

## Launching a New Product

There are almost 100 new products launched in the consumer arena in the United States daily. Some of these products are extensions of existing products or brands, and some are me-too products that are seeking to snatch away a bit of a competitor's market share. Very few new products are radical or revolutionary in their newness, yet the process of launching a new product is still not simple. With more than 33,000 new products a year, the competition of consumer attention (let alone their willingness to try new things) is intense. This article will discuss the hurdles that need to be overcome and the strategies that can be used to do so.

There are a number of challenges that need to be considered when planning a new product launch. These include:

- Greater Market Segmentation – the market is becoming more diverse both ethnically and economically. This compounded segmentation makes targeted a new launch more challenging.
- New Technologies – the engine that drives a new product launch is awareness and typically the way to raise consumer awareness has been advertising. The introduction and increasing use of advertising avoidance technologies presents the new product launch with the task of discovering and implementing new types of awareness activities.
- Changing Habits – both consumers and retailers have changed the way they behave in recent years, forcing the introduction of new products to be more flexible. In some cases alternative launch channels may be necessary, as well as the targeting of a narrower niche to get the launch started.
- New Power Structure – the enormous power of the big box retailers has also forever altered the pattern of a new product launch. The acceptance or rejection of a new product by the big box retailers need not spell an immediate death sentence, however the product will need to validate itself in alternative market centers before it can enjoy big box distribution.

Understanding these challenges can assist in the development of a launch strategy that is able to neutralize, overcome, or bypass their negative impact. Another important tool in avoiding difficulties is understanding and remaining true to the product launch process. There are seven phases to this process. They are:

1. Investigation – you need to properly engage in both a preliminary and detailed investigation of the product you are contemplating to determine potential consumer reaction (acceptance levels) and competitor reactions. This is the first stage because the results will help you determine whether it is wise to invest resources (time, manpower and money) in developing the concept into a product.
2. Product Development – assuming the responses to the investigation stage were encouraging, you would then move into a product development stage whereby the functions and design of the product concept would be brought to prototype stage. It is critical that during this stage you continue with your investigative practices so that you will be able to incorporate into the product preferences potential consumers indicate would make the product more appealing.
3. Testing – the testing phase allows you to determine whether your product performs its intended tasks. This phase is also the time that you seek to validate the assumptions you made based on your investigations. You want to make certain that the market

sectors who seemed interested in the product genuinely are interested, and you want to explore additional market sectors.

4. Production – once you have developed your prototype and received positive market feedback from your tests, you need to begin production of the product. The main element in the production phase is quality control and product uniformity. You want to make certain that consumers get the same excellent experience from your product every time they use it.

5. Strategic Planning – in this phase you need to plan for your launch. You now have your product in production and need to begin thinking about how you want to raise consumer awareness and create market interest in what you have developed. In this planning phase you want to consider the launch from an implementation perspective, the marketing in all its tactical aspects, and the methodology you will use to evaluate performance.

6. Launch – once you have your product ready and your strategy and tactics are defined and ready to go you can launch your product into the market place. Like a well tuned battle plan you need to move forward in the beginning in spite of any obstacles that may come your way. Your objective at this phase is the entry of your product into the market and you will need to overcome whatever challenges are initially presented to you.

7. Post Launch – this phase has a number of functions to it and they change a bit as the time from the initial launching becomes more distant. The initial task of the post launch phase is to measure the launch success and determine what tactics are effective and which ones need refining or replacement. As the launch becomes more distant the task of this phase is to consolidate market gains and move the new product into additional markets.

Some additional tips for a successful product launch include:

- Pay Attention to Details – the things that may seem small in your mind are actually extremely important. You are in love with your new product and may be under the false impression that others are (or will be) too. You need to make sure that your packaging is right, your brand is strong, and that you have laid the groundwork for an effective and visible marketing effort.
- Be Flexible – there is a 100% chance that some aspects of your product and many aspects of your initial plan will require adjustments as you move forward. Do not ignore the market and what it is telling you. Be flexible enough to adjust to the market's needs and desires.
- Accept Delays – the old rule that everything takes twice as long as expected will at some point make itself felt during your process. While you can strive to avoid delays and work to correct them when they occur, accept the fact that they are going to happen and do not let them take your eye off your primary target – getting things done as quickly and as well as possible.
- Spend Money – you cannot launch a new product without spending money. The marketing requirements for a new product will demand that you have and allocate sufficient resources. Determine the needs of your product launch and engage in concept development only if you know you will have access to the necessary funds.
- Have an Excellent Launch Team – you cannot execute the launch by yourself. Regardless of the levels of your skill or the depth of your experience, you need a strong brand manager, a great marketing team, a good logistics/distribution squad, top salespeople, and experienced operations/manufacturing people.

The market wants new products. It will embrace products that are indeed better than existing products (evolutionary products), and it will richly reward products that offer benefits or delivers a function no product currently deliver (revolutionary products). The task in conceiving and designing a new product is understanding whether your product is evolutionary or revolutionary and constructing a marketing plan that best suits the product you are developing. By doing you will match your product to its market and significantly increase your chances for success.