

Product Marketing Forensics™

Protecting the Perimeter

ObjectVideo powers up development process with product management

With the escalating threat of global terrorism against a vast array of potential targets, the security industry is facing some of the greatest challenges in recent memory. Intruders are more organized and less predictable than ever before. And adequately monitoring countless targets with conventional security methods has become virtually impossible. As one countermeasure, government agencies and vulnerable industries are taking steps to beef up video surveillance. Along with the explosion of passive monitoring systems, however, comes risk: risk that is rooted in the human limitations for watching numerous video streams and reliably identifying threats.

As a result, the security industry is embracing technology like never before. And that's where ObjectVideo comes in. ObjectVideo is at the forefront of the intelligent video surveillance software industry, delivering groundbreaking technology that watches multiple video streams and automates the detection, classification, and notification of security threats—in real time. Since 1998, ObjectVideo has been blazing new trails across the security industry. Since 2001, the company and its ability to make an impact on the security industry have grown exponentially.

To keep pace, ObjectVideo's software development organization has been working to transform itself from the "three guys in a garage" culture typical of start-ups into a professional software development group. According to Alan Lipton, ObjectVideo's Chief Technology Officer, "Initially we thought implementing an agile development methodology was the answer—with monthly or bimonthly product releases. While it was a very nimble approach, we realized we did not have enough process or infrastructure to make that work for us. We had changing requirements in the middle of development cycles. We had no clear exit criteria and no way to make decisions. Consequently, a small product release scheduled for April was still dragging on in September."

The View from the Top

Now more than ever, the war on terrorism will be won with technology. At ObjectVideo, our goal is to ensure that our technology meets rapidly emerging market needs...that our priorities align with those of our customers...and that they can depend on our software to help protect their critical assets. A strong and reliable engineering process is critical to meeting those objectives, and we have taken the fundamental steps to deploy best practices in product management throughout ObjectVideo.

**— Raul J. Fernandez
Chief Executive Officer
ObjectVideo**

Beyond that, the development team had only anecdotal evidence on which to base decisions about what solutions the market truly required. “We all worked as pre-sales engineers and had a feeling about what made people’s eyes light up,” he remembers. “But we had no process for collecting market requirements. While we were very good at rapid development, we weren’t entirely sure that what we were building was what the security market really wanted to buy.”

Best Practices for Product Management

Lipton and his team knew there had to be a better way. “We looked at what was missing and realized it was classic product management: a process for defining market requirements, creating meaningful product specifications, guiding product decisions,

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establishing end points, ensuring quality control—the whole gamut. Because we needed product management help urgently, we concluded a consultant was the fastest way to get there.”

Enter Jim Foxworthy, principal of Foxworthy Consulting and architect of the Product Marketing Forensics™ methodology, which advocates that the voice of the market—not internal opinions—must guide product decisions. According to Lipton, Foxworthy came with the best of credentials: “Jim teaches product management best practices, so he knows this space backwards and forwards. He has a huge reputation in the industry and brings a vast wealth of experience. It was clear from the outset that the contributions he could make would be extremely valuable to us.”

First Things First: Process and Prioritization

The company commissioned Foxworthy to establish a system that its development team could deploy to ensure consistent and dependable delivery of all new products and releases. With that foundation in place, the company could then turn its attention to market sensing. “Jim helped us create an environment of focus, prioritization, and process—and got everyone behind it,” says Lipton. “First, we sat down and decided on our goals: We needed a reliable manufacturing organization that produces regular output that our customers can depend on. We laid out plans for how to achieve and measure our goals, what the organization needed to look like, and how we had to change. After fighting our way through all that, we came out with a document that captured our process. And there were some truly innovative ideas that resulted from that exercise.”

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The theme behind most of the innovation is prioritization. “Jim drummed into my head that if you can’t straight-line rank something, you can’t effectively manage it. What is most important: schedule, scope, or quality? Obviously there are minimum levels for all three; but if a conflict comes up, we now have a way of choosing which is most important. It is a clearly articulated metric by which we can make decisions.”

He adds, “In the past, we operated engineering on a transactional basis. Every time a sales person said, ‘If you build this, I can sell that.’ Or ‘I’ve sold this already, can you build it?’ And we were saying, ‘Yes, yes, yes.’ Very soon, we found we were agreeing to more than we could do. Our new process addresses that problem with Opportunity Briefs. Now, if you want resources from engineering—to meet with a customer, to write code, to analyze information, whatever you want—you must provide a one-page business case that states who it’s for, the dollar value it’s worth, and what it will cost. Every week, the leadership team ranks the Opportunity Briefs—and we have this beautiful list that provides complete visibility into engineering’s priorities. Anytime someone says, ‘We’ve got to build this,’ I pull

the list out and ask, ‘Where do you want to put it? What drops?’ It’s a very powerful decision-making tool.”

