

Project Management

Steps to Success

Technical competence and good intentions are not enough to finish a project on time, within budget and satisfying customer requirements, according to Steve Callahan, consulting director of The Performance Institute.

Whether it is for work or home, every day you are managing some type of project. While the projects are different in scope, schedule and budget, all have the same goal - success!

Project management is a systematic process and must be understood before one can effectively lead a project team and manage projects affectively. During a five-day webinar, Callahan teaches the "15 Steps to Project Success."

Step 1: Examine the initial customer service contract and understand how to maximize the first customer meeting.

Step 2: Identify your project team and project shareholders.

Step 3: Conduct a project kick-off meeting and develop a project description document.

Step 4: Determine your project's infrastructure and how your project will operate.

Step 5: Identify the work that is necessary to produce the scope deliverables, satisfy customer requirements and assign activity ownership.

Step 6: Develop your preliminary project schedule.

Step 7: Develop your preliminary project budget.

Step 8: Make changes to the plan to meet customer requirements.

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Twelve Simple Hiring Steps

By: Minesh Baxi

These days with all of the burdens that businesses face it can be difficult to find the right people to hire for your business. We've spoken with Minesh Baxi who specializes in ...

Here is a simple checklist of hiring steps that Baxi suggests are useful in the hiring process. This list is by no means exhaustive, but enables you to have a starting point.

1. Create an extremely detailed job description which also gives a clear idea of what the person must do and how you can hold him accountable. This lets you know quickly whether the person is meeting the expectations set up for that position. The candidate knows his responsibility in advance and there is no confusion even before the person takes on the employment.

2. Let people in your sphere of influence know that you are looking to fill a position and advertise in appropriate places like Craig's List, newspapers etc.

Some areas in the country get great results from online resources like www.Craigslist.com and some don't. You might even use a recruiter but be aware that recruiters might not screen the candidate enough. They get paid for the hire and not for the person working out in the long run. We have heard enough stories where the recruiter brought questionable candidates and, because the manager was busy or trusted the recruiter more than he should have, ended up with employees that did not work out.



Minesh Baxi

After the first 30-60 days, the recruiter fee is paid and you might be stuck with an unwanted employee. So most of our clients, even if they use the recruiter, they still assess the candidates as if the person came off the street.

3. Review all resumes, focusing on candidates with the right background and longevity in a similar capacity. We always recommend candidates who have stayed at a job long enough, that is very similar, to be considered loyal and have mastered the job. In our opinion this period is 2 years or more.

4. Pick three to five candidates and schedule interviews. In some cases, we also recommend conducting preliminary phone-based interviews to see how they sound on the phone. If you feel they are worthwhile candidates, then agree to meet the candidates in person.

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Social Media: They're Not Just for Kids

In a recent study, "Social Media Marketing: The Latest Buzz on Word of Mouth," the [Aberdeen Group](#) found that 50 percent of Best in Class companies have dedicated resources devoted to social media marketing, that 45 percent have a process for enhancing social media marketing capabilities over time and that 42 percent use social media monitoring tools.

As part of its study, the Aberdeen Group cited three case studies of companies using social media:

Wal-Mart

In June 2007, Wal-Mart, the world's biggest retailer, launched a Web site feature, Consumer Reviews & Ratings. The feature is similar to what Amazon.com has done for years: It allows consumers to write reviews and rate products. In Wal-Mart's case, it allows customers to critique — both positively and negatively — the store's entire line of merchandise.

What makes Wal-Mart's social media campaign groundbreaking is that the retailer used a multi-channel approach: store receipts, shelf fact tags and traditional media that all point customers to Walmart.com's product review page.

Chief Marketing Officer Cathy Halligan told researchers that Wal-Mart executives take customer reviews seriously. In fact, it is not unheard of for products to be pulled from shelves and returned to vendors based on negative customer reviews, Halligan said.

One key perception problem that Wal-Mart seeks to remedy — that low prices equate to low quality — is countered by four- and five-star product reviews by actual customers.

"Social media is perfectly fit to the key marketing problem that we seek to solve as a company," she said.

Plantronics

While social media may be the darling of new dot-coms, Plantronics is a nearly half-century-old company that has been on the cutting edge of Internet word-of-mouth marketing through viral videos (a la "The Dark Knight" launch) and referral engines.

Plantronics is best known as the company that manufactured the remote headset into which astronaut Neil Armstrong spoke his famous words, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind" in 1969.

In its most recent marketing campaign for its new professional wireless headset system, Plantronics executives sought "evangelists" to promote its product for them. To find evangelists, the company survey its customers to determine those who best fit their desired demographic. Once they were identified, the evangelists were given access to the necessary online tools and encouraged to talk about the product.

The evangelists provided valuable feedback to the company. Importantly, evangelists were not compensated for their participation. Rather, they were motivated by their passion for the product.

Plantronics Marketing Manager Diana LeClair said the social media campaign has allowed them to be a "fly on the wall" to hear what customers are saying about their product. Further, she said, the value of evangelists is that a product recommendation from a friend is far more credible and effective than any traditional media message.

