



## Planning Helps Outdoor Power Equipment Manufacturer Launch New Product Line

A U.S.-based power tool manufacturer was becoming a victim of its own success. Known in the States and Latin America for professional power landscaping tools, it's the brand of choice for commercial landscapers, golf courses, and campuses. With outstanding products, great sales channels, and a stable market, the company was poised for growth.

The company's development team had a full roster of new products to launch—in fact, they were buried in them. But the team's best efforts were being sabotaged by dysfunctional internal processes. Ineffective communication between its Japan-based engineering arm and U.S.-based manufacturing, sales, and marketing functions often stalled development. Although adequate at one time, the company's basic process checklists were too simplistic for its more sophisticated products and more complex international business. Frequent launch misfires had left its distributors skeptical of the company's ability to deliver products in time to meet peak seasonal demand.

The company had invested much time, money, and talent in developing a new series of professional landscaping tools, differentiated from competitors by improved horsepower, lighter weight, and longer run time. Recognizing the importance of a well-executed rollout for the series'

success, the company tapped Integrated Project Management Company, Inc. (IPM) to revamp its launch processes.

IPM began by analyzing the company's current processes, paying special attention to the commercialization stage: manufacturing, distribution, aftermarket, service, sales, and marketing. Working closely with company stakeholders, IPM developed a detailed process map, establishing individual responsibilities and defining key deliverables tied to a timeline that flagged potential risks and included strategies to mitigate them.

IPM also created a comprehensive tracking tool and a central project repository, providing employees with easy access to the most current information about their responsibilities and those of their teammates.

To improve communication between functions and mitigate potential problems, IPM introduced and facilitated weekly meetings, routine reporting, and progress measurement. A detailed project schedule focusing on the critical path and formal risk management was essential to staying on track. All along the way, IPM utilized best practice project management tools and templates for improved tracking and accountability among stakeholders.

Once the new process was in place, it was time to pilot it with the launch of a new product series. The first step was for the company to meet with its distributors, giving them a first look at the new products. This helped to create a buzz through blogger testing and reviews and word of mouth, building early demand for the products before launch. The effort not only laid the groundwork for sales, but helped rebuild the company's relationship with its critical distributor network.

In total, the launch process called for IPM to assist the company in managing 121 work packages, mitigating 12 critical risks, and resolving 70 issues. The proactive approach to managing the project execution and the consistent cross-functional communication was a true recipe for the launch's success.

On past projects, the company's timelines had been challenged with many stops and starts. Under the new process, production, engineering, marketing, sales, and all other functions aligned to hit the May launch date—just in time for the peak spring sales season. The result was millions in revenue in the first 35 days of the new series' introduction.

Management was pleased with this outcome, and appreciative of the processes IPM had developed for future product launches. "The IPM process was much better than our internal processes," an executive wrote after project completion. IPM "did a great job not only executing the project, but also in motivating and aligning the team members for the key project initiatives moving forward." ■