

Mark A. Hart

## Launch Pad

# Who will you designate as “Launch Architect”?

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*In a large percentage of new product efforts, most of the engineering development is finished before the launch plan is assembled. Typically, the launch plan is built by a cut-and-paste method with a predisposition for popular components. To increase the effectiveness of future launches, Visions Launch Editor Mark Hart introduces the concept of a “Launch Architect.”*

**F**rank Lloyd Wright was one of the most influential construction industry architects of the 20th century. He is noted for designing structures such as Fallingwater (originally a private residence) and the Guggenheim Museum. A talented architect like Wright functions to transform the client’s generic desire of “I want a nice building” into a marvelous result that creates specific user experiences and provides the high-level view of the builder’s requirements.

To arrive at an approved design, Wright’s team engaged in many discussions with the client before construction began. During construction, contractors made enhancements; but Wright’s skillful design provided guidance for everyone contributing to the effort. In contrast, imagine building a house without the services of an architect. The resulting house would include the items on a standard checklist such as walls, windows, and doors, but the house would be inferior.

### Launch plan development

Analogous to someone like Wright, a “Launch Architect” is the primary designer of a product launch. After understanding the potential of a new product idea, a launch architect combines his or her extensive knowledge from disciplines that range from engineering sciences to social sciences to create an innovative launch design. The initial design should be developed following the ideation phase or in parallel with the very early traditional en-

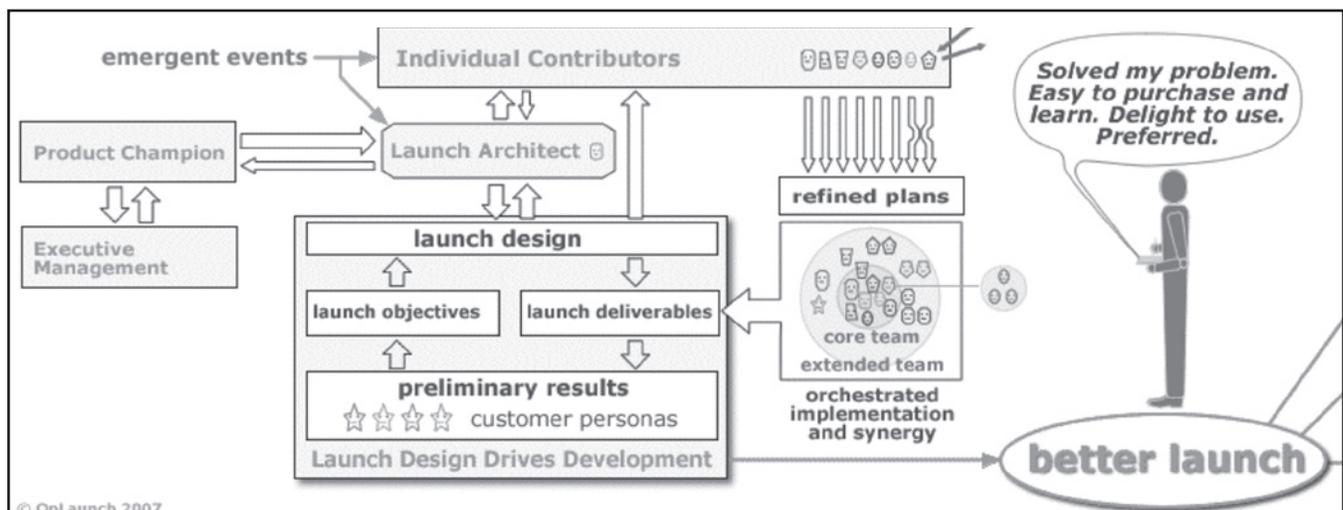
gineering activities. This early-on approach ensures that the proper resources are enlisted and that the components can be produced and orchestrated for maximum impact. Throughout development, the launch architect refines the design and the appropriate high-level schedules, milestones, and checklists as illustrated in Exhibit 1 on this page. These are documented in the launch plan.

Without a comprehensive launch design, a launch plan is likely to feature only a list of critical marketing-related deadlines. Without a designated launch architect, a launch is likely to be a collection of a few isolated examples of innovation mixed with whatever is popular as illustrated in the comic strip on page 7. Besides core development activities, it is common for team members to speculate about selecting and integrating contributions from disciplines such as interaction design, industrial design, packaging, brand management, search engine optimization, distribution channel management, partner management, public relations, advertising, documentation, post-sales support, tradeshow management, Web 2.0, or the next-big-thing to create a successful launch.

In the absence of a launch architect, reductionism prevails. Suboptimization occurs when team members emphasize certain popular components while ignoring other components to the point of reducing the potential for launch success.

“Launch architecture” is the interdisciplinary design of new product launches. It provides a robust, system-level plan to complete all of the development within the project constraints. It

Exhibit 1: The Role of the Launch Architect Is to Refine Design



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*When companies plan the launch of a new product piecemeal, they may select conventional solutions. That could mean missing out on an opportunity to be creative.*

includes the entire launch environment from the macro level of prioritizing product features to the micro level of developing the search engine optimization strategy.

### Launch Architecture

Launch architecture is a development activity that naturally follows the front end of innovation. New product development begins when one idea is selected from many potential product ideas. Launch architecture provides the design to combine many development ideas from multiple disciplines to create a synergistic

launch. Launch synergy is the positive incremental performance gain of the team that is greater than the predicted performance of the individuals working together.

Initially, the characteristics of the budget,

product, company, or the market influence the decisions about the type of launch architecture that should be developed. For example, the launch architecture for a radically new, globally distributed product will be different than the launch architecture for a mature, commodity product.

Details of the launch architecture include activities such as selecting, developing, and communicating product specifications, features, and benefits. Ultimately, launch architecture influences product reviews, including consumer generated media, the first-person commentary shared about the experience catalyzed by the product.

“ Without a designated Launch Architect, a launch is likely to be a collection of... whatever is popular.”

### Launch innovation

Opportunities for innovation are enhanced when a creative and valuable launch design is shared with the entire multidisciplinary, networked development team and improved by the feedback process shown in Exhibit 1. The launch design guides decisions regarding team composition and highlights opportunities for collaboration. A launch architect expands the development team’s vision of how a diverse set of contributions will fit together to fulfill the needs of end users, buyers, distributors, and retailers. Under these conditions, implementation is efficient and cost-benefit analyses are representative of system objectives.

I coined the phrases launch architect and launch architecture while preparing a proposal for a potential client in November 2006 as an alternative to the “build it, then learn how to sell it” sequence common in many development environments. This concept advocates a new “launch design drives development” method.

### Creating a solution

A masterful launch architect transforms the product champion’s desire of “I want a fantastic product” into a marvelous solution that addresses the key customer insights and provides the high-level view of the development requirements. Great launch architecture has an “I’ll know it when I see it” quality. Great launch architectures produce pleasant customer experiences such as “The product solved my problem. It was easy to purchase and learn. It is a delight to use.” Or “Wow!”

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