

## **Nigerian Pharmaceutical Brand Marketing – The Role of the Product Manager in Making Selling Superfluous**

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### **Abstract**

*The Product Manager in a Pharmaceutical company is considered the CEO of the product and responsible for the strategy, roadmap and feature definition for that product/brand. The roles often include Marketing, Forecasting and Profit & Loss (P&L) amongst others.*

*The interphase between sales and marketing is not a very clear one in most Pharmaceutical companies in Nigeria and the role of the product manager is usually mistaken or not well defined.*

*A clear understanding of the role of a PM and its responsibilities will ensure focus of the PM on his core responsibility and maximize his productivity.*

*Who is responsible when sales do not go as planned? Is it the joint responsibility of Marketing and sales or does the scale tip more to one side? What makes selling easy? Who puts ideas behind sales plan and formula? Is a PM necessary or will the sales team just suffice?*

*This article will look at the above questions and the Role and responsibility of the Product manager in ensuring the sales process is seamless.*

*The paper will also define a Pharmaceutical Product Manager and highlight his strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats facing his role.*

*In conclusion, sales and growth of a brand is the joint collaborative effort of Sales and marketing. Everything marketing does is designed to make sales easier. The sales team, in addition to completing the sales process, also provide valuable information required by marketing such as marketing intelligence.*

*Successful businesses recognize the role of marketing in ensuring future relevance.*

**Keywords:** Brand, Brand Manager, Marketing, Pharmaceutical, Product Manager, Sales, Sales Manager, Selling.

### **Introduction**

Sales aren't Marketing. Many people equate marketing with sales. And many salespeople do, too.

Many believe that salespeople are the best source for product ideas because they talk to customers all the time. And while it is true that they are talking with customers, 'talking' is the key word. They are talking to the customer about the products/brand they are selling, not listening for what products the customer/market requires.

According to Martin Cagan of the Silicon Valley Product Group in the Paper 'Behind every great Product', every member of the product team is important, but to succeed, a company must design, build, test and market the product effectively.

That said, there is one role that is absolutely crucial to producing a good product, yet it is often the most misunderstood and underutilized of all the roles. This is the role of the Product Manager.

In his paper, he discussed the role and responsibilities of the good product manager and the characteristics of good product managers amongst other things.

### **The expectations from the PM is enormous**

The Product Manager (PM) is like a business owner to his brand. His action and activities decide the fate of his business. His plans determine if he'll make a profit or loss, the growth of his business, market share gained or lost.

A product manager leads the product through the entire life cycle, making intelligent and informed product decisions at each stage.

The PM must understand the environment in which he sells, be aware of changing/emerging policies or trends, and be able to take advantage to position the product in the best way possible.

The PM's role is also often double-faced, he has to have a long-term strategic focus but also be able to deliver on short-term goals driving the immediate success of the brand.

Chief amongst the Product Managers role / competency is that the product manager must be a 'User' expert. The PM must understand the user better than anyone so that he may create products or design his products to meet the needs of the users important to the PMs role.

The PM must understand his customers - their mindsets and beliefs which drive their behaviors and preferences. He must also draw up plans to make the selling of the product superfluous as well as post a healthy profit in the P&L for the brand.

The Product Managers role is also a sales job. However, it's not an external sales job, but rather an internal sales job. The PM has to be able to "sell" his plans, projects, features, and proposals to all of the different stakeholders concerned with the product. A PM isn't successful unless his ideas and strategies are effectively 'sold' to all stakeholder. To achieve this, he must be a proficient in communicating so the "why" of the brand and brand strategy can be understood in very simple terms to motivate the sales team to deliver on the features and benefits messages to the market.

The PM will therefore incorporate some element of selling in doing his Job.

According to Kotler book, Marketing, if well done makes selling superfluous. Marketing is not selling, marketing begins before sales. Selling begins after a product has been made. A product roadmap must be laid and clearly defined before the product enters the market.

Peter Drucker also said "There will always, one can assume, be need for some selling. But the aim of marketing is to make selling superfluous. The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well that the product or service fits him and sells itself."

From these statements, it can therefore, be inferred that when marketing, which precedes sales is well done, the product sells itself!

It is imperative also that we understand the roles and challenges of a PM and also understand role of the sales team in other to appreciate the uniqueness of each

## **Role of the pharma PM**

The Pharma PM is typically the person who has marketing responsibilities to develop and execute marketing programs that increases brand identity and awareness for a specific product. The Product Manager is responsible for a product's overall image, and he typically controls most of the major aspects of the marketing for a product or product line.

The brand manager also ensures that all marketing activities do not deviate from brand guidelines, and reinforces brand equity.

### **A typical PMs role includes**

- Product line management.
- Sales and Marketing strategies.
- Budget management.
- Recommendations on packaging, pricing, positioning and promotion.
- Close Interaction with stake holders and agencies.
- Developing and implementing tactical and strategic marketing plan.
- Ensure all marketing materials are current and appropriate, as well as effectively communicated.

If done right, building great products is wonderful and being a leader of a product feels like the best job in the world. Great products when built and effectively introduced to the market are easily adopted by customers. This starts with a strong product manager who feels a deep sense of responsibility for their role and managing all aspects of their job function.

As with most roles, the role of the PM has its perks and challenges.

The perks include

1. Being part of a team that creates, writes the fate, directs and grows a brand, product or service.
2. The PM interphases with all departments and wears a lot of hats. Besides the CEO, only the marketing team has this advantage.

