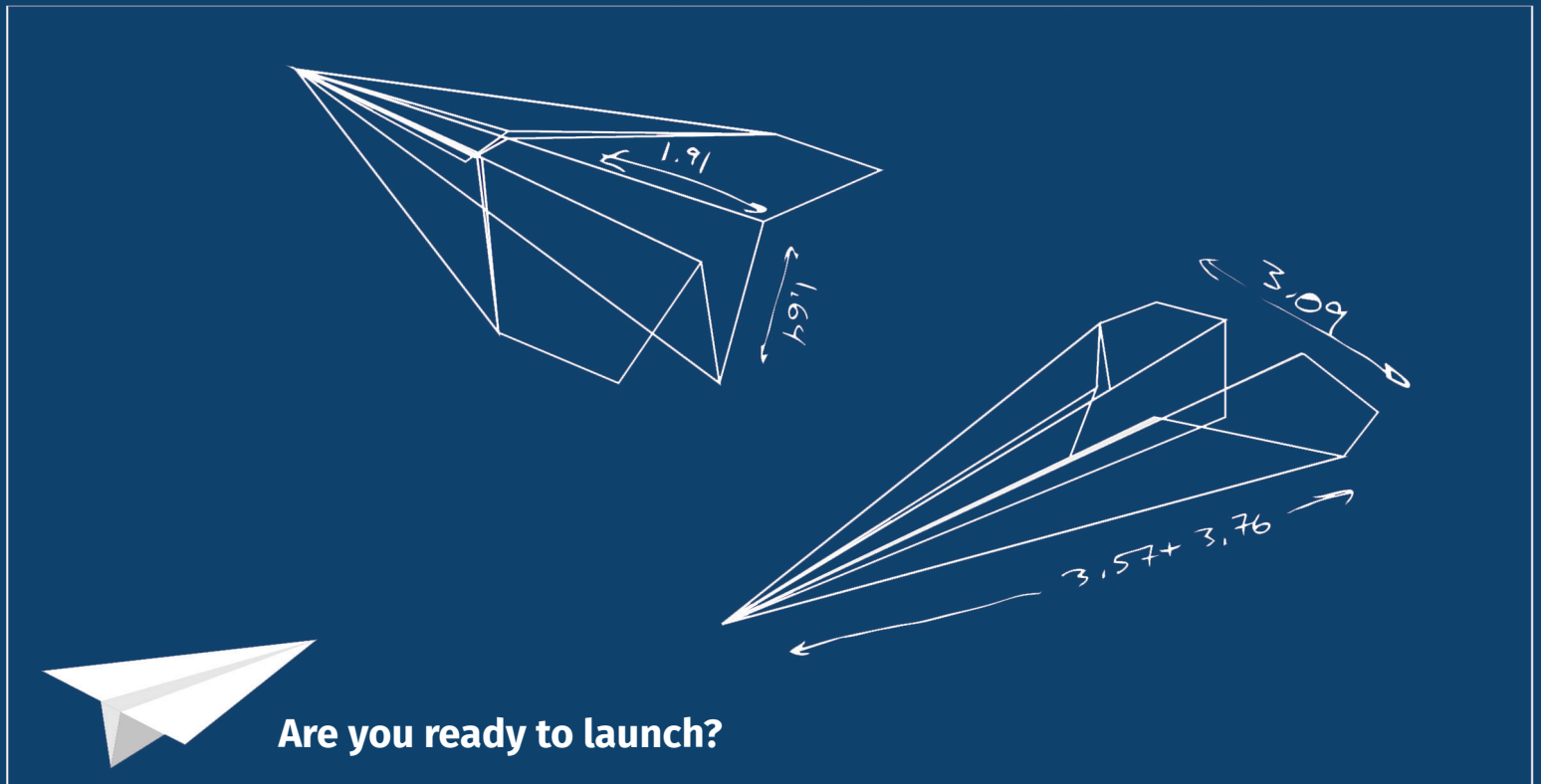


Learning Solutions and Your Product Launch

The Secret to Success



| Bottom-Line Performance

Table of Contents



Introduction	3
What is a curriculum?	4
What can a curriculum do?	6
What do I need to know to develop a curriculum?	7
Designing the curriculum <i>Prelaunch, Launch, Reinforcement, and Localization</i>	8
Rules for a Better Launch	11
“Turning red flags to green” <i>Six common challenges to manage</i>	15





