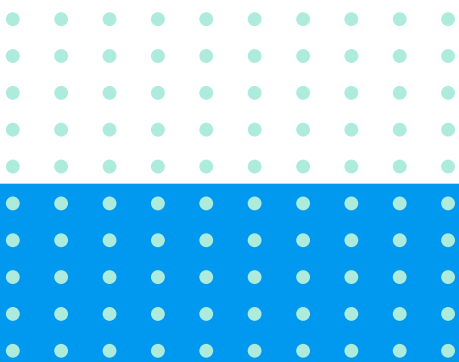


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How to lead with product; to generate growth



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Understanding what Product Led Growth truly is

Product-led growth (PLG) has been a significant trend in the tech industry for some time, but over the last couple of years, it has gained even more momentum. What was once purely a concept has now become a strategic necessity, particularly for SaaS providers and other tech companies.

However, the concept of PLG is not limited to tech companies and any organisation that sells products or services can use this approach to drive growth.

So what, in reality, is product-led growth?

What is product-led growth?

Product-led growth is, quite simply, a growth model where product usage drives customer acquisition, retention, and expansion. It's important to remember that this includes other products as well as people.

To put that in real terms, and to remove some of the jargon, it is the process of recognising your product's strengths, and building that into your customer acquisition process.

Companies who follow a Product Led Growth mindset, keep the following statement at the heart of what they do, and enjoy the benefits as a result: "Great software is built for end users".

Combine that mindset, with shifting customer and consumer expectations in our everyday life, and you will find yourself looking at a Go to Market Strategy that is seriously powerful.

Many companies nowadays, have some form of technology built into their offering. Product-led growth takes this a step further by offering tech products that are no longer exclusive to management/ IT. This is shifting the decision-making process away from management and IT and towards the organisation's users.

In this guide we'll discuss some of the most useful techniques for your business when following a PLG methodology and provide you with a few hacks that can quickly take you on to the next step of your journey .



How is a product-led approach different from having a software product or being a SaaS solution?

The product-led growth strategy within marketing, is most prevalent in B2B, but it is being seen more and more in B2C products too. In this guide, as at Incisive Edge, we'll be focusing on the B2B space.

A truly product-led approach is about creating a digital experience, from prospect to customer all the way through to advocate. Think user guidance and tips built into the product itself whether at the onboarding stage or later on; think easily accessible data within the product and think opportunities to gamify the product and make things exciting or fun for the user.

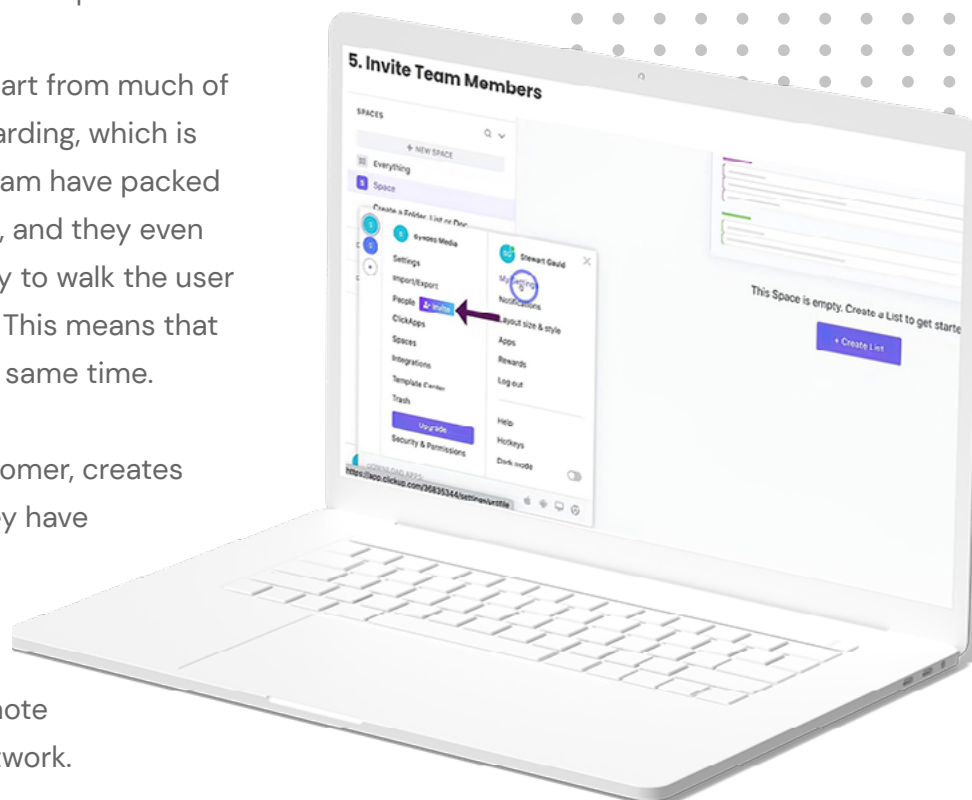
One B2B product which does PLG extremely well is ClickUp, the productivity tool.