3. The PM is a designer. He understands the macro and macro-economic stratum of the market and must design products that fits in.

The Challenges includes

1. Lack of role clarity
2. Interference in product strategy from literally every department in the company, the PM must therefore get very good at saying 'NO'.
3. The unclear line between Sales and Product Management.
4. Lack of direct reports. A PM is not anyone's boss so he cannot tell others what to do, yet he is accountable for the fate of the product, therefore, he must lead by influence, not mandate and must be good at influencing people who don't directly report to him

Being a good product manager requires a combination of skills: business, market, technology, and domain. A good PM also needs to be the kind of person who gets things done even when faced with multiple barriers.

### **Barriers to being an effective PM**

Most Pharmaceutical product managers come from a sales background. However, these managers do not have the appropriate skill level or knowledge to understand the key tasks of brand management, because the job skills for the two positions are quite different. The skills required in order to be a good salesperson are only a subset of the skills required for a good product manager. Consequently, product managers with a sales background are unprepared for working in a physical office space, as well as for the technical type of expertise required for writing marketing plans and understanding the intricacies of product development (Panigyrakis and Veloutsou, 1999). Ross (1999) states that many newly-appointed pharmaceutical product managers have minimal marketing skills, for the following reasons:

- a) Product management is not a career path in the industry;
- b) Product managers are recruited from the sales force;
- c) Few companies have comprehensive, thorough training programs; and
- d) High Staff attrition rate can result in as many as three different individuals handling a product in a short period of time, which causes lack of continuity.

He concluded that product managers need rigorous and systematic training to be effective.

These exact barriers preventing an effective PM is the same reason a sales person cannot handle a PMs role or do the job of a PM

What then are the roles and responsibilities of a sales team?

### **The job role and responsibilities of the sales team**

The sales team comprises the Area Sales Manager and the sales rep.

An area sales manager typically manages sales force within his defined regional territory. He/ she is responsible for overseeing sales operations, meeting targets and managing the sales team in the region

Primary job responsibilities of an area sales manager would include:

- a) Managing, training and motivating existing sales team to drive revenue growth
- b) Develop and manage efficient distribution networks for sales
- c) Develop efficient and creative sales and marketing strategies for the assigned territory and target setting for the sales team
- d) Collecting customer and market feedback and reporting the same to the organization
- e) Monitoring sales team performance, analyzing sales data, periodical forecasting and reporting to zonal heads

### **Role and responsibilities of Salespersons in Pharma Industry**

Generally speaking, a 'Medical Representative' is someone who conveys information about Company's products to the doctors, ensures their availability in the market and is expected to ensure timely payments from the marketing intermediaries.

The job profile of a Med Rep. can be covered under three categories;

- a) Prescription generation
- b) Customer coverage, and
- c) Market intelligence

d) Prescription Generation

The most critical activity of a Med. Rep. is to generate sales revenue and the most effective way to do this is to generate prescriptions for the Company's products from the doctors he meets.

Therefore, the role of a Sales Manager demands that he possesses the right attitude, good communication skills with leadership qualities, and should be capable of building an energetic team with a competitive edge and ability to execute the plan for achievement of pre-decided organizational goals which are totally different from the expectations from a PM.

### **Sales or marketing? or sales and marketing?**

PMs are highly analytical, data oriented, and project focused. They're all about building competitive advantage for the future. They judge their projects' performance critically and failed plans are unacceptable. However, all these performance focus and strategies doesn't always look like action to Sales team because it all happens behind a desk rather than out in the field. Salespeople, in contrast, spend their time talking to existing and potential customers, are more active and visible.

Marketing is supposed to make selling superfluous and sales people think they can do what is needed in marketing. So which team is needed or are both important?

Literally everything a Marketing department does is intended to facilitate Sales. Some of the efforts are long term or strategic, for example, the creation and maintenance of the company's brand. Other efforts are more immediate and tactical. These include various kinds of lead generation activities, creating awareness, direct mail and content marketing, product management.

Marketing studies customer behavior and the competition in order to plan strategically for the future. Specific initiatives include advertising and branding to raise awareness and pave the way for the initial sales approach. Product management tries to identify the right products and services, with the right features at the right price. And lead generation is the ongoing process of identifying new prospects and creating content that Sales can use to keep them engaged.

Because of their direct contact with individual prospects and customers, the sales force is a unique resource. Their market intelligence complements the general demographic data that Marketing generates. By working closely together, Sales can help make sure that Marketing is targeting the people with the right potential—when they create sales materials.

Feedback about competitors, reasons for lost sales, and quality of sales materials can make a big difference in the success of the combined Marketing/Sales effort.

### **Summary**

Behind every great product there is a person with great empathy for the customer, insight into what is possible, and the ability to see what is essential and what is incidental.... The PM!!!

He has a deep understanding of the customer as well as what is achievable. He operates from a strong basis of knowledge and confidence.

In the classic 4P's of Marketing, (product, promotion, price, place), salespeople are the last P, not the first. Sales people are designed to be thinking weeks ahead, how to achieve monthly numbers etc., not years ahead. Sales people sell what is available now, not planning what we ought to have.

Selling isn't marketing; it's selling! And it starts only when a product is available.

Instead, we should rely on Product Managers to focus on next year and the year after and to be thinking many moves ahead in the roadmap. Product managers are thought-leaders in their marketplace and they create the structure that the rest of the team works within, they are therefore ultimately accountable for the success or failure of the product.

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