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Project Management for E-Commerce Businesses

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PROPOSAL FOR MASTER THESIS

PROJECT MANAGEMENT FOR E-COMMERCE BUSINESSES

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ABSTRACT

Companies implement different framework and strategies while developing a website. They invest a large amount of money in assessing the prospective market. Therefore, it becomes crucial to analyze the various steps that are important for a good project management of websites. The Ecommerce business world is much more complex. The companies now need to react quickly to global challenges and changing business environments. The research aims to answer and define the best project management techniques to keep the website running in the controlled and complex project environment.

KEYWORDS:

Project Management, Website Management, Web Development Planning, Ecommerce, Architectures, Business Processes

INTRODUCTION

Project Management, as the name suggests is the art of managing a project. Be it software development, government or any engineering project, the basic concept and approach of project management applies to all. In order to handle the deliverables properly, every project manager scrutinizes the different tasks in hand, communicates with the team, weighs different tasks, provides realistic estimates and finally assigns them to respective team members. in order to avoid any slippage. All the above-mentioned responsibilities are owned by the project manager and are summed up as project planning.

Proper planning is an art. Overestimation leads to slacking and in extreme cases can even impact ROI of the business, while aggressive estimation can lead to work burden, slippages and can even jeopardize crucial release. So, it is the duty of a project manager to find the sweet spot while planning. But what should a project manager do when new tasks and requests get added every day or hour? Yes, such frequent changes are a common sight for e-commerce applications.

In an e-commerce application, a project manager has to plan periodic site upgrades which would contain new features and also cater to the requests of wholesalers who want to sell their product on the e-commerce platform. That's just the tip of the iceberg. Every customer request, feedback, inquiries, usability suggestions and technical improvements, site vulnerabilities, to name a few needs to be taken addressed from time to time. How can a project manager keep

track of all these different verticals while planning? What should be the right approach for managing the overall process of such e-commerce behemoth? What tools should be used to make a project manager's life easy?

In this paper, we would dig deep and try to focus on the common hurdles faced while managing an e-commerce business. In order to clear all such hurdles, a project manager has to keep a cool mind and prioritize the items based on their necessity and severity. As we move ahead, we would discuss the different ways any e-commerce business should be handled and the deliveries planned. We would talk about the advantages and disadvantages of each project management technique and narrow in on the most effective one.

Apart from planning, there are a number of project management tools available in the market which can make lives of a project manager easy. Such tools can be used to keep track of regular tasks and to get a rough estimate of how the overall team's progress is. Such initiative would not only save time but also increase the overall productivity of the team members. Going forward we would enlist few such tools and talk about the noteworthy features provided by them. After going through the paper, you as a project manager would be able to find out different ways which can help your streamline your e-commerce business process thus polishing the rough edges of prevailing practices.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND JUSTIFICATION

The paper will try to focus on problems that can jeopardize the project management and eventually the overall operations of an e-commerce business.

In general software development projects, a project manager is expected to create a structured process and provide platforms and opportunities for the team members so that they can perform better and add value to the product. But for an e-commerce project, the project manager has to do all the above and then some more.

Handling such diverse responsibilities, catering to frequent changes of deliverables while maintaining the customer expectations is an immensely difficult task. The whole management team has to withstand and deal with such situations and are also answer to the stakeholders for their decision and come-up with contingency plans in quick successions. These are the primary concerns of a e-commerce project manager.

Apart from project management, the project manager has to manage short releases so that the team can cater to change requests and software patches for the e-commerce application. Such requests can come from clients or even from stakeholders. So, the project manager has to be capable enough to prioritize all such requests and motivate the team members to respond to such tasks and responsibilities. That's not all, when new seller's sign-up to the site, the Project Manager has to plan and communicate every feature and intricacies of the application, to uplift the sellers' confidence who wants to sell or showcase their products on the e-commerce platform.

All such roles and responsibilities must be handled by the Project Manager while he/ she handles a growing team. Such heavy onslaught of duties can be pretty nerve-racking and if not planned properly can jeopardize the position of the project manager. For this reason, project management of e-commerce business should be done with utmost case and precaution.

A sturdy and well-perceived e-commerce business can easily crumble with poor project management. But even when a process has been put in place and the management is done right, that doesn't mean there won't be any issues in the future. A project manager should always keep track of the current market trends and practices so in order to maintain their business's foothold in the market. Some of the primary reasons why Project Management is so crucial for e-commerce business are:

- ➢ To stay afloat - To structure the existing business model and provide stability and add sustainability to the business.

- ➢ Keep up with the competitors - The management should always keep a keen eye on their nearest competitors so that they can improve their product and ensure customer satisfaction.

- ➢ Maintain customer repo - Building a handy, glitch-free software alone is not enough. The management team should think of ways to communicate and bond with the masses so that they can reach out to their target audience. Social Media Marketing and SEO building activities too must be thought of.