In 2023 it is estimated that ClickUp's ARR is in excess of \$150m USD. They follow the traditional freemium approach, offering a free membership for personal accounts, with limited functionality compared to the business plans.

One area where ClickUp stands apart from much of its competition, is their user onboarding, which is extremely efficient. The ClickUp team have packed their platform full of helpful videos, and they even use the product's own functionality to walk the user through their onboarding process. This means that users are reading and doing at the same time.

This kind of investment in the customer, creates advocates early. The user feels they have invested time in learning to be a confident user of the solution, and as such, are more likely to remain a customer, and even promote the solution within and to their network.

Not only does the loyalty represent commercial value, but by building in user prompts to their solution, ClickUp show us the value of having the user empowered early on, to run configuration and training themselves. This reduces the cost to ClickUp in terms of training hours spent by their staff and boosts their promotional activities. A double benefit which gives an edge over the competition.



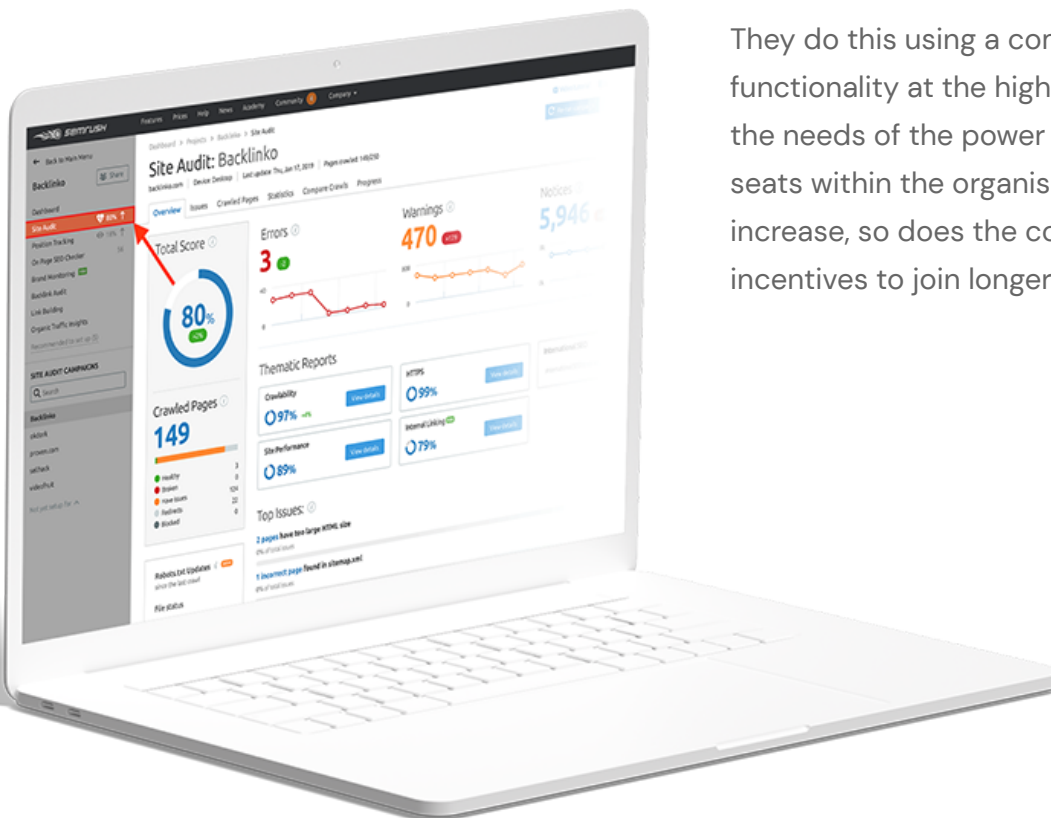
What does your product require to be suitable for a product-led growth approach?

