



Product Manager/Marketing Department

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Imagine a wheel with spokes. If all the spokes are the various departments in a record label, the hub of the wheel is the "product manager." Promotion, publicity, creative services, marketing, touring -- *everything* is funneled through a product manager. Once your album is finished and officially "delivered," your A&R person passes the baton to the product manager. The two will work as a team to represent, defend, fight for and direct your project within the company.

Your music is considered the "product" (sorry...some companies call it "Artist Development" instead to make it sound less impersonal). Young artists must understand that labels sell records -- your music is the commercial product. That's not a bad thing; it's a reality of business. The label employee in the marketing department "manages" that product. The product manager in effect is your manager within the record label. He is the person to shepherd and execute your vision throughout the company. He's your point person, your source for information, your defender, and your ally.

I, myself, am a Product Manager (although after you do it for a while, they give you fancy titles like mine, *Senior Director of Marketing*). I have worked in such capacity over the last fifteen years at four different record labels and can provide four completely different job descriptions. The basics, however, are the same. The Marketing Department is responsible for all things that relate to marketing, which includes everything from designing your poster to finding you the right tour. We'll take a look at some of the specific things you can expect from your product manager.

Who and Why

Depending on the size of the label, there could be anywhere between 2 and 20 product managers. The artist does not have the luxury of *choosing* a product manager, but rather is assigned to one who, based on many different factors, is most likely the best option. A product manager might volunteer for a project because the A&R person may have turned him on to the music, or he may already have a relationship with the manager, or he might be a fan. A product manager can also be assigned to a project because he has an affinity and knowledge for a certain genre of music, or his workload dictates he has time for a new project, or it's just the right match. A product manager can have anywhere from five to 25 artists on his personal roster, depending on the label.

Visual Elements and Tools

One of the first things you and your product manager work on together is your album package. An art director in the creative services department is assigned to you (much the same way a product manager is assigned). Your product manager holds your hand through the process of choosing a photographer for your photo shoot, developing your CD cover and booklet artwork. More specifics on this are addressed in my [Creative Services](#) chapter.

The by-products of the art department are all channeled through your product manager for design direction and approval. Those include:

1. Packaging -- the design of the entire CD package and all singles.
2. Publicity photos -- you have the final approval, but your art director and product manager each have valid opinions. You will be asked to approve a good quantity of both black and white and color photos.
3. P.O.P. (Point Of Purchase) materials, which include everything you see in a record store -- posters, flats (12" x 12" cardboard poster versions of your album cover), streamers, header cards, counter-top displays, etc.
4. Advertising --all print ads that may appear in anything from your local fanzine to *Rolling Stone*, to radio tip sheet advertising (see "Promotion").
5. Promotional material -- this includes the basics like stickers, postcards, flyers and also more elaborate

promotional goodies like key chains, t-shirts, hats, mouse pads, etc.

The Hub of the Wheel

Each department within a label is responsible for a specific thing. Promotion is responsible for getting radio airplay. Publicity is responsible for getting reviews and interviews. Sales is responsible for selling record to the accounts. Creative Services is responsible for designing of artwork. Each of these departments, though, needs tools with which to do the job. The product manager's responsibility is to ensure that each department has what it needs on a timely basis to make sure the right job gets done. Each department's responsibilities are outlined in their separate chapters, but here is an overview on how each department relies on the product manager and how they interact.

