

Top Ten Product Review Program Mistakes

Maximize Your Chances Of Receiving Positive Reviews

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About the 280 Group...

The 280 Group LLC provides consulting, contractors, training and templates to help companies define, launch and market breakthrough new products. For more information or a free consultation call 408-834-7218 or visit their website at www.280group.com.

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About This White Paper

This white paper is part of the Product Review Program Toolkit™, which provides you with the training, knowledge and templates to help you run more compelling and effective product review programs and receive better reviews. The content of this white paper is at a fairly basic level - the toolkit includes much more in-depth information.

The Product Review Program Toolkit also contains:

1.) A narrated presentation: "How to Get Phenomenal Product Reviews"

2.) Templates:

- Reviewer's Guide
- Product Review Program Plan
- Competitive Product Comparison
- Reviewer's Kit Cover Letter
- Roles & Responsibilities Matrix
- Reviewer Tracking Database
- Product Review Program NDA
- Product Review Program FAQ
- Press Release Background Document
- Press Release
- Press & Reviewer Kit Checklist
- Company Backgrounder
- Competitive Product Comparison
- Press Presentation
- Analyst Presentation

3.) Samples:

- Four Reviewer's Guides
- Press Release
- Testimonials & Success Stories
- Screen Shots
- Competitive Comparison

4.) Guidelines:

- How to Write Features and Benefits
- Press Release Guidelines
- Press & Analyst Launch Timeline

For more information on the Product Review Program Toolkit go to www.280group.com.

Introduction

Getting positive product reviews is a critical part of shipping a successful product. Because reviews come from an independent (and presumably unbiased) source, they carry much more weight than other forms of marketing such as advertising. When a positive review appears it supports (and magnifies) all other marketing efforts, and gives the product a much higher chance of market success and hitting its revenue goals.

The key to getting the best possible reviews is to create and execute a plan that is appropriate to meet your goals given your resources, budget and time constraints. This paper will summarize the top ten most common mistakes that we have seen companies make when seeking their reviews for their products.

Top Ten Product Launch Mistakes

Mistake #1: Launching the program after the product has already shipped

One of the biggest mistakes that companies make is that the review program ends up being an afterthought after the product has already been released, rather than a well-planned and coordinated effort up-front. This results in several problems:

- The product is no longer new, so your ability to get publications to review it diminishes significantly.
- The time to prepare materials adequately and set yourself up for a great review is reduced and the quality of the materials suffers as a result.
- The reviews are often not timed to coincide with the product launch marketing activities, and thus don't provide additional support and synergy to help get the initial revenues and sales going.
- Many times the company has to respond to negative reviews or competitive roundups that they weren't aware were going to happen. Once something negative is written and released about a product it is very difficult to turn around the perception that is created.

To avoid this problem begin planning your review program four months prior to the product launch. This will ensure that all of your PR and launch efforts can be leveraged, and will give you adequate time to prepare the materials and run a first-rate review program (see timeline below).

Mistake #3: Inadequate review materials

Providing inadequate review materials is a good way to ensure a poor review. Your materials should include everything the reviewer needs: a reviewer's guide, FAQs, competitive information, product presentation, etc. These are the materials that the reviewer is going to leverage to evaluate your product. You can make it easy or difficult for them. The easier it is, the higher the likelihood of a good write up.

Mistake # 4: Providing the product to all reviewers at once

Don't try to roll out the product to twenty or thirty reviewers all at once. You won't be able to support all of them if there are problems, and the result can be a catastrophe. Instead roll it out to several "friendly" reviewers first (ideally as a beta under NDA), then prioritize the rest of your list of publications and provide it to them accordingly in phases over the next few weeks. This approach will allow you to address any problems and questions that come up early in the process so that the majority of the reviewers will have a positive experience.

Mistake #5: Putting a junior person on the job

Many of our clients think that a review program is something that simply isn't that important - *until they end up with negative reviews and have to scramble to try to fix them*. Your review program may be the MOST important marketing activity for your product. As such, make sure that you put a very senior person on the job.

The person responsible for the review program needs to be able to answer tough questions and needs to be responsible and responsive. Make sure that the review program is their number one priority for two to three months after the product first ships - the result will be great reviews that pay off.