- Open and flexible architecture.
- Designed to add value to users' ecosystem.
- Cloud based.
- Real-time interconnectivity.
- Data flowing freely where needed.
- Accessible. People can use anywhere and everywhere (needs to fit into peoples' way of working e.g., traveling on a train, in a coffee shop, at home, in their office, in their client's office etc.) Meet users where they work.
- Pricing is user-based. Needs to be transparent, clear and typically comes into effect after users have gained value.

Another excellent example of PLG focused business is SEMrush.

Their product provides functionality which adds tangible value to members of their target audience, and their freemium model means that there is plenty of exposure to it before users begin to pay. As use of the tool increases, with a scaling business or an agency adding more clients, the model scales with it and locks customers in.

They do this using a combination of functionality at the higher tiers which matches the needs of the power user, and scaling seats within the organisation. As the packages increase, so does the cost, and with it the incentives to join longer term subscriptions.



What are the principles of PLG?

So now that we understand a little more about some businesses who use PLG extremely well, we can begin to look at creating our own PLG strategy for your business.

In doing this, it is critical to keep the focus on customer experience and helping users see immediate value. Win hearts and minds early through the user seeing the true value of your product and how it solves their pain point – their value realisation moment.



BUILD



DELIVER



**MONETISE
PRODUCTS**

Customer expectations within PLG

In order to achieve a product-led growth marketing strategy, you must live by some rules which support the steps mentioned above. The theme of these rules is to create open and frictionless adoption. In effect, your product must work just as well for HR as it does for IT.

Failure to hit your customers' expectations will create friction at the start of the relationship between customer – product – brand and could affect scale.

Common customer expectations for PLG include:

- **User-friendly products:** Customers expect products that are intuitive and easy to use, with a low learning curve.
- **Self-service options:** PLG relies on customers being able to try, purchase, and use products independently, without needing to interact with sales or support teams.
- **Personalisation:** Customers expect products that are tailored to their specific needs and preferences, with personalised onboarding and user experiences.
- **Continuous improvement:** Customers require a cycle of continuous improvement, with regular updates and new features that will enhance their experience and address their pain points.
- **Value for money:** Customers expect PLG products to be affordable and provide value for

money and fast time to value, with transparent pricing and flexible subscription options.

- **Accessibility:** The successful adoption of a product relies on it being easily accessible within the user's existing work environment, integrating seamlessly with the user's workflow and how they carry out their daily tasks.

Overall, customers expect a seamless, frictionless experience when using PLG products, with a focus on delivering value and solving their problems quickly and efficiently.

- No technical expertise
- No extensive training or professional services required
- Out of the box integrations to related services
- Easy to use UI
- Discovered and championed by users



How do we become product-led?

A product-led growth strategy has to come from the very top table in your business, and filter down. It is particularly effective in the modern SaaS based company where the founder's vision is tightly aligned to product benefit. However, it can also be retrofitted as products grow and evolve, to match today's technology climate.

