



Your Business: Ready for Launch?

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10 keys to making the right moves and avoiding potential pitfalls when adding a new service or technology to your offering.

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If I have one bit of advice to share after 38 years in the security business, it is to use caution when launching a new product or service. Many years ago, when I entered the electronic security industry, I was young and naive. I quickly joined my local, state and national alarm associations for guidance and to seek out mentors – by far, it was one of the best decisions I made in those early days. That was 1980.

I found myself partnering with my “trusted” panel providers and listening intently to what they were saying and how to best position my company for our mutual growth. Enthusiastic and energized, I was ready to go where no alarm dealer had gone before; however, I was a bit too

naive and made some grandiose mistakes – the product was not ready, the roadmap was not sound, and I failed to ask the right questions.

I concluded that just about every manufacturer had their spin on how to conquer the world or how to take my hard-earned money. Then, I went to work for a manufacturer for nine years, and later a Software as a Service (SaaS) provider for another four. To be sure, the folks I worked with had the best intentions for their integrators – but the issue, as I see it, is that every dealer/integrator has multiple vendors all vying for their business, which equates to numerous people hoping you “chase *their* shiny penny.”

Making the right decision when adding a new product or service to your repertoire – at the right time with the best partner to ensure a positive outcome – is paramount to success as an integrator.

Follow these 10 steps...and avoid the potential pitfalls as well:

1. Ensure the manufacturer’s product or service aligns with your company’s strategic direction. All too often, I find that integrators let their vendors drive internal strategy. Don’t get me wrong – they are crucial stakeholders, but they are not the *only* stakeholders. Your role is to align your business needs as you work with vendors to develop a list of products or enhancements that are priorities to your company and customers. This ensures that any manufacturer engagement is aligned with the integrator’s strategic plan and objectives.

Potential pitfalls: Let’s say a manufacturer develops product enhancements for your intrusion line that you have not previously considered. You pause – as you should – to evaluate how these enhancements will benefit your company or not, and then quickly fall prey to accepting the new features “lock, stock and barrel.” Make sure that these changes are aligned with your strategic vision, your customers’ goals, internal operations, etc. If not, you risk distraction from your company’s strategic priorities and product development goals – often creating internal chaos.

2. Have a clear understanding of what you are being sold. It is important to first schedule multiple product demonstrations and research customer testimonials and integrator references. Be sure to reflect on your strategic goals and company mission to confirm alignment. For example, the product may serve as a good use-case into an unpenetrated vertical market that you have been considering. This could be a nice transition into that vertical, but *only* if it is in concert with your company’s mission.

Potential pitfalls: Innovations without a clearly defined purpose do not deliver value to the end-user. Picking the wrong products and services can sink a launch. Determine the expected

lifecycle of the product and ensure the vendor provides a product roadmap so you can make informed, long-term decisions.

3. Consider marketing, operations and other key stakeholders early in the process. All too often, we leave key stakeholders out of the preliminary discussions – only to pay a hefty price later. Brad Wilson, CPP, President and COO of RFI Communications and Security Systems, presented with me at an industry conference on this topic. He explains that when RFI performs an evaluation, they look at the “3-C” model for Success: Customer, Competitors and Company. He identifies the investment and financial return, the value it delivers to all stakeholders, and the compelling business drivers. He then systematically develops a balanced scorecard to ensure that the product/service falls within RFI’s strategic positioning and objectives. This focused approach in decision-making has yielded positive results and mitigates “chasing the shiny penny” syndrome.

Potential pitfalls: How are you going to market this new feature or product to customers? Sales and marketing are often the last department to be brought into launching a new service line – do not make this mistake. These are the people who you will depend on to champion the new product externally. Early engagement will lead to a better-developed sales and marketing plan and a successful launch.