Sony

Social media is not new to Sony. In fact, the company can be said to be one of its creators.

The electronics giant is credited for making Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) games, where hundreds of thousands if not millions of subscribers participate, a financially viable industry.

Obviously, MMO participants are computer and Internet savvy and scores of forums, including those hosted by Sony, have sprung up to discuss the virtual reality games and worlds.

Needless to say, Sony managers actively monitor the forums and report on discussions — both positive and negative. During the course of their monitoring efforts, the Sony "community managers" discovered a lot of misinformation and negativity on the net.

According to Torrie Dorrell, senior vice president of global sales and marketing at Sony Online, the company was often perceived as a corporate behemoth that didn't care about players and only wanted to make a buck.

To counter the perception, the company identifies the top 20 social media influencers — those whose posts were most cited in forums — both evangelists and skeptics, and invites them twice a year to corporate headquarters in San Diego. The company solicits the influencers' input and helps to correct misinformation.

Dorrell said the program has been a success.

"We can track true sentiment and understand where we're falling down," she said. "We're also able to glean what additional features players are looking for and how they respond to our various announcements."

The Aberdeen study concludes that social media monitoring programs need to be part of a feedback loop that drive social media marketing improvements and, importantly, link to increased revenues and other financial programs.

[New York Times Business Best Sellers - January 2009](#)

OUTLIERS, by Malcolm Gladwell. (Little, Brown, \$27.99.) Why some people succeed — it has to do with luck and opportunities as well as talent—from the author of "Blink" and "The Tipping Point."

THE SNOWBALL, BY Alice Schroeder. (Bantam, \$35.00.) The life of Warren Buffett. Snowball.

HOT, FLAT, AND CROWDED, by Thomas L. Friedman. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$27.95.) How a green revolution can renew America, by the New York Times columnist.

THE ASCENT OF MONEY, by Niall Ferguson. (Penguin Press, \$29.95.) A financial history of the world, stressing the link between politics and economics.

Public Relations and Marketing are Key to Surviving in a Down Market

The importance of strong PR and marketing when in a recession is something that isn't taught in business school and something that most CEOs overlook when devising their survival plan.

In a recent article published by the Harvard Business School, "Marketing Your Way Through a Recession," John Quelch, a professor at the university, highlights multiple factors that all companies should keep in mind when making their marketing plans for 2008-09.

In his article, Quelch writes, "In a recession, consumers become value oriented, distributors are concerned about cash, and employees worry about their jobs. But a downturn is no time to stop spending on marketing.

The key, says Quelch, is to understand how the needs of your customers and partners change, and adapt your strategies to the new reality.

He offers these key concepts:

- Brands that increase advertising during a downturn can improve market share and return on investment.
- Early-buy allowances, extended financing, and generous return policies motivate distributors to stock your full product line.
- In tough times, price cuts attract more consumer support than promotions.
- CEOs must spend more time with customers and employees.

We've also noticed that when times get tight and budgets need trimming, often times PR and marketing are first on the chopping block, especially when the PR/Marketing support is coming from an outside agency.

Other PR pros note the same tendency and contend that public relations should be the last area to cut. A recent blog on p2-squared explains why:

1. Agency PR is more cost-effective than in-house PR. The VP of Marketing is not going to create and manage databases, craft pitches, write press releases, and spend hours each day reaching out to 50 reporters (and another 150 bloggers). They'll need a senior PR pro to handle those sundry duties – and, with salary and benefits included – that senior PR pro will cost about \$150,000.

A good PR agency will do "all of the above" and will spread the work across FIVE people, including a senior strategist who can offer experienced counsel; two or

more media bulldogs; and, a dedicated industry researcher – for about \$150,000.

2. A further virtue of an Agency's distribution of talent? The PR firm is always listening and responding. When a blogger posts about your brand, a speedy response is critical. If you place all your bets on in-house personnel – who are often distracted with myriad corp comms duties – you could miss an important meme.

3. A PR agency also grants access to the wickedly expensive media databases (Cision, Profnet, etc.). These resources

help ensure your company does not miss out on those all-important industry round-ups. (As Leone noted, staying visible is even more important when your industry is shedding weak competitors in a downturn – you don't want to be "noticeable by your absence.")

4. PR "feeds the beast" of SEO by ensuring your company's content shows up in both Social Media and Mainstream Media channels. Most PR agencies have been whipped into shape on the SEO front by their Google-hungry clients, offering googly expertise that's always being

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Twelve Simple Hiring Steps

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5. Check each candidate's credit score. Todd Scrima, President of Summit Funding and a principal coach of The CORE Coaching and Training (www.TheCORE.tv) insists on credit score. He has repeatedly found that people who lack credibility and accountability score low on the credit score. His recommendation is not to hire anybody whose credit score is below 640. He cancels any interview if the candidate's credit score is below 640.

