



# THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO B2B PRODUCT LAUNCH PLANNING

# THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO B2B PRODUCT LAUNCH PLANNING

When Apple launched the iPhone 6 and 6s in September 2015, it sold more than 13 million — just three days after launch! You could argue that Apple is the long-reigning king of B2C product launches. But in the B2B space, it's a bit more complicated than that.

Most B2B product launches barely see a blip on the sales radar, much to the chagrin of stakeholders. It's no secret that for both B2C and B2B companies, product launches "fail" because there simply isn't a plan in place. Instead, there were implicit expectations from stakeholders, with visions of Apple-like hype and press, and assumptions that everyone should (and would) want your new product!

If the B2B product you are launching is meeting a real market need and product development is on schedule (big assumptions to be sure) then launch time should be an exciting time to build momentum in your company and in the market. That kind of energy is contingent on having a well-conceived plan in place.

We are big fans of the [Pragmatic Marketing framework](#) and frequently use that (and other "secret" sources) as a basis for our work. Here's how we approach it, and how you can frame your next B2B product launch.



## KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL B2B PRODUCT LAUNCH

The objective of a product launch plan is simple: sales, velocity, and momentum! A new product launch can be rocket fuel for your sales pipeline, both in renewals for existing customers and share-of-wallet for net-new business. But only with the right ingredients. Gear your product launch toward your customers, speak to their needs and problems, demonstrate how your product solves real market problems, and set real and measurable launch goals to gauge the success of your product launch.

There are two types of product launches we encounter most often. They look like this:

### ○ The Existing Customer Launch

Called the “Migration Launch” in Pragmatic terms, this launch plan is for your current clients.

The objectives here:

- Keep your existing customers with you (and potentially upgrade them)
- Reduce the attractiveness of alternatives from competitors
- Dislodge or disrupt the competition who are knocking on your customers’ door

#### The Key:

In your product development, constantly ask yourself, “How do we keep the migration from old to new as cost effective and hassle-free as possible?” Failure to do so equals loss of existing customer base.

#### Your Goals:

Look at setting some hard numbers around how many customers you want to upgrade in a certain amount of time (upgrade X% of client base in next Y months). This should coincide with your sundown plan for your “old” product. You probably don’t want two products running simultaneously for very long.

## ○ New Customer Launch

Called the **Share-of-Wallet Launch**, this is where the fun begins (not that your current customers aren't fun). The opportunity here is two fold: cold or dead leads that know you, and net-new prospects that have never heard of you — until now! The objectives here:

- Greater brand awareness through marketing and PR efforts around launch time
- An increase in product demos and trials (if you have them)
- Increase in product sales to new clients

