



THE CINTMAN GROUP

Product Core/Function

Model

A White Paper

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Intro

The Product Core/Function Model is more than learning about markets, problems, customers, personas, etc. This model is about creating a unified context to fit all information relating to product management. Essentially, the model is about learning your product so you and your stakeholders have shared references to discuss the market, problems, customers, personas, etc. Understanding your product in a way that contextualizes all the other data related to customers, stakeholders, and teams can profoundly impact how you will manage the product.

Let's start at the beginning. You're new to product management, or you're an experienced product manager new to the company. In either case, you're handed a mountain of data just waiting for you to sift through, learn, digest, share, and become the expert.



I found myself in this situation, primarily when I worked in acquisitions and received first-hand experience in the deluge of information overload we, as Product Managers (PM), can be subjected to. Our company's investments focused on products in distress. Our acquisition process had three phases, and as PM, I played an essential role in all of them.

The first phase was due diligence, when I evaluated the market fit and portfolio synergy. The next phase came after the acquisition when the primary task was consolidation. Finally, in the third phase, our mission was to improve the product services and revitalize our solution, increasing profitability.

At one point, I was learning and managing ten different products across different categories, spanning four acquisitions in one of the three phases. While doing this, I spoke with customers, prioritized development, assisted sales and marketing, and conducted vast customer interactions.

The greatest problem was synthesizing and organizing all the information. Connecting each piece of information (e.g., features, competitors, and market needs) across the portfolio and sharing the information with acquisition stakeholders proved difficult, considering all the buzzwords, marketing flare, and technical jargon. Clearly and concisely communicating with sales, account management, engineering, and the CEO required an approach to establishing logical relationships within the product and across the portfolio. I had to solve the problem of learning products in record time. So, I developed a framework I call the **Product Core Function Model**.



Building Your Model

The model's heart is research and analysis of your product category. The goal is to identify the core characteristics of your product category held by all other products in the marketplace: characteristics, not features. Characteristics are inherent to your category and make your product just like all the others; think of them as the “Core Functions.”

Step 1: Identifying the Product Category

The first step to building your model is identifying your product's “Product Category.” Consider this the family of solutions your products are commonly known for; in this example, I will use Digital Asset Management or (DAM).

You can start your research by reviewing the Gartner Magic Quadrant or the Forrester Wave by performing keyword searches on the category using these websites. You can also keyword search the internet using your favorite search engines on topics like:

- **“Digital Asset Management (DAM)” Top 10 solutions**
- **“Digital Asset Management (DAM)” What is it?**
- **“What is a “Digital Asset Management (DAM)”**
- **“Digital Asset Management (DAM)” Review**

You're looking for common terminology or industry terms. Industry terms will provide a common language you can use with stakeholders and springboard other topics to search and learn from.

Step 2: Inventory Characteristics

Next, take inventory of the characteristics shared by all the products in your category. Start your framework by defining those characteristics for your organization that may be different than those on other sites (e.g., Gartner and Forrester). They may be different because their research mainly compares competitors in the marketplace, so it does not serve the same purpose as the Core/Function Model. The Core/Function Analysis does not compare differences or differentiators, but takes inventory of commonalities across the marketplace.

Here is a product example.

We have 16 hats with different styles (or features), but all share the same inherent characteristics: head coverage, fit/sizing, material, purpose, and appeal.



I determined nine characteristics by researching the digital asset management category shared across all DAMs. These nine characteristics provide a consistent framework from which I can review, assimilate, and examine competitors, market trends, features, etc. I could speak with marketing, sales, product development, and engineering in a way that would contextualize and define terms and features across the portfolio of products.

Nine Characteristics

I'll list and define three of the nine.



Retrieval

Includes any process or action taken by a user of the system with appropriate access (system or asset level) to request an asset presented through the primary mechanism of the product (web browser, desktop client, or other integrated application).

Version

Includes the product's ability to store, organize, retrieve, and secure assets that are measurably different but derived from an original baseline asset.



Organize

Includes the product's ability to allow a user to establish sorting and other guided retrieval of digital assets presented to a user when viewing system-stored assets.

These are the other six, but not defined:

- Ingest
- Search
- Store
- Secure
- Metadata
- Governance

These definitions are also purposefully broad and overlap. The descriptions should address all actions, features, bugs, customer suggestions, roadmaps, and ideas that come up while managing your product. In addition, the definitions will facilitate conversations with stakeholders, customers, sales, marketing, and engineering by establishing the context for the product (e.g., features, bugs, personas, etc.).

Core Function

The model's heart is research and analysis of your product category. The goal is to identify the core characteristics of your product category held by all other products in the marketplace: **characteristics, not features.**

Characteristics are inherent to your category and make your product just like all the others; think of them as the **"Core Functions."**



When we focus our conversations on features, how we executed a specific detail of the product, or how it "solves the customer's problem," we can fall into the trap of speaking endlessly about poor design or feature improvement. Instead, consider how we can address current market pains.

Framing a conversation with an existing or new customer on a core function takes the conversation up a few levels outside engineering execution. It lets you converse on the broader topic we want to discuss as product managers: **customer pain points.**

Core Function

The Model In Use

As I developed the framework for the digital asset category, I found that my conversations with customers went beyond their experiences. This led me deeper into areas I didn't know were there. During a conversation with a customer who supported ad agencies, we discussed the core functionality of governance.

Governance is how the system imposes policies and standards over an asset. Policies can affect the asset's lifecycle, including expiration dates or contracts on images of human models depicted in the digital asset. The customer began to vent frustration about a new trend involving asset owners removing the head from model images to avoid expiration dates on digital assets.

The problem or new pain was a disagreement between talent (the human models) and producers of products the models showcased (e.g., clothing).

The clothing producer didn't want to continue to pay royalties for images even though they continued to sell those items. Because the conversation focused on governance and not image manipulation or how to change expiration dates, I uncovered an area under the core function of governance open to innovation.



The governance problem would have been discovered without the Product Core/Function Model, but it might have taken longer and have focused on changing the feature instead of innovating on the core function. As a result of this discovery, I began working with engineers on how we could address the market conflict instead of altering or adding to an existing feature.

Closing

The Product Core/Function Model and Framework also provided me with additional applications, including:

- SWOT Analysis
- Feature Prioritization
- Messaging/Value Proposition
- Product Positioning
- Persona Development
- Brand Identity & Management
- Just to name a few

Just remember, the model is a framework for:



Unifying context for clear communication

- Across your product portfolio
- With stakeholders
- With customers



Research and data

Gathering information to learn about the category and by extension, your product



Focusing on how products in a category are similar

Identify core characteristics



Applying the insights

- Enhance development
- Communication
- Market insights