Research Article

Factors in Planning Strategic Marketing Communication: Project Management Software

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Abstract

The aim of the exploratory study was to gain an understanding of the key uses and features from those who use project management software to better understand user benefits which in turn aids in choosing advertising language for specific target audience segments for better targeted marketing campaigns. In addition to a literature review, the exploratory research in this study was conducted via an online survey which was distributed via social media and direct messages to organizations working in project management. The findings and understanding gained from this paper contribute to the overall understanding of management software consumer habits and benefits sought, which can then be used in strategic marketing campaigns in terms of advertising copy language or in the selection of targeted marketing channels to improve the delivery of a message to the intended audiences. Project managers in this study stated that they want to see why they should use a particular software and what benefits they would gain by using it as compared to current project management software offerings and work methods. Interestingly, it was found that none of those that responded went to trade shows or have a relationship with their project management software company representatives. The literature review and survey results suggest that it is essential for project management software companies to explain how the software can be utilized for various purposes by multiple and different types of customers and, thus, it is very important for those creating software to do market analysis, or understand their target market, so they're able to reach them effectively which means understanding the key benefits customers seek and use these in targeted advertising campaigns. The larger impacts of the findings would be on the efficiency of marketing campaign planning for employees in software development, as well as those working in advertising.

Keywords: Marketing Communication, Management, Software.

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Introduction

Project management is defined as the process of planning, overseeing, and collaborating from start to finish to complete a project to a client's satisfaction (Giao and Trang, 2021). The use of the best project management practices leads to added business value, greater benefit realization, and better benefit management activities (Kaerzer, 2015). To manage available resources and to meet the goals of the project, more organizations operate in a project management style and continuously work to improve efficiency, productivity, employee satisfaction, and most importantly, delivery that meets or even exceeds clients' expectations" (Jiang, 2018). This is the case for most industries ranging from IT to engineering and beyond as research has shown that efficient PM provides tangible benefits, such as a better rate of return on investments, as well as intangible benefits such as improved corporate culture and client satisfaction (Ibbs and Kwak, 2000; Andersen and Vaagaasar, 2009; Eskerod and Riis, 2009; Mengel, Cowan-Sahadath, and Follert, 2009).

It's also important to recognize that there are different ways of tackling projects and work may vary between industries and companies, such as through focusing on the key paradigm, the unit of focus, success criteria, or the project manager's role (Shenhar and Dvir, 2003).

Project management also applies to creating advertising campaigns. Initially the objectives must be set, followed by a clear understanding of the scope along with the constraints of the advertising campaign such as budget or timeline. Thus, when developing an advertising campaign, the communicator must understand the target audience's needs and process so they have a clear understanding of how their product can address those needs to aid in improvements of life and work.
Something that companies and / or project managers may struggle with is the tracking of

project work, such as the statistics of project successes overtime, which suggests that projects still fail and/or projects do not accomplish their business results (Shenhar and Dvir, 2003). Marketing is also a key factor to consider at the beginning of a project, since "The role of marketing is to help make a product succeed in the marketplace and realize its sales potential…" (Baker, 2010).

Some examples Baker (2010) provides are the design of the product and researching the market, both of which are necessary to consider before beginning to actively work on the project. Additionally, since many times a project's result is geared toward the creation of a product or the process of completing a service (such as within the IT and construction industries), it's likely that the business will need to market the completed product, the services their business provides, or increase awareness of their brand. The factors of project failure fall into three categories: People, process, and communications (Discenza and Forman, 2007). Thus, many project management professionals are using software for aiding the planning and controlling of projects (Liberatore and Pollack-Johnson, 2003), with increasing interest in developing and proving new managerial practices for increasing efficiency and productivity in project management (PM) (Armenia, Dangelico, Nonino, and Pompei, 2019). There is a variety of software and tools used for tracking projects in various industries. The strongest self-reported factors influencing PM software usage, both positively and negatively, are the size and complexity of projects, as larger projects require additional levels of management and tracking (Liberatore and Pollack-Johnson, 2003). Project management software is an interactive product, meaning that it relies on users' direct contribution, sometimes daily, to keep up to date with the project's development. Other examples that Lyons and Wilker (2012) provide for interactive products are websites, applications, digital installations, and kiosks. Additionally, "Unless an interactive product is