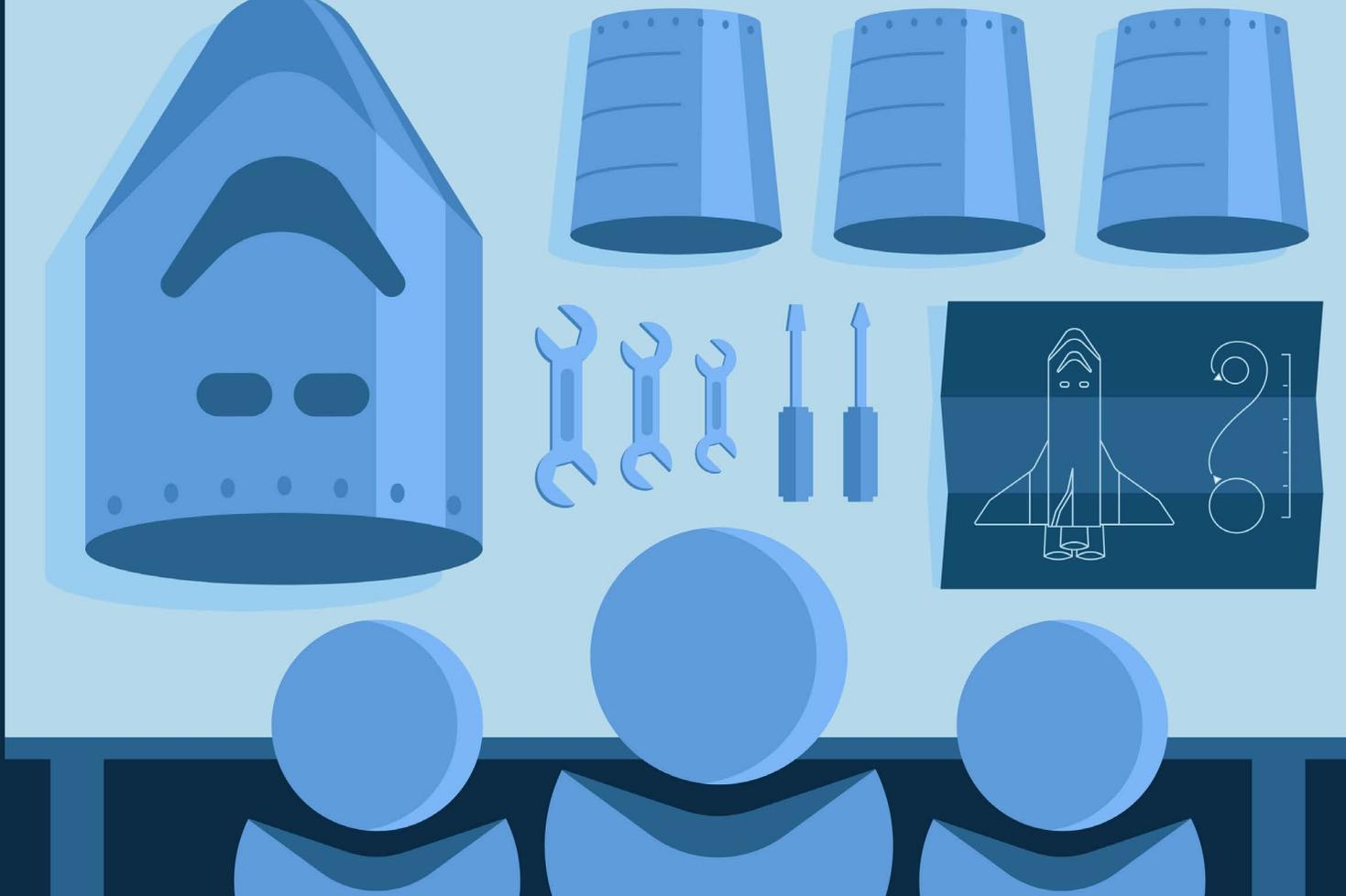
### The Key:

Let marketing do their jobs. They are responsible for paving the runway for sales momentum. Pay-per-click, content, email, collateral pieces all blitzed around a launch date will give you that momentum.

### Your Goals:

Simple. New sales. Look at your existing sales goals and factor in realistic increases for the months preceding the launch date. Your momentum is highest in the months right after launch date. Capitalize on it!

Okay, so now the foundations of your launch plan are laid. There are two other components to unpack: launch readiness and your “runway” or timeline. Both are imperative to a successful product launch. Let's start by looking at launch readiness — and, mostly importantly, what not to do.



## TOP 4 LAUNCH READINESS MISTAKES TO AVOID

Now that you know the two most common kinds of B2B product launches, how do you plan for yours? Based on our experience helping clients launch tech products, there are a couple pitfalls that consistently trip people up. Review this list as you begin to shape your own product launch plan so you can avoid these four common mistakes.

### ❶ Launching before your organization is ready

Product launches are not the responsibility of your product team. Or your marketing team. Or your sales team. The responsibility belongs to everyone. Your entire organization needs to be ready and aligned for a product launch.

If Customer Support isn't armed with new product knowledge, aware of potential issues, and ready to provide solutions to those issues, you're shooting yourself in the foot. If your Integration Team isn't ready to migrate existing customers to the new product, you'll lose business. And if key stakeholders can't confidently speak to the features and benefits of the new product, you'll lose credibility.

Everyone in the organization needs to be ready — and rally — for launch.

### ❷ Launching before your product is ready

There are two sides to this coin: either your new product is over-engineered and can't be easily grasped and assimilated, or it's under-engineered and you haven't solved the basic problems of your users. In either scenario, you're toast.

At launch, your product needs to have a delicate balance between being a minimally viable product (MVP) that will require well-orchestrated iterations to get it up to full speed and a fully-functioning, benefit-focused product that meets the needs of your users (at least most of them). A key step to achieving that balance is through a beta launch, which brings us to our next point.