Introduction

You have a new product to bring to market. Your company has spent time, money, and hours making it the right solution to a marketplace problem. Your R&D team has put in copious energy creating, testing, tweaking, and testing again—and it is almost ready. Your marketing team knows who the optimal customers are and has a sense for what the message should be. The communications folks are hard at work creating buzz in the industry. Your sales affiliates are aware it is coming, and want to learn more and try it out—and they may be starting to chat with customers about it, too, or may even have been part of the testing process.

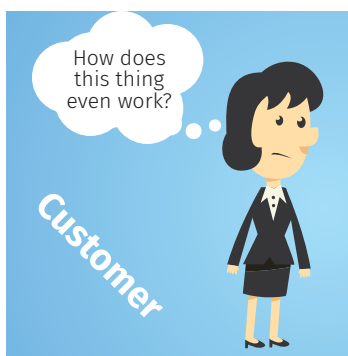
Most new product launch advice focuses on the product and the message, which is right: a bad product or the wrong message is the fastest road to product launch failure. That said, one of the hidden success factors of a product launch is your sales force, and by extension your customers: do they have the right skills and knowledge to make your launch successful?

Think carefully about what you want to do.

Most sales reps don't receive training on new products—they rely on marketing collateral and PowerPoints to learn. However, the right training, put together in a way that helps learners remember and use the information on the job, can make a significant impact on the success of your launch.

This is an intimidating step: you are moving from a highly controlled communication process, and a relatively small team, to your whole sales force—and trainers, and technical support, and ultimately your distributors and customers—talking about the product, using the product, making judgments about the product. Will they do it right? How can you make sure they do?

It's time to think about building a curriculum to support your launch.



What is a curriculum?

Let's start with the basics: what is a curriculum? We define a curriculum as:

A set of learning solutions that support a common goal, solving a business problem.

Let's break this apart:

Learning solutions are traditionally instructor-led training or eLearning courses. For many, “launch training” is a one-time meeting that, while often quite impressive, is not enough to change behavior and provide learners with the skills and knowledge they need to be able to remember and use when they are actually back on the job. Keep in mind that a curriculum is, by definition, a set of learning solutions. Curricula can reach beyond these traditional solutions to include job

aids, reference materials (paper, electronic, or app-based), online portals, memorization apps, reminder emails, staff meeting reinforcement tools, and many other options. Learning is complete only when the learner is executing on the job successfully. Getting back to our definition of a curriculum, for a product launch, the business problem we are solving is typically that sales representatives (or other audiences) do not have the knowledge and/or skills to successfully sell and support the new product.

From a knowledge perspective, their existing product and market knowledge may or may not be applicable to the new product. Sometimes, they have to un-learn what they already know and re-learn a new approach. They also may have to learn

“Sometimes, they have to un-learn what they already know and re-learn a new approach.”

about new markets; new customers or customer segments; new product features or functions; or new ways of doing business, both for themselves and for customers.

As far as skills, while they may have existing sales skills, they may have to learn to sell a new way. They might have hands-on technical skills to learn so they can demonstrate the product, set it up, troubleshoot it, or answer questions about how it works.



A curriculum is a set of learning solutions

Finally, they may have new business skills to learn: if the product requires the customer to work in a new way, the sales representative may have to walk them through that process and help the customer understand and execute the changes that need to be made.

So, at the most fundamental level, the goal of the product launch training curriculum is that sales representatives and others have and can use the skills and knowledge needed to successfully launch the product.





What can a curriculum do?

