sendbird

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Getting Developers' Buy-in on Build vs. Buy

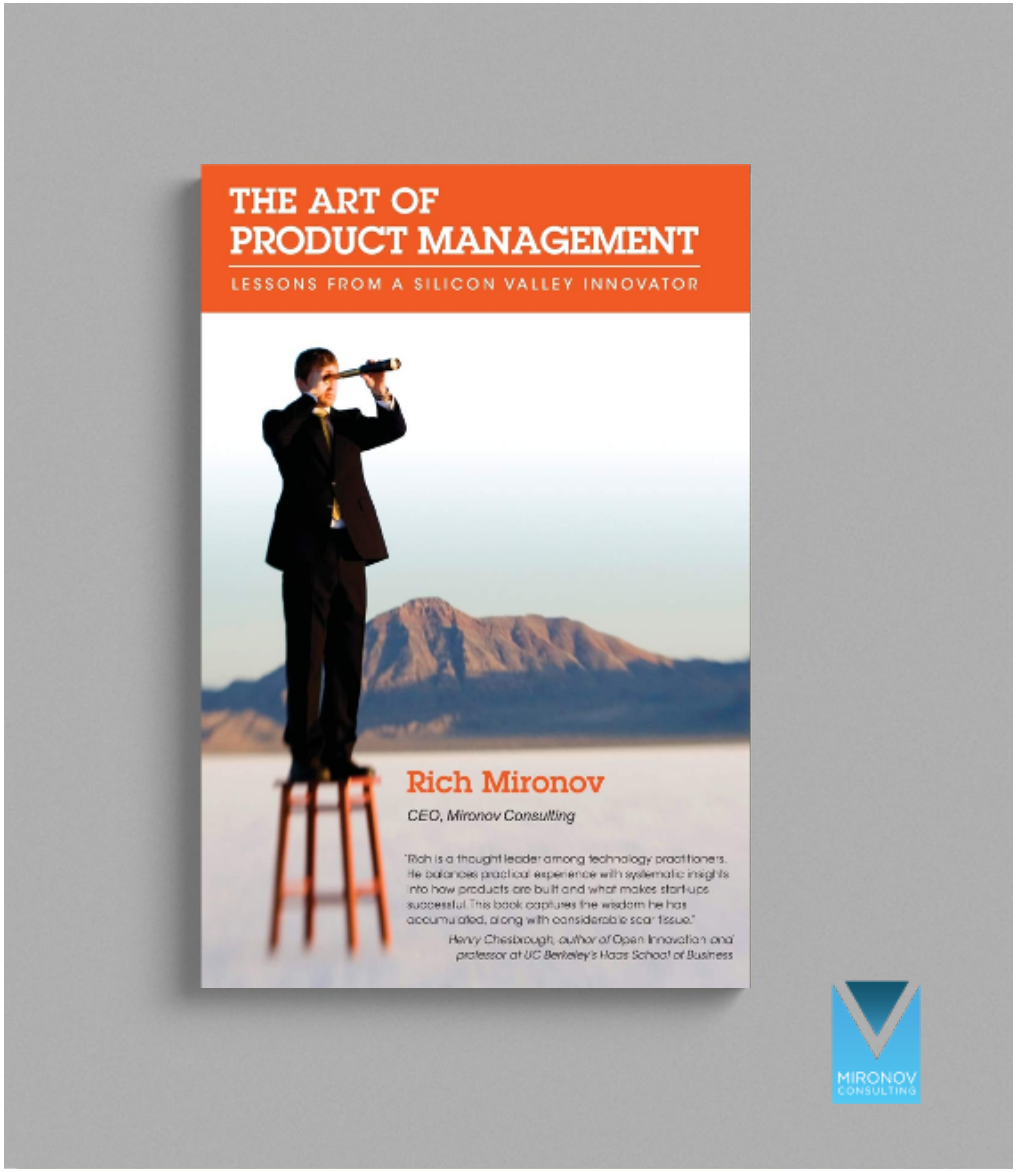
with Rich Mironov

October 2021

Welcome Rich Mironov

Rich is a Silicon Valley enterprise software veteran including 35 years in product management and six startups. He is a smokejumper product executive – parachuting into software companies to run product teams on an interim basis – when he's not coaching product leaders or helping design product organizations.

He founded Product Camp, has been blogging about software product management since 2002 and his 'Art of Product Management' was one of the first books on the subject.




Getting Developers'
Buy-In on Build versus Buy
Rich Mironov for Sendbird
22 October 2021

Product and Engineering Often Have Differing Points of View

"Can we" versus "should we"?

- **Product: will this capability differentiate us versus competitors? What would we postpone for this?**
- **Development: how easy/hard/interesting is it?**

Product's View of "Build" Traps

1. **Confusing strategic and generic capabilities**
2. **Ignoring that we're already at capacity with strategic work, roadmap, architecture, tech debt…**
3. **Disqualifying vendors based on missing minor feature** (while underestimating complexity)
4. **Downplaying ongoing maintenance, improvements, updates, testing**

[1] What's Strategic for Your Product?

