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mozilla.dev.apps.firefox > **PM Activities for Firefox 3**

From: Sherman Dickman - view profile
Date: Tues, Jun 20 2006 3:34 pm

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All,

In case I haven't met some of you, my name is Sherman Dickman, and
I'll be driving product management activities in support of Firefox 3
planning.

Since the product management role is a relatively new one at Mozilla,
I thought it would be useful to outline some of the most important
functions that a PM should perform, particularly within the context
of product planning. Many of these will be conducted in parallel
with the Gecko 1.9 engineering planning efforts currently underway.
The end PM deliverable for Firefox 3 will be a MRD that can be
referenced by all, but the real value for the Mozilla community will
be derived from the MRD development process itself.

Activities

Here are some of the activities and deliverables that a PM helps to
coordinate, all geared towards providing the organization with the
information it needs to make effective product decisions. These
include:
    * identifying market and technology trends
    * competitive analysis and strategy
    * customer segmentation and value delivery chains
    * user personas and use case scenarios
    * value proposition and differentiation strategy
    * product vision and strategy
    * key feature requirements
    * participation in release criteria discussions
    * etc.

Subjective Activities

Additionally, there are more subjective activities that can help
clarify thinking and spur creativity. One of the most important
things a PM can do is to engage the team in answering some very tough
questions about our goals, product, and strategy. For example:

* Where do we want to go? How will we get there? Why do we think
we'll be successful?
* Why should anyone use our product over another product? Do the
benefits outweigh the tradeoffs that a user must endure when
switching? If yes, why don't more people use our product?
* Which of our technology assets are clearly superior to the
competition? How do we keep them from being easily copied or
duplicated? Are there barriers to entry or significant hurdles for
competitors to overcome?

Questions such as these can be particularly difficult to answer. But once answered, they help to direct downstream activities tremendously.

User Feedback

Another critical product management function is to collect user data, and then analyze the information to find hidden stories and opportunities. The biggest challenge in collecting user data is knowing what questions to ask and from whom.

If you ask a panel of home cooks questions about how to build a better oven, they'll tell you. But if you ask them about the challenges of feeding a family each night, you might receive a completely different set of answers — answers that might suggest a new product opportunity (such as the microwave oven).

A formula that has worked very well in the past looks like this:

    1. How do we build a better product?
    2. What are your biggest challenges? What do you spend most of your time and/or money on? What keeps you up a night? What would you do differently if given unlimited resources? What's your worst case scenario?
    3. If we did everything that you told us to do in question 1, would that address any of the issues outlined in question 2?

The answer to the last question is usually "no," but that's okay if the customer articulates their greatest pain points and unmet needs, many of which *can* be addressed by the product if approached in the right way. For example, Nike golf shirts now have SPF 30 protection. What types of questions did they ask consumers to come up with that idea?

The product management team at Mozilla is currently working on mechanisms that will allow us to better capture user data to uncover these hidden stores and opportunities. Expect to see some things roll out in the next month or so.

Cheers,
Sherman

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