A curriculum can:

- Help learners develop skills around how to sell, use or install the new product
- Help learners remember key information about the new product
- Help learners feel more confident because they have the skills and knowledge they need about the new product



A curriculum cannot:

- Change the market environment
- Create buy-in at the field level if senior management tells a different story
- Fix a misguided message
- Correct a poorly designed or executed product



What do I need to know to develop a curriculum?



You will need to gather, create, or decide the following to create the most robust curriculum:

NEW PRODUCT

- What is the vision for this product? What is the compelling story for customers and for internal audiences—what sets it apart?
- What does it do? What does it not do?
- What is the marketplace? Who are the customers?
- When is it rolling out?

GOAL

- What is the overall goal of your curriculum?
- What business problem are you trying to solve?

AUDIENCE

- Who are you training? Sales, technical folk, distributors, customers, all of the above?
- What do they know already?
- Are you giving them skills, knowledge, both? What are your learning objectives: what do they need to be able to know, do, or believe for you to achieve the goal you set above?
- What is the frequency, importance, and complexity of each skill or knowledge item? What common mistakes do you need to prevent?
- How much change will be required of everyone for this launch to be successful?
- How competent does each audience need to be when?

CIRCUMSTANCES

- How does this new product fit into the big scheme of things? One of many that roll out every six weeks, or a company savior that has been a focus for years?
- What possible obstacles are there in selling and using the new product? What is being done to overcome them?
- Is everyone supportive of the new product? Why or why not?
- How are internal systems aligned around the product? Will that help or hinder? Are system changes needed to make the product successful?

COMMUNICATION

- Who knows what so far? How is the new product being positioned—internally, with customers, against competitors?
- What is the strategy? What is the messaging and how does the learning component fit in?
- How will your learning solutions be updated as product, competitor, and regulatory information changes over time?
- How will you ensure regional sales affiliates can successfully localize your curriculum?



Designing the curriculum

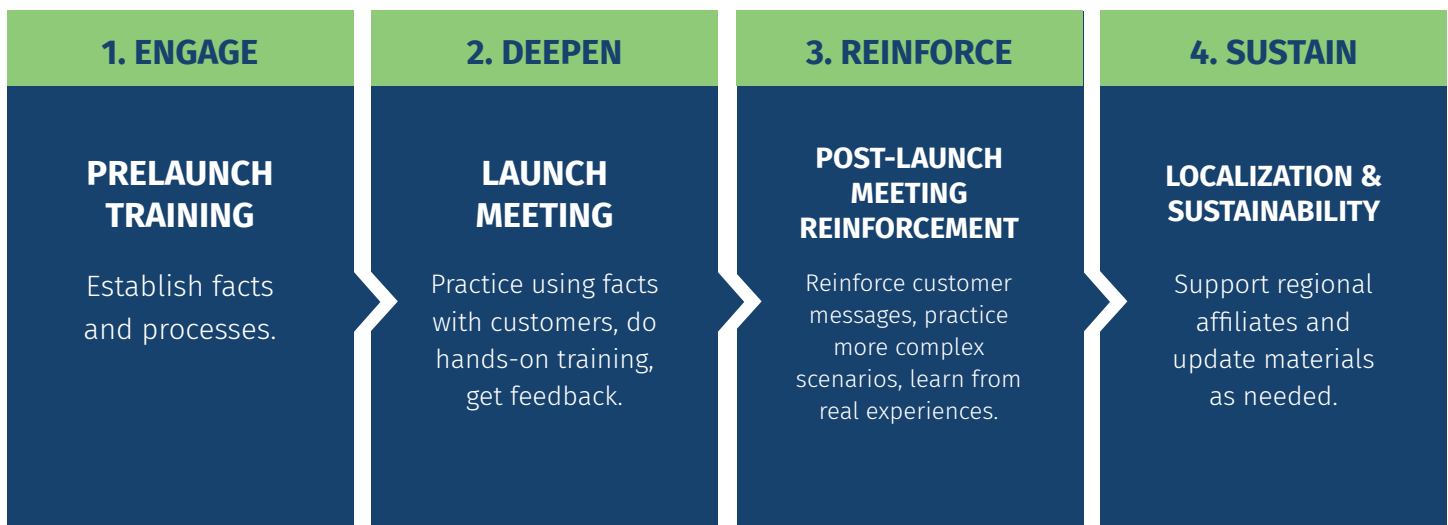
Every launch curriculum is different, and has different needs based on what learners currently know, what the product is, the structure of the sales organization, etc. For some companies, the launch training begins years before the launch meeting, as the audience needs to learn a variety of foundational information before they even get to the new product information. In other cases, the launch training happens in a compact window right before the product launches in the market.