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created thoughtfully, with purpose, and effectively meets the needs of the user, it's not a solution..." (Lyons and Wilker, 2012). This means that finding the right software is essential to the project's success, which is why some businesses are using more specialized and customized software for tracking of resources and personnel within larger projects, due to that customization and the time saving benefits for managers and personnel. Understanding the project management process from the end users' perspective is key for developing advertising that focuses on the benefits of such software from the user's perspective and experience. This information goes into advertising campaigns as user insights and experiences with a product, in this case the PM software.

The purpose of this study was to get the perspective of those with primary experience using PM software, in a variety of industries, since gaining this understanding is essential. The questions were geared to assess their preferences and factors they viewed important so stakeholders (such as software companies) could modify existing software or create new software to either appeal to wider varieties of consumers or distinguish their software from others', such as for specific, niche industry. This information could also be beneficial when companies create plans to market this software, through identifying and highlighting advertising language for project management software that targets the selected audience. Other questions asked during the study were regarding what factors benefitted project managers and what their preferences were for software features. Another question asked was how software developers could better communicate with their clients in various industries.

Methodology

This exploratory research was approved by the University of Nebraska's institutional review board (IRB# #031621-1). The data collection was conducted via an online survey where data were collected from project managers in several different industries. The

mixed methods survey consisting of both quantitative demographic questions about the industry as well as qualitative questions about the preferences and benefits of project management software was distributed in 2021 through social media, mainly Facebook through posts as well as direct messages to project management organizations.

Due to the number of responses, (n=3), the data were analyzed based on industry and for the qualitative comments made by project managers to gain insight about the perceived benefits of software being used or being bought.

Results

The survey responses showed that the respondents were mainly from the Midwest of the United States and worked in various industries from flooring to web development.

According to PR Newswire (2014), The North American commercial flooring industry is one of the most diverse of any manufactured product in terms of product type and selection. Many job descriptions for project managers in the commercial flooring industry require that project managers have skills in managing multiple simultaneous projects, have the ability to track project costing, and anticipate and manage a project's resources including personnel. When asked about the main features and benefits of software project, managers currently use one project manager and user of project management software in the industrial flooring installation industry listed location tracking as the most frequently used feature. It was also noted that in the flooring industry the employees in the industry continually travel to different locations for their jobs and data entry must be accessible remotely, off site. The project manager respondent stated not being able to log into the software as the feature they had the most trouble with. This leads to questions of whether it's the software itself that causes the inability to log in or if it's another problem that's causing it, like an inadequate wireless connection. Additionally, they listed that they

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could be convinced to switch project management software, namely if the software being purchased was more user friendly, available in many languages, had more accurate location tracking, less glitching, and the ability to "track time to" multiple job locations in one day. Another response from a project manager explained that they felt that "the project management software they used makes it easier for them to navigate between projects".

How project managers and those working in project management found out about developments or new developments was asked. It was found that none of those that responded went to trade shows or have a relationship with their project management software company representatives. The industrial flooring installation response listed that "[their] chat is pretty good" when asked about what they like about their project management software company. They also said that they don't like that their company "[doesn't] give administrators full control."

The project managers from software industries for example according to job descriptions for software industry project managers found these project managers are responsible for the planning, scheduling, budgeting, execution, and delivery of software and web projects. Many job descriptions for these jobs also require software project managers to oversee and manage personnel as well as manage multiple simultaneous projects for different clients.