## ○ Launching without beta testing

You're incredibly proud of your new product: all of its new bells, whistles, features, and so on. But here's the stinger: none of that means anything until it's in the hands of real customers who think it's awesome after actually using it. They are your litmus test of your success — which is why you need to beta test it before launch. Let users (people who are outside of your office and therefore more objective than your team can be) inform and influence if you have a product ready for the marketplace.

If you decide to beta test with existing customers, use your best ones. They have a relationship with you: they want to work with you and they want to be involved. It's in their best interest. But it's important to supplement this with new customer testing for real insight. Product and development teams need to be closely aligned with this process — user testing should not be relegated to marketing teams behind a two-way mirror!

## ○ Launching without a timeline

We'll dive into an example of a launch timeline in the next section but, in addition to having a launch plan, you also need to have a defined plan for roll-out. Your organization and product can't be "ready" if there's no documented timeline, milestones, and launch date. An effective product launch is typically scheduled around a specific date: a customer event, an anniversary (business or product), or a time of year coinciding with the buying cycle (back to school, fiscal periods). A timeline keeps your entire organization focused and accountable, and expectations realistic.

Obviously, there are a myriad of factors that affect a product launch — but these are a few that we encounter the most. Having these things in order will go a long way in determining the success (or failure) of your product launch. Every product, company, and sales cycle is nuanced. But if you get the big stuff right, you're way ahead of most in the marketplace.



## BUILDING A B2B PRODUCT LAUNCH TIMELINE

**In the attached download, we've included a very simple and easy-to-use template to help you create a launch timeline.**

We originally created this template for one of our clients. They had a SaaS product that had already been on the market for several years, and they were in process of rolling out a totally redesigned product several months from now. Their sales cycle is long (sometimes more than a year) but, thanks to the launch timeline we created for them, they were way ahead of the game for their new product.

This launch timeline, coupled with sales readiness and launch strategies for new and existing customers, provides a framework for a successful B2B technology product launch — taken straight from our playbook. As you review the sample timeline, let's point out a few key components:

### Pre-Sales Planning

As you work on designing and refining the function and new UX/UI of your product, you'll want to set sales goals (both for new and existing customers) and thinking through the migration plan for existing clients. Go back to the first section for migration and share-of-wallet recommended goals.

### Marketing to New Vs. Existing Clients

For obvious reasons, you'll want to sell to existing clients first. Arm yourself with a migration plan to eliminate fears and trepidation about this potentially disruptive process (depending on the complexity of your product).

Your timing for selling to new clients is important. Too early and you'll lose momentum and excitement for when the product is actually available; the fuse will burn out before the firework launches. Too late and you may not reach the velocity you need leading into launch day; plus, you'll miss out on the opportunity for pre-launch incentives that can help achieve sales goals.

## New Product Demo

As soon as you have a good series of screenshots to show off the design of the new product, you can stitch those together into a pitch deck for the sales team.

The big question here: Will a new product release 5-6 months from now negatively affect sales today? Won't prospective customers simply choose to wait for the new product? In our clients' case, since their sales cycle is long, we anticipate the positive growth of the new product at launch to usurp the loss of potential short cycle sales opportunities.

## Launch Day

Maximize your product launch by choosing a specific, relevant date: company anniversary, significant trade show, conference, etc. This particular product launch will be released at our client's user conference.

Though their sales team has already been teasing the new product in the marketplace for several months, launch day makes it official: the product is ready to purchase, migration can start, the new website launches, and PR efforts begin.

Don't forget the power and insight of beta testing, as we discussed previously. Nothing can destroy the momentum of a new product launch more than product issues that could have been caught during beta.

## Pricing

A new product launch is the perfect time to adjust your pricing. The updated product is now new, improved, and — with attention to UX/UI — can certainly be positioned as more valuable than its predecessor.

Capitalize on this while you can. You can also create sales incentives that allow buyers to purchase the new product at "old" product pricing for a limited amount of time before the price increases. Again, your goal here is to create sales velocity, so there are several strategies you can explore to find which best suits your offering.

**Other items you might want to add to our basic example:**

**Customer Service Training:** Arm your CSRs with anticipated questions and answers about the new product.

**IT Support:** Know the ins and outs of implementing your new product from a technical standpoint, and have solutions ready.

**Internal Kickoff:** Schedule a pre-launch kickoff with your entire team to prepare them for launch day.

Now, it's your turn! Use our [B2B product launch template](#) to map out your launch runway. We hope it proves as valuable to you as it has to our clients. As always, if a product launch is on your horizon and you need help, **we are ready.**