Many companies define a launch with the internal launch meeting: an event several weeks or months before the external launch that gets sales representatives and others ready for the external launch. Given the “launch meeting” model,

we find that there are a minimum of three, and ideally four, phases to the launch training that help ensure success.



The Four-Phase Product Launch Training Model



Prelaunch training

Prelaunch training establishes fundamental facts, processes and knowledge. Take learning facts out of the launch meeting itself – it is not the best use of the face-to-face environment. This phase should also focus on facts that learners need to know, not look up – if they can look it up, teach them the skill of looking it up, and give them the right tools to do so quickly. Don't waste your time having them memorize things that don't have to be memorized.

Launch meeting

Spend this time on face-to-face interaction: practice, feedback, talking, doing. If your learners need to assemble equipment, for instance, have them learn about it in prelaunch – and practice as much as possible – but the real assembly often is best performed in person, where real-time coaches can provide feedback. The same is true for many steps in the sales process – learn about features and benefits in the prelaunch training, but practice putting them together and talking with customers about them during the launch meeting itself. Meetings are also a great place to break into groups, plan customer interactions (including managing objections), practice, debrief and practice again.

Four strategies to foster long-term retention

If you want to get the best return on your training investment, your learners need to be able to retrieve what they learned on the job when it is time to use it. The following four strategies inhibit forgetting and enhance remembering... and they are ideally suited for a product launch curriculum. The first two are critical; the other two enhance the first ones.



Provide frequent, spaced intervals of learning instead of unrepeated waves. In other words, don't just have a launch meeting and assume they will remember everything. The three initial phases of launch training are ideal vehicles for providing spaced intervals.



Provide multiple repetitions. Early repetitions help recall (for instance, during the prelaunch training, address the same information more than once in slightly different ways). Later repetitions should allow for greater elaboration (for instance, using the features and benefits learned in prelaunch training in a sales call setting).



Provide immediate feedback for mistakes, and make sure learners get it right before moving forward. Give learners a chance to do it right, so when they remember they are remembering the right way to do it. This should show up in the design for every element of the training.



Use stories to drive the learning experience. Many stories characterize a product launch: tell the story of a customer with a problem, and how the new product solved it. Just remember that the story is what you want them to remember – stories about the trials and tribulations of developing the product are not what you want them to take away!

For more information on these four strategies, refer to When Remembering Really Matters:

<http://www2.bottomlineperformance.com/when-remembering-really-matters-white-paper>

Post-launch meeting reinforcement

Reinforcement is a critical part of the entire launch process. The learning doesn't end until the learner is using the knowledge/skills on the job. If you are able to leave the launch meeting and start selling the next day, great! More often, there will be a space of time before the knowledge and skills will be used, and the post-launch reinforcement is critical to making sure they don't forget. This is a great time to provide further application and practice opportunities – new scenarios or actual customers.

Localization and Sustainability

Arguably, this is the most overlooked part of the launch process. Many organizations simply cannot afford to send every sales rep to launch training; key account managers or marketing managers attend launch training and must return to their home countries to deliver the training to sales reps. Training must be turnkey enough for them to adapt to their needs, and it must be easy to expand upon and update as product, competitor, and regulatory information changes over time. Most importantly, systems must be in place to provide ongoing support to affiliates over the long haul.