Mistake #6: Underestimating the time required to manage the program

Review programs take far more time to manage than most people realize. Creating all of the materials, sending out evaluation copies, tracking progress, following up with reviewers, troubleshooting problems, etc. can take twenty to thirty hours per week or more. Don't make the mistake of thinking this will only take a few hours per week - you'll find that you end up being unresponsive to the reviewers and they will treat you accordingly in their reviews.

Mistake #7: Not addressing the competition

It is very common for a company to release a new product, ignore the competition and then have their product show up with an unfavorable comparison in product "roundup" articles. This is a naïve approach. Publications like to categorize and group your product with similar products and include them all in one roundup piece. If you fail to acknowledge your competition and fail to present a compelling competitive argument then you are leaving it up to the publications (or your competitors) to set the terms for comparison and you will likely lose.

Tell the press what category you are in, who your competitors are and why you beat them. Give them a competitive comparison chart. Make your competitors respond to *your* claims. Chances are if you are better prepared than they are the reviewer will use your materials to create the review criteria, and you have a better chance of winning.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	SUMMARY OF FEATURES					
2	[Product Category Goes Here]					
3	LEGEND ■ YES L NO ■ ADD-ON		[Product Name]	[Competitor 1]	[Competitor 2]	[Competitor 3]
12	Feature Category Three					
13	Feature 1					
14	Feature 2					
15	Feature 3					
16	Feature Category Four					
17	Feature 1					
18	Feature 2					
19	Feature 3					
20	Feature Category Five					
21	Feature 1					
22	Feature 2					
23	Feature 3					
24	Feature Category Five					
25	Feature 1					
26	Feature 2					
27	Feature 3					
28	Feature Category Six					
29	Feature 1					
30	Feature 2					
31	Feature 3					

Include a competitive comparison chart that shows why your product is superior to other solutions (this one is in the Product Review Program Toolkit).

Mistake #8: Undefined goals beforehand

Many companies run review programs without clearly defining their goals up-front. As a result they are often disappointed with the results.

Get clear about what you want to accomplish. How many reviews do you want to receive? What publications are most important to reach your target market? What are the top three messages you want the publications to repeat about your products? Are you trying to use reviews to drive revenues? If so, how many sales are you expecting? Are you trying to re-set the competitive landscape so that your product is the favorite?

Setting goals like these and making them as concrete as possible allows you to do a reality check when you are writing your review program plan. If your goals are ambitious make sure you have enough time and resources to achieve them. Don't rely on wishful thinking here - nothing can upset your company and team more than receiving poor (or no) reviews when you all believe you have a winning product.

Mistake #9: Lack of relationship building beforehand

One critical success factor for good reviews is to make sure that you have built strong relationships with reviewers before they receive your product for review. The person running the review program should go on the press tour, meet the reviewers and start to build relationships with them. Email the reviewers before, during and after the review to let them know you are there to help in any way. Get to know them - ask their opinions about the market and other products.

Building relationships like this can save you if your product does have some problems during the review process. If you have built some rapport, shown you are responsive and shown you are on top of things oftentimes a reviewers will give you some leeway if they know you. If they have never met you before and there is a problem you may not be given the chance to ask for forgiveness. Also, if you get to know them well they may call you for an opinion when your competitor releases a new product, giving you the chance to put the best possible spin on how your product is superior.

Mistake #10: No reviewer's guide

Writing product reviews is difficult and time consuming. Your goal with a review program is to provide the reviewer with absolutely everything they need to make it easy for them to do their job. Reviewer's guides are an excellent way to do this, and can be a good single source of all of the

information they need. Don't make the reviewer search through your website or other places for answers - give them everything in one reviewer's guide. Also, provide the reviewer's guide to them in electronic format so that they can borrow text from it to use in their articles (for features and benefits or other areas).

If you provide an excellent reviewer's guide, build up a good relationship and do a great presentation and demo on the press tour you will sometimes find that the reviewer doesn't feel a need to do a thorough analysis of your product. They may simply read the reviewer's guide and give you a positive write up without ever installing or using the product.

Next Steps

This white paper has discussed the top ten mistakes that companies make when running product review programs products. For in-depth additional review program training, tips, best practices and templates visit www.280group.com to take a look at the 280 Group Product Review Program Toolkit. And if you need assistance with developing your review program plans or running your program contact the 280 Group and we can provide you with a seasoned professional to help you with your efforts.