Discussion

Advertising & Communicating the Benefits of Software

As mentioned previously, the goal of a project is frequently the creation of a product or the process of completing a service. This is the case with the development of PM software, which will be the focus of the discussion. Focusing first on software development, previous research undertaken to investigate the client–advertising agency relationship

shows the importance of the relationship of the developer to the project manager (Levin, et. al., 2019). However, it isn't plausible financially or with regards to deadlines to customize software for every individual customer. It's essential for software companies to create a product that can be used by multiple customers. Thus, those creating software must do market analysis, or understand their target market, so they're able to reach them effectively in the planning phase of development. Additionally, this would lessen the cost and time of developing the software, which would benefit both the software companies and their clients. To do so, the process is as follows: study the market, determine the similarities and differences, elaborate on commonalities, and expand upon the software's reusable features (Tahsin, Munim, Hasan, Nahar, and Rokonuzzaman, 2018).

However, the key factors of the market—function, technology, customer segmentation, and extent of incorporation—are always changing. This results in new possibilities, which can be positive or negative for the business, that make it essential to consider multiple perspectives of strategic markets, like the top-down and bottom-up analysis styles. Having a clear understanding of these theories will result in the ability to better think strategically and thus have a quicker response to threats and opportunities that arise (Day, 1981). "Generally, broad definitions are necessary for the analysis of new ventures, or for competitive surveillance purposes, while narrower definitions are used for performance evaluation" (Day, 1981). To further explain, "Senior management chooses between a decision process that dictates the resource level (top-down) and one that delegates the resource decision and gives up control in favor of more precise information (bottom-up)" (Hutchison-Krupat and Kavadias, 2015). One technique to approach this is through the SWOT analysis, which divides up factors into categories of the business's internal strengths and weaknesses and the external opportunities and threats. This process should result in an

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understanding of the market segment, the market's size, and the costs of creating a software for that specific market (Tahsin, et. al, 2018).

Studying the similarities and differences between project management software can be done through primary or secondary research, such as a survey directly to businesses in a specific market that regularly uses project management software or studying the project management software programs that are available and determining what features they share. The reasons software would be purchased and used would be to help gain efficiencies and improvements for project managers when aiming to increase tangible benefits such as higher returns on investment, growing the number of projects managed, or efficiencies in managing resources such as personnel or materials (Tereso, Ribeiro, Fernandes, Loureiro, and Ferreira, 2019). With this knowledge, developers and advertisers can better understand the common features and expand upon them, increasing the software's usability during the software's development stages (Tahsin, et. al, 2018). Additionally, they would be able to better understand additional features that users are wanting to have included in their software and fulfill those needs.

It's also important to understand the market when trying to reach their customers via marketing, which is frequently through digital platforms in today's world. This insight can be gained through target market surveys or even via conversations about relevant content that they can then utilize to connect with their customers, such as through their Facebook and/or LinkedIn profiles, website/blog, among others, meaning they're a "media business" that needs to create quality content that highlights the value of what they're offering (Leboff, 2014). "…because of the nuances and pitfalls of evolving new digital platforms, it is essential for advertising professions and project managers to pay particularly close attention to time, quality and communication management practices in

order to deliver successful results to clients" (Jiang, page 27).

Another important factor of digital marketing is that "…it is no longer what companies say about themselves that matters; it is what others say that really counts" (Leboff, 2014). By facilitating a positive relationship with customers, businesses are better able to work with them to better the customers' experiences before, during, and after the sale (Leboff, 2014). It's also important to understand how to recognize "successful results" from digital advertising, which frequently comes in the form of data. This can range from focusing on the demographics of those clicking certain ads, the number of views and clicks on the ad, and the number of sales made because of consumers seeing these ads with certain advertising creatives over others.

Liberatore and Pollack-Johnson (2003) found that older industries with a strong history of project management such as construction and engineering services tend to make heavier use of the more high-end software packages, while the newer, more technological industries, such as computer software/data processing and telecom services, make heavier use of the simpler, less-expensive project management software packages. With this being generally the case, it's also important to understand the motivations of project management software users as well as the extent of PM software usage and project size. Factors influencing a project manager and thus project management software use and preference are the number of activities in a typical project, the number of projects typically being managed, the percent of work in PM, and of course by historical PM software usage, (Liberatore and Pollack-Johnson, 2003). The most significant factors for project management software usage, according to this study, "…are the size and complexity of projects (larger and more complex projects pushing PM professionals to use the software more" (Liberatore and Pollack-Johnson, 2003). Thus, when creating an advertising campaign for project management software,

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the project manager can pinpoint stakeholder requirements.