Even after the product is being sold and used, there is often a more advanced level of knowledge or skill needed that couldn't be taught in the launch meeting because of time, availability, and brain capacity—now is the time for that training, too. Think about just-in-time reference, and training for people who start after the launch meeting, and...

Tools

Develop reference tools for learners to use to look up the non-critical information quickly and effectively. Ideally, use them in all three phases of training:

- **Prelaunch:** have them look up information as part of the prelaunch training; explain them in a staff meeting; ask for feedback on them in preparation for actual field use.
- **Launch meeting:** Use them as information sources or proof sources during activities in the meeting; give out “official” versions, whether electronically or in person; practice answering questions quickly using the tools.
- **Reinforcement:** send out scenarios and learning activities for which they have to use the reference materials. Plan a time-base campaign to align key value statements and sales messages.
- **Localization and Sustainability:** Gather stories about on-the-job use and share; schedule “office hours” affiliates can attend to share feedback and request help; update and share changes as product and customer information evolves.

Rules for a Better Launch



There are as many ways to learn about a new product as there are new products!

Consider the following decision points:

Prelaunch training

1. If you are limited on time, specifically analyze what learners have to know, versus what they can look up. Focus your training on the few key items that your learners need to know and recall; incorporate practice and repetition as much as you can in your tight time-frame. On a parallel path, create a robust support system, so they can quickly and easily look up what you did not have time to teach them before launch.
2. If your new launch is similar to one learners have experienced in the past, do not start from the beginning. Use the knowledge they already have: tell them what is the same and what is different from what they already know. Reinforce their current knowledge, and focus your repetition and practice on the new or changed information or skills.
3. If you have a large volume of information to teach, give them time to learn it. Weave the information together to increase retention: teach a new concept, then harken back to a



previous concept, then reinforce the new one again and move on to a different idea. Make sure you have time to **repeat** and **practice** the information: it is tempting to touch on each concept once and move on because you have “so much to cover.” Do not give in to temptation! In most cases, mentioning something once makes the teacher feel better, but it does nothing for the learner—they forget unless they repeat, practice, and get feedback.

4. Use stories, not bullets, to help learners learn. Can you create a metaphor for your key product concept? Do you have customer success stories to share? Can you create a learning agent to guide the learner through the launch? Give learners a story to connect the product to real usage!
5. Prelaunch training used to be dry... a set of fact sheets or a series of research results. Facts and research results are often critical to product launch success, but putting them in context of product success, of customer problems and needs, of real-world results... that takes dry fact and ignites it into memorable learning.

Launch training

1. The first question: do you need a launch meeting? For many, the launch meeting is an established step, focused on showing senior leadership support, practicing skills with real-world coaching and improvement, and bringing sales and marketing together to create momentum and excitement for the launch itself. These reasons are valid and proven reasons to do the launch meeting event. In today's atmosphere, the budget and timelines do not always allow for a launch meeting. **So**