1. [Creative Services](#). During the course of the project, certain basic elements are needed such as posters, flats, ads, radio and TV spots. The Creative Services department needs direction from the product manager before designing and creating any of these elements. Which photos do we use for the poster? What copy do you want on the ad? Which songs do you want in the music bed of the radio spots? All of those questions, with input from whoever is applicable (A&R, management, creative), are ultimately the product manager's responsibility to answer.
2. [Promotion](#). The promotion department schedules singles and decides which radio formats they will be chasing. The product manager's responsibilities to the promotion department are to insure that the CD Pro (i.e. Promotional CD) single ships on schedule and to the right people, the tip sheet ads are created on time and the promotion staff receives all promotional items, information, highlights, news, anything that could possibly make their jobs of getting airplay easier. The two work very closely together to create any opportunities that could help garner airplay.
3. [Sales](#). Much like the promotion department needs timely information and updates, the sales department does too. The sales department's introduction to an artist is a one-sheet or "New Release Sheet" written by the product manager that gives a brief overview of the project and its summarized marketing plan. The product manager is responsible for providing Sales with marketing ideas, tools, updated information on airplay and touring and everything else that could help them sell records.
4. [Publicity](#). The publicist relies on a product manager to provide much of the same information, news and project updates as the other departments do. Up-to-the-minute itineraries are specifically needed for the publicity department to garner tour press for live show reviews and interviews while on the road.
5. [Artist Development](#). The touring department relies on the product manager to give direction for finding the right tours, timing and scheduling. The two always work very closely to insure that an artist on the road is getting the most out of touring, and that all opportunities for promotion and exploitation are explored.

Marketing & Advertising

A product manager's main focus is creative [marketing](#), which can be loosely interpreted. Basically, everything that happens in a day in the life of a product manager is *marketing*. The creation and design of the visual elements is marketing. Deciding on the timing of the release of singles to radio and to what formats is marketing. Finding the right touring opportunities is marketing. Devising a plan for print, radio and television advertising is marketing.

More specifically, *marketing* leads the consumer to the store to buy your record. Obviously, each department focuses on a specific piece of the puzzle, and when it all comes together perfectly, the consumer is naturally driven to buy a record. When there is radio airplay, video play, in-store displays and plenty of stock, rave reviews in the right magazines a sold out tour in major markets, *marketing* seems easy. But more often than not, (in fact, *mostly*) we are lucky to have even *one* piece of the puzzle in place.

It is the product manager's job to craftily (while staying within budget) build some excitement around a project and try to generate some sales. Here are a few examples of basic marketing and advertising plans that a product manager would initiate:

1. A new alternative artist Band X is getting airplay in a handful of major and important secondary markets. I support it by buying spots on local radio stations. The radio spot educates the consumer about the song: "This song is from a new band called Band X. Their debut album is now in stores." To supplement that, I inform the sales department, who then secure a retail account to "tag" the spots ("on sale now at Sam Goody") and provide sale pricing. I also inform the promotion department that I am

spending money on these specific radio stations, in hopes it will help sustain airplay or even increase it. Desired results: a visible increase in album sales the week after spots run in each of those markets.

2. Teen pop stars Y are on tour. To inform fans and help augment visibility, I conduct a display contest with Distribution involving the field reps. A cash prize will be awarded to the field rep who executes best-looking in-store display announcing the tour date. OR, the store clerks themselves enter the display contest to win tickets to the show. Desired results: increase in album sales in tour markets.
3. Superstar 70's rock icons Z are releasing a new record. Knowing that Z fanatics everywhere are serious collectors, I devise a way to entice the fans with "Added Value" or "Gift With Purchase." Sales sets up a promotion where while supplies last, consumers can buy the new Z record at Best Buy and get a free Z mouse pad. Desired result: high first-week sales.
4. Hippie Band X is on a 2-week college tour, whereby only college students can purchase tickets. I ask the regionals to set up acoustic in-store appearances at a major retail account in each city. Desired results: consumers other than college students are exposed to the band while they are in town, increase record sales in each market.

You can see how the product manager interacts with the other departments and how communication between everyone is crucial for the success of a project. In my current position at Columbia Records, one of my colleagues has a quote hanging on his office door that defines the term "product manager." It's taken from *CMJ New Music Monthly* magazine about three years ago (a feature called "Buzz Word"). It reads:

PRODUCT MANAGER refers to the person at a label who, for his or her designated artists, coordinates all of the label's activities surrounding that artist. Unlike the A&R person, the product manager doesn't get involved in the recording process or creative decisions surrounding the music itself. Instead, the product manager is like the artist's manager within the label. Whether making sure the album artwork gets done or suggesting and facilitating possible press opportunities or marketing ideas for the artist, the product manager communicates with all of the departments at the label to make sure that the artist's best interests are being represented.

Which is pretty much what I just said.