Brian Eckert, Vice President of Marketing for ObjectVideo, adds, “The prioritization process is based on company strategy and dynamic market demands. It gives us the flexibility to adapt and adjust. Engineering creates a menu of opportunities, and if the leadership team checks off A, B, and C, they know exactly how much that will cost and how long it will take to build. Now, we can make those decisions in the clear light of day. Plus our process remains nimble in response to changing market demands. When opportunities present themselves, we can turn them around without sacrificing process or quality.”

Persona-Based Development Creates Instant Magic

One of the most innovative aspects of ObjectVideo’s new development methodology revolves around the concept of persona-based development. Personas represent the archetype of the various people who will buy or use a product: what matters most to each and the underlying requirements to satisfy their goals. With Foxworthy’s guidance, the development team at ObjectVideo now designs all of its products and features with specific personas in mind.

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**— Alan Lipton
Chief Technology Officer**

“We’re very excited about our persona process,” Lipton emphasizes. “They have become like friends and family. Our personas are based on industry knowledge. You have to understand the market, talk to the buyers and influencers, get out and meet them. Jim personally met ‘Frank’ and ‘Lou’ and ‘Ivan.’ He helped us understand and get to know what each of them wants and needs in our products. This does two very important things for us. First, the engineers know exactly for whom they are designing. They know what they can include and what they shouldn’t, what the language should be like, what the look and feel should be like—because they are designing for what feels like real people. Our personas are now embedded in our culture and lexicon: You can Ivanize something, or you can Frank something. In design meetings, someone might say, ‘Lou doesn’t understand this option, but Frank does.’ It gives us a frame of reference to design against.”

He continues, “Personas also provide a method for changing scope without losing functionality and going through a lengthy requirements redesign. For example, consider a tool that’s originally scoped for Lou. Lou is a security guard who has no advanced education and is not computer savvy. If you are building something for Lou, you have to make it easy and intuitive, point and click. Building that is complex and time consuming. On the other hand, Ivan is an integrator. He’s computer savvy. He knows how to set up systems and what an IP address is. He knows how to configure a Windows machine. If we build that function for Ivan instead of Lou, we don’t need a graphical user interface; we can do it with a command line interface and can get him to type in the IP addresses. To change the requirement, all we have to do is say, ‘Let’s forget Lou and build it for Ivan instead.’ I can change my scope by changing a name. And everybody immediately understands what that means. It’s instant magic when it comes to the design process.’

He provides another example of the magic of personas. “We are in the process of localizing our products for international markets. With personas, localization is simple to specify. Ivan—whether in Japan, Germany, or wherever—can typically get by with English. But everything Lou sees must be in his own language. That’s the complete spec. I’m done. Everyone on the team now knows which aspects of the product need to support local languages and which don’t.”

Bridging the Credibility Gap

When asked about the biggest difference Foxworthy made at ObjectVideo, Lipton has a ready answer: “We have changed the perception of the development organization. When Jim came on board, there was no visibility into what we were building, no metrics, no process. Now, engineering is seen as one of the most tightly structured organizations within the company. The data coming from engineering is strong enough for people to rely upon. Management can get answers they can trust and plan against. Plus, what we are building is more relevant to the market. With our latest product release, we are getting huge buzz. It’s the right stuff. It’s solving real market issues. It’s making a big impact already.”

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Lipton credits Foxworthy as the catalyst for much of that innovation. “Jim is a force for positive change. It’s been invaluable having someone who can stand toe-to-toe with some highly opinionated technical and business people and have a healthy dialog. Beyond that, he has an extremely broad skill set. I’ve seen product marketing managers who are good at market sensing. I’ve seen process-oriented product managers who can control the development and launch effort. But having someone with the breadth of knowledge and experience across the spectrum is extraordinary. As a true mentor in product management, Jim has taught me invaluable lessons and guiding principles about process and

prioritization. I use that knowledge whenever a knee-jerk decision is about to be made. Jim has become that little voice in my head.”

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— **Brian Eckert**
Vice President of Marketing

Eckert agrees, “Jim helped bring product management and product marketing into focus and create discipline within our technology development practice. Because that process is in place, we are now better able to translate market demands into product and can continue our transition into a market-led company.” ❖

About Jim Foxworthy



With almost 30 years in high-tech, Jim Foxworthy has sat in nearly every chair in every department within a software vendor. Home, though, has always been product management. An instructor for Pragmatic Marketing, Jim is president of Product Marketing Forensics, a consulting firm that assists clients with the implementation of product management best practices.

You can learn more about Product Marketing Forensics at <http://www.marketingforensics.com>. You can also contact Jim at jimfoxworthy@marketingforensics.com.