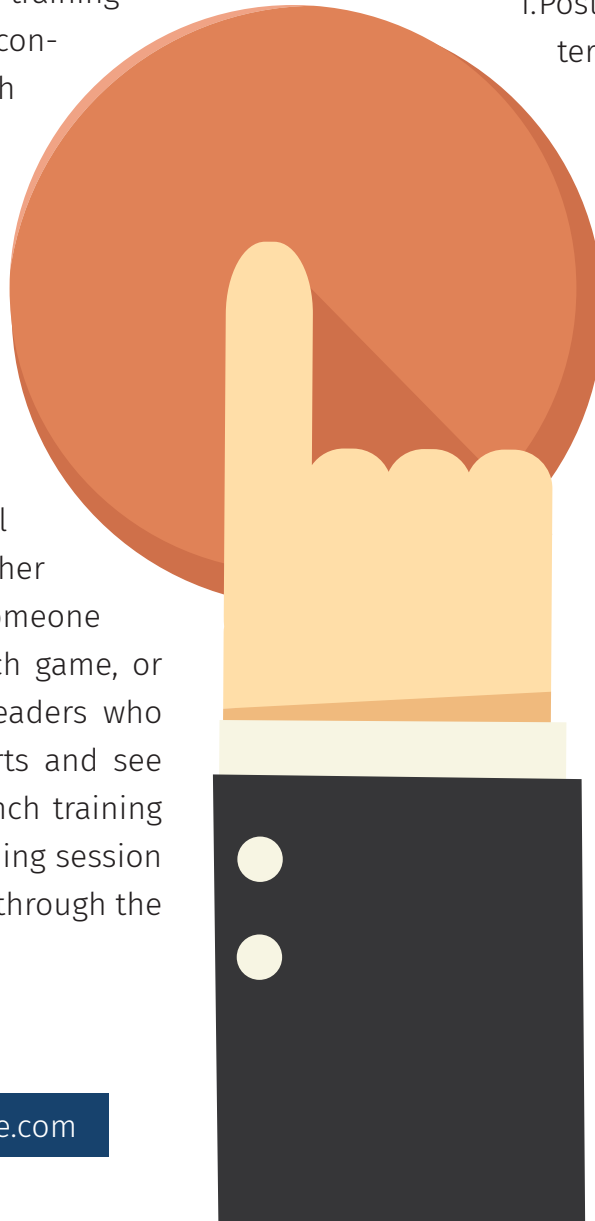
how can you provide the benefits without the meeting?

Consider training your local leaders to conduct mini-launches—with technical or sales support—as part of established staff meetings. Show senior leadership support through a company-wide message, and also follow up with individual reinforcement for local launch activities... whether it's a personal note for someone who won the local launch game, or public praise for local leaders who support the launch efforts and see the results. Make prelaunch training a weekly or monthly training session or message that extends through the launch and beyond.

2. Whether gathering sales reps for a company-wide meeting or conducting smaller training events, remember that one experience rarely creates lasting change. A launch meeting alone is less successful than a series of events that help learners incorporate the learning into their daily sales or support routines.
3. Make sure the launch event is a learning event as well as entertainment. Hype only lasts until the next hype; learning creates lasting change.

Post-launch reinforcement

1. Post-launch reinforcement is better called “using launch information.” If the first use is long after the launch event is over, how do learners practice between the event and in real life? What normal events—meetings, training, conversations, newsletters—can incorporate the new information and skills? How can reinforcement become part of the way you do business?
2. If your product launch is delayed after training, what are you doing to keep the information in memory? Do your learners need to retrieve it and use it on a



regular basis? Are you expanding their knowledge base and skill level as you learn more in anticipation of your launch? Or, if they do forget, how will you reestablish their learning later?

3. As you begin launch planning, think about follow-up systems. Is finding information after launch quickly important for you? If so, build the support system first, and incorporate using it into every aspect of the launch—don't just save it as an afterthought.

“Reinforcement is a critical part of the entire launch process. The learning doesn't end until the learner is using the knowledge on the job.”



“Develop reference tools for learners to use to look up the non-critical information quickly and effectively.”



Localization and Sustainability

1. Ensure a long-term plan is in place to support local leaders. What are their learning priorities, and how are you making them happen?
2. Sometimes, the best post-launch support you can provide is just showing success others are having: customer needs that are met, sales that happen, difficult objections that are overcome. Give learners a face for the skills you have taught, and success to aspire to.
3. Rely on a “plug and play” approach where the framework of the workshop and all activities remain, but the examples and scenarios used can be separated out and replaced at the local level. Consider wireframe activities for workshops and screen templates for eLearning courses that can be re-skinned as needed.
4. Use a theme that can live beyond the initial launch “event” and make sense for new sales reps that onboard later. A theme can complement a product’s marketing campaign, but it doesn’t necessarily need to be identical.



Turning Red Flags to Green



So you have an initial plan for what this curriculum needs to include and how it is going to work. You are on a timeline: you have to get the process going and keep it moving to meet the launch targets.