The key to success is positioning and user experience

Customer expectations have never been higher. Consumer SaaS platforms have warped the end-user standards for what is acceptable, and in the B2B world the stakes are even higher. From day 1, your solution will need to provide easy user experience, and a look/feel that lives up to the functionality.



Gain trust of potential users

Free trials, good news stories and reviews will all be required in order to persuade users to even begin using your product. This means an investment in marketing before go-live, which is strategic and can be backed up by timely releases. Users will be sceptical until they can get their hands on your solution and see that it is adding value to the marketplace – and more importantly, to them.



Constant feedback loop

In-platform feedback, both in terms of analytics but also commentary from users is critical. It is expected now that SaaS solutions of all kinds provide users the opportunity to input into bug fixing and future development.

Early access, Betas and rewards for customer loyalty which shine a light behind the scenes of development can be used to keep power users on board, whilst also expanding your testing. Users must feel empowered to feedback on the product if you are going to continue to increase satisfaction with your product and win promoters and advocates.



Iterative process

Whilst the stakes will be high from day one, a continuous process of improvement is expected in the modern tech solution. Users will feel vindicated as features which they have requested within the community make it to release. Release notes need to be pushed out regularly and the user-centred improvements should be given prominence within them, to demonstrate your business' commitment to implementing the changes requested by your userbase.



Can your business answer these questions?

What does your product do better than the competition?

What are your top X uniquely valuable features?

These need to be the ones you do at least 20% better than the alternatives. Don't panic if you can't identify any. You can speak to your happiest clients to understand why they chose to use your product and look for opportunities to differentiate these, if possible.

Which aspects of your product aren't adding value?

Is there anything your product does which clients don't care about?

What would stop people using your product?

What would/ do users stop using or doing instead, once they use your product (i.e., what does it replace, if anything)?

Who are your high intent prospects (target audience)?

How will you create a sense of ownership for your users?



Does this mean we need to fire our marketing (and sales) team?

In short, absolutely not!

Spreading these product-focused responsibilities amongst the Product team, engineering, marketing and sales will allow you to utilise the variety of personality and expertise across the different functions, united under a common goal.

The priorities do shift for both teams though.

For your sales team, they become the last link in the chain, because you really want your users to engage with your product, rather than your sales team.

For your marketing team, the product-led mindset will mean that you must depart from the more traditional forms of marketing and begin to prioritise some of the below areas:

Build product evangelists

If you're going to stand on the shoulders of your product's strength, then you can't be the only people shouting about it. You will need to go out to the community, and build the right independents to speak on behalf of your product.

The tech evangelist is the equivalent of modern day "influencer". However, they buck some of the trends when it comes to affecting that influence. You can look online within social media, or amongst popular blogs and even journalists, to find the right people to vouch for your product. The key point here, is to build a group of people who are happy to lend their credibility to your brand and product, when prompted.

Content marketing

Your team's content creation will have to take on a renewed vigour if you are going to adequately upskill users to the level required by product-led growth strategies. A sizable chunk of your business' copywriting will need to be focused on the how-to guide format, some of which will be traditional long form content, but may also require content direct within your product to upskill the user base. Microsoft were ahead of the curve with their MS Word Paperclip character!

Consider:

Product demos: Videos, walkthroughs, or interactive demos of your product to help users understand how your platform works and how it will benefit them.

Case studies: Sharing success stories of how other users have achieved their goals using your product will help to build trust and credibility with potential users.

How-to guides and tutorials: Providing step-by-step guides on how to use your product will fast track users when it comes to getting up and running quickly.

User-generated content: Encouraging and sharing user-generated content, such as reviews, testimonials, and social media posts, builds social proof and shows the value of your product.

Thought leadership content: Creating content that demonstrates your expertise in your industry or niche shows the reader that you're an authority on your chosen subject, and trustworthy when it comes to advice.