4. Get leadership approval. Establish a focused “executive sponsor” for your product who can advocate for the new service and ensure that it stays a priority at a senior level within the organization – this is important whether the company has 200 or 2,000 employees. Achieve leadership approval for the business case, including product concept, preliminary design and specifications, solution outline, and finalized product requirements. This way, if the decision is made to launch or not to launch after the evaluation, it is an informed one.

There is no win-lose here – a new product or service must work for both customers and the company. If the business case is approved, it is at this point that a Project Manager (PM) should be brought onto the team, whose role is to ensure that timelines and deliverables are realistic as a more detailed business plan is created.

Potential pitfalls: Ensure that all cross-functional departments are on board and or have input into decisions. Keep senior leadership informed from the beginning so that no one sabotages its progress. Remember that launching any product or service is a process – not all have to agree, but you need “air cover” to collect the information and present it to the team. By not including a PM early in the process, a steep learning curve can be created for the person you depend on as both the “engine” and “engineer” behind the implementation.

5. Perform a technical readiness review. Once you make the decision to launch, are you really ready? Has operations signed off on the technical readiness of the team? Remember, as

part of this process, you must consider how the new product or service will impact all teams, including the central station, billing, operations, customer support, marketing, sales, etc. Sue Duffy, my former Operations VP, once told me: “If we cannot provide consistency in service levels for the product we are going to launch, we shouldn’t do it.” Sue is now owner of Pacific Security Group, a California-based consulting firm. Thank goodness I listened to her – she was 100-percent correct.

Potential pitfalls: This is a “no brainer,” but experience has taught me that when a company gets close to the finish line, certain critical details often fall through the cracks. Avoid this mishap by directing the PM to take a step back, review the plan and gain consensus that you are indeed ready for launch.

6. Plan ahead. Throughout the review process, confirm that the program schedule is meeting its target dates and budget – which are finalized by sales and finance. All sales forecasts should be defined and approved by sales management.

Potential pitfalls: I have seen times when a service provider launches a new service/product without a commitment from the sales team on a forecast – trust me, this never works. Remember, at the end of the day, you are a team.

7. Make the final decision as a team. The “go/no-go” decision should be an informed decision made by an executive council with representatives from all departments. If final approval is received, the PM is now well-versed on the details of the product/service implementation and has established relationships with the key stakeholders. In this way, the PM is prepared to successfully coordinate the launch across all functions of the business.

Potential pitfalls: Transparency in the new service launch decision is critical. Companies that drive major business and product decisions behind closed doors and through informal hallway conversations often have the end-product sabotaged by key departments responsible for the new service’s success. Many great organizations provide project management support – I recommend the Security Industry Association (SIA)’s Certified Security Product Manager (CSPM) course (Learn more at www.securityindustry.org).

8. Set measurable performance goals: Be specific about who is accountable for each key performance indicator; determine how the data will be obtained, its frequency and the reporting plan.

Potential pitfalls: Do not fall into the trap of setting goals that cannot be quantified and measured and without a person assigned to collecting the data.

9. Prepare for the initial release. Complete product beta testing, qualify supporting processes, demonstrate manufacturability, and create and implement a pilot plan and testing that includes field trial reviews with key “friendly” customers. I recommend integrators establish an advisory group of technology customers who will give you honest feedback. Many years ago, when I was EVP at Post Alarm Co., in California, we called this the “Stanley Hayden test” – Stanley was a customer who could always uncover something that we were not doing well, no matter how small. Whenever we launched a new service or product we asked ourselves: *Would this pass the Stanley Hayden test?* Every company has a Stanley Hayden – find yours.

Potential pitfalls: With beta testing, develop a list of beta customers you can use from time to time, but do *not* use your most valued and critical customers. If the beta test does not go well, you will be eating crow!

10. Revisit the launch in 30, 60 and 90 days. Have the launch’s goals and objectives been met? Review Key Performance Indicators to make sure there is alignment. Has your vendor supported you as they said they would? Are you pleased with the launch?

Potential pitfalls: Be sure it is an honest post-mortem with the entire team – then learn from mistakes and celebrate successes.

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