But... you have never created a curriculum for a new product launch before. What do you need to look out for as you actually develop it?

While different industries and different products have fundamentally different launch strategies, there are certain commonalities amongst all of them. Not every product launch has all of these challenges, but it is rare that a launch would have none of them.

We call these challenges red flags – they won't break a product launch, but they might seriously sabotage it if they aren't addressed. We have come up with a set of "yellow flag" questions to ask that will turn those red flags into green flags.

Keep in mind that all of these red flags are related to the curriculum, learning plans, and meet-

ing the launch deadline. Much bigger red flags (the product doesn't work, there is no marketing message) supersede these!



#1: Craft the curriculum based on feedback



Red Flag: “I know what I want.”



Why is this a red flag? We want a launch with a vision, right? Absolutely! If this means we have a vision of the future state, then this is a green flag all the way – bring on the vision!

In some cases, this is a red flag because it indicates one of two situations:

1. A member of the launch team expects the curriculum to work miracles: after a 20-minute launch meeting, the staff will be able to rattle off all features and benefits of the product with no mistakes. OR the curriculum will make the marketing message work, even though it doesn't address customers' key needs. What you want has to align with what a curriculum can do.
2. A member of the launch team – often one who has been part of a launch before – has a crystal clear vision of what the final deliverables should be: 3 video discs three hours long

each. While this solution may have worked in the past, it may not be the best way to train in these circumstances (and a 3-hour video course is brutal!). What is right for this launch, this time?

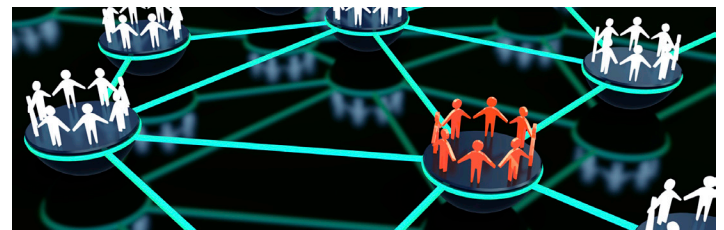
Yellow Flag: What other viewpoints should we consider?



In each of these cases, the issue often lies with the fact that a single point of view is driving the decision. The solution is to bring in other viewpoints, particularly customers or front-line employees who will have to implement the decision. We ask them about past experience, their ideal approach, and their reactions to the proposed solution – and bring our own experience to the conversation as well.

Green Flag: Teams of feedback

Based on the feedback, we create a more inclusive solution that includes the original el-



ements – as much as possible – if they are truly the right solution. Even better, because we have broad input, we also have broader buy-in, which is critical to long-term success.

#2: Have the right players for the circumstances



Red Flag: “People may not be available.”

In many product launches, the people with



the best information support twenty or thirty different communication and launch efforts in addition to their actual job. This can make response times lag. When it takes a month to get a call back on a question, it is hard to keep the curriculum moving. The most common overload tends to be the most critical players: the key subject matter expert (SME) and the key decision maker.



Yellow Flag: How do we move forward without them?

Often, there is another SME who can provide 80% of the information... we just rely on the main SME for that last, critical 20%. For the decision maker, we find out what decisions others can make, and how we can plan ahead to engage the key decision maker at the most important points only.



Green Flag: Plan B

The most important point in making Plan B work is setting expectations and getting buy-in from the SME and decision maker up front. We need to clearly define what this decrease in involvement means: less time, certainly, but it also means they have to adhere to the decisions their replacements made. If they cannot do so, either their time has to free up or the project has to slow: no reason to delegate decisions if they are not supported.



Have a Plan B whenever possible

#3: Use flexibility correctly



Red Flag: “We need flexibility in dates.”



Flexibility may mean a variety of things:

- Deadlines are just suggestions – thorough review may take longer.
- We can’t make people participate so we can’t guarantee they will meet deadlines.
- Things are changing so rapidly we don’t know what will be possible.



Yellow Flag: How do you define flexibility?

