

SAMPLE WORK PRODUCT | MICROSOFT CORPORATION

Earned Influence:

A Community-Based GTM Playbook

How peer influence, seeded advocacy, and community engagement drove 2M+ impressions and \$300K in pipeline at zero media cost.

About this document

This is a sample work product developed and executed by Peter Pizzi at Microsoft Corporation. It documents a community-based demand generation program that seeded product advocacy among influential IT professionals, generating organic reach, peer-driven reviews, and measurable sales pipeline.

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01 The Challenge

Reaching a skeptical, influential audience without paid media

IT professionals are among the most advertising-resistant buyers in B2B. They rely on peer reviews, community forums, and hands-on experience - not vendor marketing. Traditional paid campaigns generate low trust and minimal organic engagement with this audience.

The challenge was to build genuine advocacy for Windows 10 Pro and modern commercial devices within the Spiceworks community - a platform of over 400,000 IT professionals who actively call out over-selling and reward authentic peer engagement.

The opportunity

- Spiceworks had 400,000+ active IT Pro community members
- IT Pros were already influencing device and OS decisions at their organizations
- Peer reviews and community discussions drove more trust than any vendor content
- The community had organic discussion threads generating hundreds of thousands of views monthly

The constraints

- Zero paid media budget allocated to this program
- Audience actively skeptical of vendor marketing and overt promotion
- Content needed to be genuinely useful, not promotional
- Success required earning community trust before driving any commercial outcome

02 The Approach — Earned Influence

Seed advocacy with the right people. Let the community do the work.

The program was built on a simple but disciplined insight: in a peer-driven community, influence flows from respected insiders. Rather than broadcasting to the whole community, the program identified and activated the most credible voices within it.

Target persona: The influential IT Pro

The program targeted senior IT Pros with proven community influence, technical depth, and purchasing authority - specifically those who managed and supported 10 or more devices, had high community standing (Spiceworks Spice Level: Datil and above), and had direct involvement in device evaluation, imaging, and refresh decisions.

Four core program mechanics

#	Mechanic	How it worked
1	Device seeding program	Provided loaner HP Elite X2 devices to 10 high-influence IT Pros for hands-on evaluation. Required no promotional commitment - just authentic use and feedback.
2	Weekly themed discussions	Launched weekly community discussions focused on real-world Windows 10 Pro benefits, use cases, and best practices. Content led with value, not promotion.
3	Review and giveaway programs	Created structured product review campaigns and Microsoft swag giveaways that incentivized community participation without compromising authenticity.
4	Community reinforcement	Maintained continuous brand presence by contributing to organic discussions, answering technical questions, and engaging with community feedback.

03 Results & Business Impact

2M+ impressions. \$300K pipeline. Zero paid media.

The program generated results across three dimensions: reach and engagement, peer advocacy and reviews, and direct sales pipeline. All results were generated organically - no paid media was deployed.

\$300K Sales Pipeline Generated in 2 monthly programs	2M+ Total Impressions On commercial Windows posts in FY17	120 Product Reviews Avg. rating 4.2 out of 5 stars	\$0 Paid Media Cost 100% organic reach
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Reach and engagement performance

Program / Discussion	Organic Views	Organic Reach	Engagements
Device Evaluation Program - Launch Announcement	4,277	2,212	275
Device Evaluation Program - Windows 10 Pro Management	1,091	481	88
HP Elite X2 - Device Evaluation Review	595	305	40
Low Cost Devices - Business Ready or Niche Use?	34,475	23,625	813
Windows 10 Pro Review Campaign	19,272	7,363	1,518

Community forum performance - Top discussions by monthly view volume

Forum	Posts	Organic Views
Windows 10 Forum	61	57,420
General Hardware Forum	19	36,269
Training & Development Forum	14	33,622
Water Cooler Forum	32	23,424
Contests Forum	19	19,272
Software Deployment & Patching Forum	6	18,336
Microsoft Licensing Forum	41	17,638
Total (Top Forums)	200+	221,550+

04 The Voice of the Community

What IT Pros said - in their own words

Peer advocacy generated authentic testimonials that carried far more credibility than any vendor-produced content. The following quotes were generated organically by program participants.

"I miss the little guy already. I really liked it when I was running around the manufacturing floor and in meetings."

- Tom M., Network Administrator

"In my financial firm, high net-worth clients like to see higher end technology. They like to sign off on documents on a device like this with a stylus. I know we will bring at least 2 of these devices in for tax season."

- Rob Z., Director of Technologies

Direct pipeline opportunities generated

Three direct sales opportunities were identified and tracked as a result of community engagement and device evaluation participation:

Account	Company Size	Pipeline Value
Financial Services Firm	11-50 employees	\$10,000
Engineering Services Company	201-500 employees	\$100,000
Technology Design Firm	51-200 employees	\$40,000

05 What We Learned - The Playbook

Five principles for community-based demand generation

The program generated a repeatable playbook for earning influence in technical communities. These principles apply across B2B markets where peer trust outweighs vendor credibility.

01 Seed with the right people

Identifying the most credible, engaged members of a community and giving them genuine hands-on access generates far more authentic advocacy than broadcasting to the full audience. Influence in technical communities is earned by peers, not vendors.

02 Lead with value, not promotion

Technical communities actively call out over-selling. Content that leads with practical value - best practices, honest comparisons, real-world use cases - generates significantly more organic engagement than promotional messaging.

03 Incentivize participation, not outcomes

Giveaways, swag, and early access create engagement without compromising authenticity. The incentive is for participation - the advocacy that follows is genuine because it is not purchased.

04 Sustain the presence

A single campaign generates a spike. Continuous community engagement - weekly discussions, responding to organic threads, answering technical questions - builds brand recognition and trust that compounds over time.

05 Respect the community

Technical communities police themselves. Spiceworks members will publicly call out inauthentic vendor behavior. Respecting the community's norms, being transparent about sponsorship, and genuinely contributing to discussions is not optional - it is the program's foundation.

The financial model

The program required no paid media investment. The primary cost was vendor management time (approximately 10 hours per week) and the cost of 10 loaner devices. \$300,000 in pipeline generated from this investment represents an exceptionally high return on marketing spend.

06 Where This Applies

Community-based GTM works wherever peer trust drives buying decisions

The mechanics of this program - seeded advocacy, influencer activation, community engagement, peer reviews - translate directly to any B2B market where customers trust peers more than vendors. This includes most technology, industrial, and professional markets.

Markets where this applies

- Enterprise software and SaaS - developer and IT Pro communities
- Industrial technology - engineer and operations communities
- Semiconductor and electronic components - hardware design communities
- Healthcare technology - clinical and IT decision-maker communities
- Professional services - practitioner and operator communities

What to adapt for your market

- Platform - Spiceworks is specific to IT Pros; equivalent communities exist in most B2B verticals
- Seeding mechanism - devices work for hardware; software trials, credits, or early access work for SaaS
- Incentive structure - swag and giveaways work broadly; adapt to community norms
- Content cadence - weekly worked here; match to the natural rhythm of your target community

Program requirements

- An identifiable community where your target buyers are already active
- A product or solution with genuine value worth evaluating
- Willingness to invest in community presence before expecting commercial return
- Patience - community trust builds over months, not weeks

What does not change

- The principle that peer credibility outperforms vendor credibility in almost every B2B buying decision
- The requirement to lead with genuine value before any commercial ask
- The compounding effect of sustained community presence over time
- The outsized ROI of earned media versus paid media in trust-driven markets

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This document reflects actual program design, execution, and results from FY17.