Please note that some lawmakers are trying to end using credit scores in the employment screening process. So find out what is the legal process in using such tools in your state.

6. Interview candidates with a prepared set of questions and take notes during the interview. Instead of trying to sell them on the job, ask questions to determine why they should be considered for the job.

7. Measure the candidates' skill level for the position you are hiring. Talking about possessing a skill is easier than demonstrating it.

We remember one of our clients who was upset when he found out that the new employee was not adequately skilled for the job. Checking their phone skills, having them look over agreements, and asking specific questions about how they will handle a specific problem in their job will give you awareness whether the candidates have the requisite skill.

If the employee will need to use certain software that is specific to his role, have him show you on the computer how he will input data, check conditions, and complete the task.

8. Pick your best two candidates.

9. Use assessments to screen and qualify the candidates. Our recommendations are based on the job description and the information we have collected on the organization so far.

We highly recommend that managers take assessments as well so the person can fit the manager's style.

10. Schedule an appointment with the expert to review the assessments in detail

to analyze the information in these two reports, explain it to you in plain English and let you know whether or not the candidate is the right person 'on the bus' – for your team - and whether or not they will be 'in the right seat' – that is, in the right position for them to succeed.

11. Check references diligently.

12. Don't be in a hurry to make a decision. Evaluate your options carefully. It is okay to restart the process if no candidate fits the requirement. Desperation can cause you to make unfortunate mistakes.

Great companies attract and keep great people. Base your decision on a person's talent and past performance, not on their promises.

P2R Associates Update

P2R Associates Strengthens Management Team with Addition of Scott Russell

P2R Associates announced the addition of Scott K. Russell as Director, Account Services and Business Development.

As a key player in P2R Associates' growing marketing communications practice, Russell is responsible for directing both business development initiatives and integrated public relations and marketing communications efforts for clients in a range of industry sectors.

Prior to joining P2R Associates, Russell held management positions with Federal-Mogul Corp., AutoLign Manufacturing, Magna International and several Detroit-area marketing communications firms. He earned a master's degree from the University of Detroit and a bachelor's degree in advertising from Michigan State University. Russell has won numerous national and regional business communication awards.

P2R Associates Earns Award for Public Relations Excellence

P2R Associates announced the receipt of a Silver Award in the New Product Launch category for its public relations work on the Toyota Truck "Salute to the Military" program. The award was made by the Automotive Public Relations Council's (APRC) Excellence in Automotive Public Relations program.

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Step 9: Develop risk management plans for areas of high risk.

Step 10: Gain management and customer approval of your project plan.

Step 11: Collect status reports to enable assessment of your project performance.

Step 12: Identify variances to your plan and assess causes and impacts.

Step 13: Identify and take corrective actions necessary to realign your approved baseline.

Step 14: Report your project status to all shareholders.

Step 15: Close out and archive your project documentation and lessons learned.

For more information, go to www.performanceweb.org.

The Toyota Truck Salute to the Military program was part of Toyota's sponsorship of the St. Louis Rams and recognized the contributions of local Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force service men and women who served in Iraq or Afghanistan.

The APRC awards are the only ones of their kind that are dedicated to recognizing excellence in automotive public relations. The Excellence in Automotive Public Relations Award identifies public relations programs that have successfully addressed an automotive-related public relations issue with exemplary professional skill, creativity and resourcefulness. The award honors complete public relations programs that incorporate sound planning, execution and evaluation.

P2R Associates Receive multiple MarCom Awards

P2R Associates announced that they have received eight MarCom Awards. Two Platinum, three Gold and three Honorable Mention awards were presented to P2R Associates for work they had completed in 2007-08 for multiple clients in multiple categories

MarCom entries come from corporate marketing and communication departments, advertising agencies, PR firms, design shops, production companies and freelancers. The competition has grown to perhaps the largest of its kind in the world. A look at the winners shows a range in size from individual communicators to media conglomerates and Fortune 500 companies. The competition is so well respected in the industry that national public relations organizations, local ad clubs, and local business communicator chapters are entrants.

MarCom Awards is administered and judged by the Association of Marketing and Communication Professionals. The international organization consists of several thousand creative professionals. The Association oversees awards and recognition programs, provides judges and sets standards for excellence.

PR Key to Survival

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honed by industry dynamics.

5. PR provides air-cover for the Sales team. The big benefactor when Marketing is cut is the Sales group. But what's the Sales department's #1 gripe? "Not enough people know about us! The sales cycle is too long because I need to spend too much time educating prospects about our product and our viability." Paging the PR firm!

While both Defren and Quelch make valid points as to why PR and marketing should not be cut in times of distress, the main obstacle remains; CEOs who are under tremendous pressure to fix the company often overlook the importance, thus placing themselves, their employees and shareholders in a worse situation.

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**STRATEGIC PUBLIC RELATIONS
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P2R Associates is a strategic public relations agency specializing in public relations, marketing communications and business development practice areas. Headquartered in Livonia, Mich., P2R provides clients with strategy driven tactics, superior service and measurable results.

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