- ➢ Innovate to grow - The above points were just the basic necessities which are required to maintain an e-commerce business. But if it has to thrive, prosper and stand out from other competitors, the company has to innovate. The project management should think of new processes and tools to streamline releases while the development team should use the latest coding techniques and software architecture to make the e-commerce website, robust and user-friendly.

To accomplish all the above, some stringent actions and effort must be taken.

- Proper planning of deliverables during releases to reduce slippage.

- Adopting a flexible development model, like Agile which would refine the delivery process and add new features to the website in periodic iterations.

- Coordination among different teams would play a pivotal role. For an e-commerce business to grow and stand out, the marketing team, sales, development team and management teams should work closely while taking suggestions and feedback from each other and the existing user base.

- Thinking out of the box can be a boon for the e-commerce business. To survive the cut-throat competition, the Project Management has to do think differently and not resort to orthodox management, development or design techniques.

In this paper, we would be specifically focusing on the project management of an e-commerce business. We would be looking at different aspects of development models and tools that can be helpful, but we won't be considering the management of other businesses, services or software products.

The figure below depicts the different management processes and deliverables expected from an E-commerce.
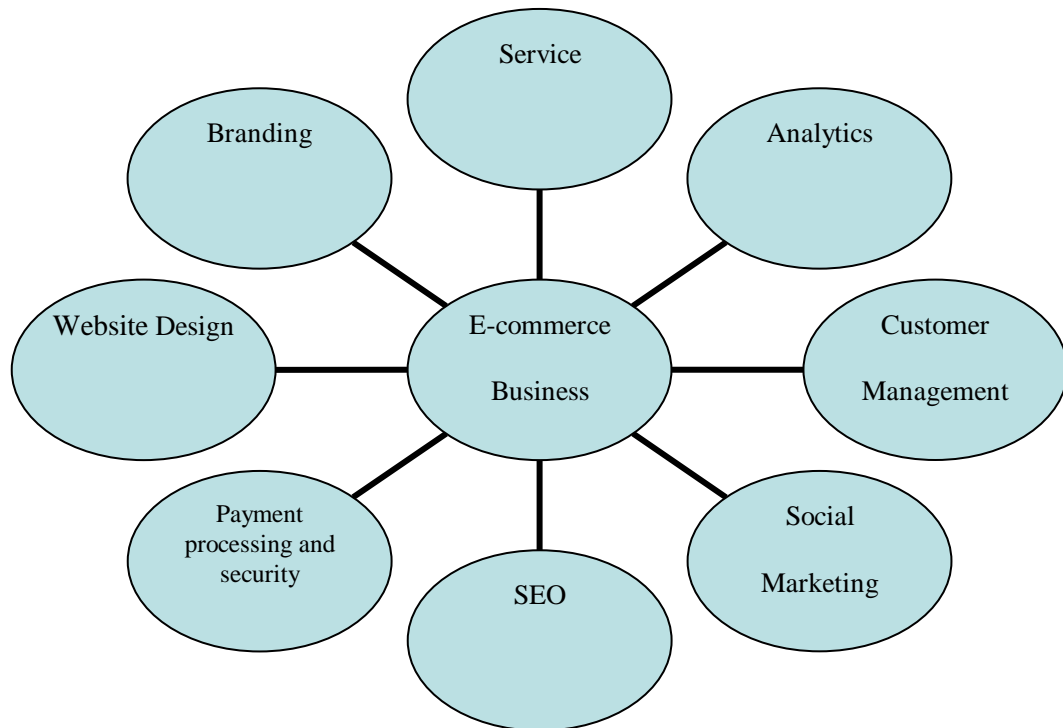
3. LITERATURE REVIEW -- ANALYSIS OF RELATED WORK (4-5 PAGES)

Every e-commerce business focuses on a niche market. Such market can be specific to a type of product, demographic or age group. When a business is able to successfully acquire such a market, they start earning profit which helps the business to expand. Such success creates a domino effect and results in the addition of more resources and partners for the business. But when everything is going great and the business is churning out handsome ROI, the management eventually comes face to face with the harsh reality of fast paced growth.

Growth is always considered a positive identified; then how come it is being considered as a hurdle?

Michelle Nickolaisen, in "A 101 Guide for Fast-Growing Ecommerce Businesses", states that,

" Business is booming. After lots of hard work you've found your product-market fit, and your wares are selling like gangbusters. There's a problem: you're having a hard time keeping up with all this growth. You're losing supplier and wholesaler emails. Your team (which has grown a ton in the last few months) isn't quite sure who's doing what...so some things aren't getting done. Overall, you're tripping over your own feet on the path to success. What's the answer? Better project management."

The article also brought into limelight the fact that, for a flourishing business a growth plan and process is extremely important. While the growth plan helps the management to assess the growth, the process to achieve future milestones helps to channelize the efforts in a planned manner from different teams towards a common goal.