Additionally, the world is becoming more globalized through technology use. Many companies have employees that live abroad or have tools that were created abroad, including project management software. Thus, it's important to consider differences in culture and geography when offering software to managers that ensure everyone involved has the same understanding of their role and the expectation of the project's results (Shafiq). Ensuring this understanding includes "monitor[ing] the activities, risks and issues under the responsibilities of team members in different time zones, by sending automated messages," among other ways of instantaneously communicating, such as through Zoom (Binder, 2009).

Communication is essential throughout the project management process, including when doing the communications planning at the beginning of the process, when the project manager pinpoints stakeholder requirements. Managers can also "...produce an index of the information available directly in the project management tool, with instructions on how to obtain it," efficiently creating reports to keep track of the project (Binder, page 244). With much of the information being efficiently accessed this way, particularly if those involved are in different time zones, it reinforces the use of the project management software (Binder, 2009). This shows the importance of the software for the customers that use it and thus shows how essential it is for them to find the software that's the best fit for planning and control of projects within their company (Liberatore and Pollack Johnson, 2003).

In addition to communication being an integral piece to any project, awareness of one's cultural perspective is also important when working on a project. For example, the standards of success (Binder, 2009). For example, "Israeli project managers are more focused on performing "Scope" and "Time" management processes, assisted by project management software, while formal

"Communications" and "Cost" management are more frequently used by Japanese project managers. It was also found that Japanese organizations use clear and measurable success measures for each project, while project objectives in Israel are often quite foggy" (Zwikael, 2005). The differences in focus and measurements of success by the project managers are significant in determining whether a project is completed adequately. There is no right answer regarding both perspectives, but greatly impacts how such software should be advertised in each country and which features customers, in fact, value more and thus pay more attention to.

When focusing specifically on marketing, it's also important to focus on cultural factors like symbols, heroes, and rituals. The symbols include "words, gestures, pictures and objects" (Binder, 2009). When having a project with the goal of advertising project management software in the United States, for example, this would include using a copy that appeals to businesses, images of professionals working in their industry, aided by the software, and objects that are synonymous with this, like laptops and other mobile devices. The heroes are people, whether they're actual people or an ideal, that exhibit "good" behavior and who are rewarded for it (Binder, 2009). Using the earlier example, images of hardworking business owners would fit this ideal. Finally, the rituals are "...collective activities without a practical purpose but essential to keep the individual bound within the norms of the collectivity," which include how meetings are planned and who participates (Binder, 2009). An example of this would include scenes of holiday parties.

Conclusion

Focusing specifically on PM software as the product, this paper draws upon literature from key disciplines of project management, advertising, and customer-relationship management to address the gaps in the current literature for gaining insight about

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which features, and benefits of software are sought out or used by project managers in various industries. The insights gained from the survey responses show that the benefits of PM software by project managers and personnel vary by industry. This shows the need for some customization and personalization of software along with access to customer service and information technology support. The benefits sought by potential customers should be used in targeted advertising copy language by project management software providers and companies. Project managers in this study stated that they want to see why they should use a particular software and what benefits they would gain by using it as compared to current project management software offerings and work methods.

The literature review findings support this conclusion by stating that customization of a mass product is important for relationship building between the provider and user of the software. In addition, project managers in this study also stated their desire to have administrative control over their software. Thus, identifying where potential customers for project management software gain information about new products and services is important for gaining new business leads followed by the establishment of a working relationship where benefits and customization can be communicated to a potential customer and user of the software in question. The results of this study found that mid-western project managers do not attend industry trade shows and therefore other communication methods are advisable such as direct response messages or personal selling.

This study showed that gaining insight and understanding from end users of project management software in terms of which benefits and uses project managers seek and value and this along with cultural and industrial considerations when conducting a full target audience analysis are important factors for advertisers of project management software to successfully meet the needs of end users, in this case project managers and personnel.

Acknowledgment

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