Group Objectives

This is an exercise for groups of 3 or 4 people. The objective is to identify what distinguishes a "program" (i.e. lines of computer code) from a "product" (i.e. something that can be sold for money).

The objectives are two-fold:

1. To produce a list of features that distinguish a product from a program.

2. To evaluate the relative importance of particular features and some of the issues and trade-offs that are involved.

You should imagine that a "program" has just been completed, either a game or an office productivity application, and that a meeting has been called to discuss the productisation of this program. On the following pages are descriptions of four roles that people may take at this meeting. Each person should take on one role and debate with their colleagues what should be done and who should do it. Do not be constrained by the suggestions in the role descriptions, feel free to add your own, however the most fun can be had (and the most insights gained) if each participant takes a fairly "bloody-minded" approach and adopts up a robust defensive strategy on behalf of their own departments.

Each group should provide a written list of distinguishing features and should highlight those features that they have collectively decided to implement for their product. They may be required to explain their reasoning.

This is a formative assessment and hence is not formally marked and does not form part of the final coursework mark.

Role: Marketing Manager

As Marketing Manager your role is to maximise the exposure of the product and hence maximise revenue from the product. You would like to see a "roadmap" of the proposed product development showing a regular series of new features and releases that you can use to maintain interest in the product. In general you are not too worried about bugs in the product as long as there is a new version going to be available shortly.

You may also have specific functionality that you would like to see in the product which would help you "push" the product to particular groups of potential customers. These could include:

- Facilities to import data from rival products
- Support of as wide a range of operating systems and hardware as possible
- High quality printed user documentation
- Glossy artwork for the product box

It would also help you gain exposure for the product on magazine cover disks and the like if there was a reduced functionality demonstration version available.

You are likely to be broadly neutral on the idea of copy protection, recognising that it probably loses you as many sales as it gains, but you like the idea of product registration a great deal as it gives you an ideal channel for pushing upgrade sales.

You may also have your own ideas about how to improve sales of the product, which you are free to suggest as you wish.

Role: Technical Support Manager

You are responsible for the post-sales technical support of the product. You are clearly interested in the number of bugs that the product has, and that these be reduced with every release as it will obviously reduce your support load. You will also wish to reduce the range of supported operating systems and hardware to the smallest level possible for a similar reason.

There may also be specific features that you like to see in the product which would help you in providing technical support. These may include:

- "instrumentation" code within the product which can be used for fault finding by the user under the guidance of technical support.

- Facilities for remote debugging and operation of the product on the customer's PC (with the appropriate safeguards).

- A well written technical support manual explaining the operation of the product.

- A comprehensive test suite for new version of the product, including "regression" tests to ensure that everything that was in previous versions still works correctly.

As Technical Support manager you also need to consider whether you would set up a website for technical support, or whether you could operate a premium rate telephone support line. You may also wish to consider copy protection mechanisms for the product to ensure that you receive support requests only from genuine users, but recognise that the copy protection mechanism itself may be a source of technical problems.

You may have your own ideas about what you would like to see in the product, which you are free to suggest as you wish.

Role: Development Manager

You are in charge of the programming team that have created the program. You are protective of your team and do not want to see them subjected to unnecessary work. You and your team would like to move on to new versions of the product and add significant new features, ideally using the latest technologies. Bug fixing and documentation can soak up weeks of programmer time for very little result. Your team particularly dislike work to port the program to other operating systems and hardware as this is tedious, fiddly and not very interesting. You do believe in a certain amount of testing, but definitely not to excess.

However, the programme has been built incrementally on top of a rather crude prototype and there may be mileage in redeveloping some major parts using the latest OO design tools and techniques to give a cleaner finished product and enhance the CVs of the programming team.

You may have other ideas about how you would like to enhance the product but typically you can see your role as nay-sayer general – protecting the team from the scum of the other departments.

Role: Product Manager

[This role can be dropped if there are fewer than 4 in the group]

You are responsible for the product as a whole, and in particular maximising the ***profit*** from it (note that this is not necessarily the same as maximising the *revenue*). You must strike a balance between the costs of developing, marketing and supporting the product with revenue that is received from selling it. You are responsible for setting an appropriate price to cover the costs and retain a profit.

You may also look for additional revenue opportunities in selling consultancy, training and other expertise in support of the product.

There may be ideas that you have for the development of the product that will enhance sales, or reduce costs and you should feel free to suggest these as you wish.

You will usually be expected to mediate between other departments and balance the costs of one against the benefits of the other. Unlike the other department heads you will receive a commission based on the audit profitably of the product over the next year.