For some people, “flexibility” means that one member of the team is allowed to miss deadlines, but all others have to stay on track. For others, it means a give and take as the product launch progresses and more becomes known. We recommend the second approach.



Green Flag: Mutual flexibility

Mutual flexibility means that we are all focused on the deadline, but delay in one place means we move things around to keep everything on track ... it does not mean that we automatically shorten all remaining deadlines.

For instance, if a reviewer is late, we don’t auto-



matically keep the final deadline the same. We look at the factors surrounding the project: can the final deadline move too? Can we proceed with most of the deliverables, and make a few changes to a section when the reviewer is ready? Can we move something else forward as this part moves back? How do we keep things moving based on what we have?

#4: Place decisions correctly



Red Flag: “Our whole team will decide together.”

New product teams are often brought together for



a short time. As a result, there may be low trust... and everyone may need to have a hand in every decision to believe that their point of view is represented. In addition, product launch decisions can be big decisions! For many teams, getting buy-in from all players feels critical to long-term success. This can add months to the timeline – is it worth it?



Yellow Flag: Who owns which decision?

Think critically about the decision process... are there certain decisions that certain team members own? Is there a final decision maker who should just make some choices? Can a sub-team make the hard decisions and just get feedback/approval from the whole team? Can the team set foundational guidelines about decisions so everyone can let go of some decision points?




Green Flag: Consolidated decisions

In the end, rather than every team member touching every decision, the team members only touch the decisions they need to touch. If it truly is a group decision, can the group discuss and come to a decision based on previous agreements? Ideally, the decision should reflect everyone who needs to be part of the decision... in the most efficient way possible.



Consolidating decisions can save you time and effort

#5: Find the right chunks of information

 **Red Flag:** “We are still working on that information.”



With a new product launch, new information becomes available almost daily. That said, we can't wait until the week before launch, and cobble everything together. We have to keep things moving.

 **Yellow Flag:** What can we get when?

Can we identify the “core” nugget of information that will then inform the various learning solutions we are developing? Is there a hierarchy of information... is there a part that is stable first that we can prioritize?

 **Green Flag:** Chunks of content

Revisit the plan and order the development process based on what information is available when. Break the curriculum into projects – or pieces of projects – based on what is available and keep things moving.



Chunking your content can help keep things moving as you wait on information

#6: Finish it!



Red Flag: “I know I said it was final, but....”



The ultimate new product launch problem: change, and change, and change again. As the disparate groups of team members come together, decisions get made and remade... decisions that may have far-reaching consequences way beyond the training.



Yellow Flag: How can we stop the madness?

This yellow flag uses every strategy we have discussed so far: how can we reprioritize work? Can someone else help? What tradeoffs can we make? What flexibility can we build in? What is Plan C and D and E?



Green Flag: Highlights and gaps



This type of change often has a waterfall effect... changing a small fact in one solution can have a compounding effect on other parts of the curriculum. We have to do what we can, not try to do what we really can't do, and mark the last little pieces that are outstanding so we can go back for them later, but keep moving now.

In the End

Is a launch ever over? New people join the company; new information comes to light; new strategies to better understand customers are discovered. Training for a product launch is a process; if you end it, you may lose a chance to continue to improve and grow your sales.



Let's Launch!

About Bottom-Line Performance

Since 1995, **Bottom-Line Performance** has helped organizations create the right learning solution. Whether you have a complex problem to solve, product to launch, or process to implement, our in-house team partners with you every step of the way to design for your desired outcome and develop the right mix of tools: web and mobile apps, eLearning, serious games and gamification, video, and highly interactive instructor-led training to name a few. The end result? Award-winning solutions that solve problems, inspire people to act, and help people learn.

We are also the creators of Knowledge Guru®, a training reinforcement platform that uses adaptive learning, game-based learning, and microlearning to increase knowledge retention and improve performance.

Get in Touch

Email | info@bottomlineperformance.com

Phone | (317) 861-7281

Website | www.bottomlineperformance.com



| Bottom-Line Performance