To make things easier, managers should take the help of different project management tools to set daily or weekly goals for themselves as well as for the entire team. It not only ensures steady and planned progress, reports from such tools can also be extracted and be used in the future to check which plan and business/ development strategy worked and what failed. The results and outcomes can even be compared to single out the best approach for any problem.

[Artdriver](), provided a list of top 5 project management tools which are best suited for managing e-commerce business, namely

- Basecamp

- ProofHub

- Trello

- Asana

- Teamwork

Each of these tools had a distinct flavor and advantage of its own but are build to serve a common purpose, i.e. to plan business deliverables.

When members from econsultancy, interviewed Martin Newman, an e-commerce expert, he pointed the following points as the primary reasons which leads to a successful business structure and ensures a bright future for an e-commerce business.

- Realistic management - Achievable business case coupled with a commercial plan for the e-commerce channel.

- Apt supplier selection - Diligence while choosing the right supplier. Commodity price should not be the sole deciding factor and emphasis should be provided on value as well.

- Engagement of stakeholders - The management team should gain commitment and build consensus from stakeholders and members responsible for major business operations

Along with the above pointers, Martin also clearly laid down the fact that the caliber of a Project Managers and his/ her involvement plays a major role in paving the future of the e-commerce business.

"Weak project managers are also a major cause of e-commerce projects failing. This can be due to them allowing scope creep, not ensuring deadlines are met, not communicating effectively and so on. So, a good project manager is quite literally worth their weight in gold. This should be a mandatory requirement."

In E-commerce Project Management, Professor Ivan and Priyatosh distinguished the areas that sets an e-commerce business apart from regular or brick and mortar businesses. According to the excerpt,

> *"Usually and in practice a company turns its business into an eBusiness when it integrates the marketing, sales, accounting, manufacturing, and operations with web site activities. An eBusiness uses the Internet as a resource for all business activities."*

As the structure of an e-commerce business is different from an contemporary business model, equal importance should be provided to sales, marketing and customer management as to the management of the e-commerce website.

James Hammersley is CEO and co-founder at Good Growth Ltd, emphasized on leadership in an e-commerce web development and wrote,

> *Fixing this is one of the biggest leadership challenges in modern business. Get it wrong and you may not be around to compete in the 2020s.*
>
> *Trying to fix it using what worked in the past, however, may not deliver the change you are looking for.*

Sanjay Podder, Principal Consultant at SYNTEL, advocated the need to aggressive software development model like Agile to cope up with progressive business delivery. In his paper, Toward successful management of e-commerce projects he denounced traditional software development methodologies like Waterfall and preferred iterative or more flexible models.

"Software Project Management is the art of balancing competing objectives, managing risk, and overcoming constraints to deliver, successfully, a product that meets the needs of both customers (the payers of bills) and the users. The fact that so few projects are unarguably successful is comment enough on the difficulty of the task (Kruchten 2000).

E-projects do not fit the Waterfall model that is the traditional software development methodology. Waterfall model assumes existence of scope-gods who have a correct and complete understanding of the business need. The analyst and designers building the portal have to gather requirements from these scope-gods. The presumption that the customer knows his requirement is flawed right at the beginning. Add to this the fact that organizations typically will have several such scope-gods and the actual scope can be arrived at after several joint review sessions with the stakeholders."

From the above snippet it is quite evident that Agile fits almost perfectly for e-commerce app or web development tasks. As an online portal is the only customer facing interface such development strategy should be dealt with extreme importance and prioritized over other management tasks or goals.

Quick overview of literature

Example of a reference:

Adams, J., et al (2001) show detailed results.

Albani, A. Dietz, J. (2006) examines ontologies

There should be a framework for analyzing the literature (table, chart, or diagram, whatever)

Organization suggestions: (Thematic, Methodological, Chronological)

4. PROPOSED SOLUTION APPROACH (2-3 PAGES)

Also known as Study Design (based on behavioral or design science research) that shows:

- The main results expected

- How the results will be produced

Focus is on "How" you will solve the problem" (you know "What" the problem is)

It is basically a plan that consists of the following:

- What will be the overall process (procedures, technologies) will you use to answer the questions

- What will be the steps of the process (decompose and subdivide)

- What will be the results of the steps (data collected, data analyzed, artifacts built)

- What will be done in each step and what will not be done

- What type of resources will be needed in each step

- How will the validity and quality of results be assured

The setting (environment in which the results will be used) should be also discussed

May also include specific details about all aspects of experiments, data collection and interpretation, sampling, ethical issues, etc

5. PROPOSED WORK PLAN (1-2 PAGES)

Expected to finish: fall, spring, summer (please specify)

Detailed plan of work with major activities, target dates for completion, etc

It basically adds timelines to the study design

A high-level Gant chart would be helpful

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APPENDICES

Any extra materials, sample data, etc