- **"Strategic" depends on our customers and market**
- **If you're in the retirement investment space…**
  - Strategic: stock portfolio, regulatory compliance, funds transfers, financial statements, ML to spot stock trends
  - Not strategic: AI/ML platform, multi-factor auth, IDE, cloud capacity tracking, test harness, mobile chat, BI visualization, login/password management, software updates…

- **If you're a Multi-Factor Authentication vendor**
  - Strategic: password reset flows, alternate messaging channels, length/strength, hashing, DDOS defense, sample API calls…
  - Not strategic: 401(k)s, regulatory compliance, cloud capacity, BI visualization, software updates, mobile chat, AI/ML platform
- **Can we put our look-and-feel on technical platforms?**

Example: Llama Management Suite

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Strategic features

- Veterinary records, GPS animal tracking, llama wool classification database, extreme voice amplification

Non-strategic

- Cloud hosting, CRM, login mgmt, DDOS, in-app chat, currency conversions, email campaign mgmt, ticketing, DevOps tooling…

Can we put llama "front end" on commercial back-end services/products?

There's nothing more wasteful than brilliantly engineering a capability that doesn't matter to customers.

[2] Every Development Team is Over Capacity

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- All software projects run 40% late (even if you include the 40%)
- Infinite backlog of requests, demands, bugs, tech debt, architecture, prototypes, "small things"

- Constant PM refrain: are we working on the most important few things? What do we delay to add Shiny Feature X?


Development can
never build as fast
as we can dream

[3] Fixating on Minor Features

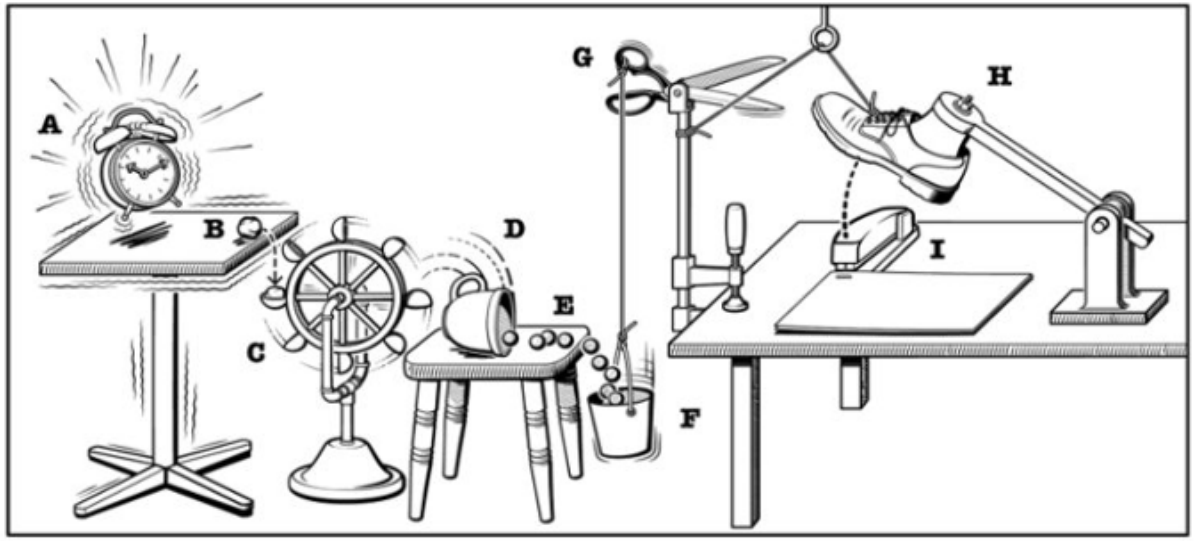
- **"Major email marketing platforms don't let us vary background image by recipient gender"**

- **But hundreds of features (score of developer-years) are essential parts of email campaign**
- **Tend to discover requirements as we build**
  - Regulations, double opt-in, email de-dup, analytics, responsive design, spam filters, templates, tracking opens…
  - Vendors address top needs for M's of users
- **$0 - $149/month**

[4] Downplaying Maintenance, Improvements, Updates, Testing

No “one and done” projects

- All software eventually breaks
- Every feature has a backlog
- Need test suite coverage
- Original developer leaves
- Change to partner API
- *“We promise never to use this for anything else”*



Takeaways

1. **Product and Engineering often have different build-vs-buy viewpoints**
   - Start with empathetic listening
2. **Build (only) what's truly strategic, buy/license everything else that you can**
   - 85% solutions at 5% of effort & cost
   - Put your own UI on commercial infrastructure
3. **Easy to underestimate complexity, forget ongoing support, focus on second-order features**
4. **"Buy" isn't a critique of dev team, but can feel that way: share your logic and concerns**

Thank you!

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