONS

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How to Hire a Great Web 2.0 Product Exec



By [Vikki Pachera](#)

An executive recruiter describes the traits necessary for a successful Web 2.0 product manager.

Despite the fact that end users have a great deal of control and influence in the second generation of the web, Web 2.0 companies offer product marketing leaders an exceptionally challenging and rich career opportunity. However, as a hiring executive you have your work cut out for you in assessing which candidates are going to be truly great product marketers in this environment.

There are several characteristics that are common to all good product marketing executives in technology. First, they should be deeply passionate for the space and the market you serve. People often use unusual language to describe people who have a deep enthusiasm: *sports nut, gadget freak, video game addict*. Those are exactly the descriptors you should be looking for when assessing passion.

Second, product marketing executives must have an appreciation for and be current on feasible design and development approaches. The ability to translate what a technology *is* into what it can *do* for end users is a skill.

Last, great product marketing executives play a key role in an organization through their masterful interpretation of what their specific market wants in the way of features, functionality and content, as well as how it is rolled out.

The Web 2.0 environment, however, demands a unique set of skills for product marketers. Think about these attributes as you develop a composite of what you want in your product marketing organization:

- **Vision tempered with humility.** Asking customers what they want in a product is a lame way to do market research; your customers often cannot articulate what

they want. They look to you to invent it. Yet this powerful group of consumers does not want to be dictated to, they want involvement and the opportunity for feedback. Just ask the guys at Facebook. So when you look for that visionary candidate, be sure he is balanced with humility. Go beyond being wowed by his vision: ask how he will bring the community along.

- **A belief in people.** It's not possible to be a successful Web 2.0 product marketer if you don't have an inherent trust in the power of the group. If you can't embrace the idea that the user community will make Wikipedia accurate, if your stomach turns when your CEO blogs, if you have a burning desire to edit content that's been posted to your site, you have no place in the Web 2.0 space. Listen carefully for those candidates who are rules oriented and want to control everything.
- **Socially cognizant.** Product marketing is a "futures" business and, as such, great Web 2.0 product marketers are contemporary, and observant of societal trends within their market. It's very difficult to assess if a product marketing candidate will be successful in a youth- or teen-oriented market like a MySpace. Probe hard on how this individual stays current within this market and look for answers beyond "reading about" and "talking to." You are looking for roll-up-the-sleeves, creative, hands-on interactions. It's wise to test how she will measure and try out her ideas: Look for strong listening skills and an interactive style.
- **Collaborators.** A good product marketing executive plays an integral role in the development of software, playing a key link in bridging customers with engineering. Great marketers help engineering solve problems by suggesting new approaches, through compromise and by bringing their own ideas to the table. But in this generation of web development, the real group you need to be collaborating with is your customer base: seeking feedback through Beta programs, through active blogs and by being accessible. Is your candidate social, open and hands on?

Product marketing leaders can have all of the traits listed above but if they can't communicate what should be developed, how the product is different from the competition and how to best use the product, it is all for not. A deep understanding of your own company, its culture and what is and is not working with your site today is the foundation for a thoughtful assessment of the right executive to lead your product marketing efforts.

Every organization is different, with varying sets of issues and challenges. Landing the right leader for product marketing can make all the difference to your company winning the hearts and minds of your customer base.

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