FAQ and support content: Providing clear and helpful answers to common questions and issues reduces friction and encourages users to continue using your product.

And of course, don't forget SEO to drive traffic to your website.

[DOWNLOAD YOUR CHECKLIST](#)





Perfect user onboarding

Providing a smooth and intuitive onboarding experience for new users can help them get up and running quickly and increase the likelihood of them becoming long-term users. Marketing likely contains all, or close to all, of the skillsets required to run an excellent onboarding experience. Utilising your Marketing Automation Platform, existing workflows & content templates will allow you to create a consistently branded experience from sale through to onboarding.

- **Identify the user's goal:** Understand the user's primary goal in using your product, and design the onboarding process around it.
- **Keep it simple:** Avoid overwhelming users with too much information or too many features all at once. Focus on the essential features that the user needs to get started.
- **Use interactive tutorials:** Interactive tutorials can help users understand the product's features in a more engaging way. Use screenshots, videos, and other media to make the tutorials more interactive.
- **Personalize the experience:** Customize the onboarding experience based on the user's needs and preferences. This could involve asking them a few questions at the start of the process or using their activity data to suggest next steps.
- **Provide instant value:** Provide users with instant value during the onboarding process, such as offering a free trial, a discount, or a limited-time bonus. This can help users see the benefits of the product right away.
- **Follow up with emails:** Send follow-up emails to users who have completed the onboarding process, providing them with additional tips, tricks, and resources to help them get the most out of the product.
- **Measure and optimize:** Measure the success of your onboarding process and optimize it based on the feedback and usage data you collect. Use A/B testing and other methods to test different approaches and see what works best.

Create integrated free tools which support your product mission

This technique is often deployed to great effect. Free tools can boost your business' SEO ranking, and drive significant traffic into your site. Prove your value with a simple piece of IP that performs a related task to your product, and draw users into the real product through use of free tools.

In a perfect world, these free tools should not require too much maintenance from your engineering team, and sit on the same platform as your main product. This throws up some additional considerations around security, however nothing will "sell" your main product like a window into the quality of solution provided by your business. That goes double if you're able



to develop a tool which quickly and simply solves a pain point for your target audience.

Brand awareness in audience communities

User communities are a large component for emerging product-led businesses. Early stages of marketing are going to rely on getting users into the platform, so going direct to the place where those users live, and creating a buzz can have a drastic effect.

Ad-spend in closed forums can be a great way to drive people into your company's platform before the main release. Ensuring your brand and messaging is present amongst the everyday user, as soon as possible, will make your hard release go much smoother. Consider pushing out preview content or reviews within communities as soon as possible prior to, and during, release.

Create referral programmes

Encouraging existing users to refer new users to your product can be a powerful way to drive growth. Offering incentives to both the referrer and the new user can increase the likelihood of referrals.

- **Determine your referral incentive:** Decide on what incentive you will offer to users who refer new customers to your product. This could be a discount, free subscription, or other reward.
- **Set up tracking and reporting:** Use a tracking system to monitor and report on referral activity. In this way, you can understand the effectiveness of your programme and make any necessary adjustments.
- **Create referral messaging:** Develop clear and compelling messaging that users can easily share with their network. This messaging should highlight the key benefits of your product and why it is worth recommending.
- **Promote your programme:** Make sure your referral program is prominently displayed on your website and in your product. Consider using email campaigns, social media, and other marketing channels to promote your programme and encourage participation.
- **Follow up with referrals:** When a new user signs up through a referral link, make sure to thank the referring user and ask them to share with their community.
- **Measure and optimize:** Continuously track and analyse the success of your referral programme and make adjustments as needed to maximise its impact on your product-led growth.



Free trials and freemium models

Offering a defined-period, free trial or a freemium version of your product can give users a taste of what your product can do and help them realise the value. Once users have experienced the product, they are more likely to become paying customers.

Social media marketing

Engaging with potential users on social media platforms can help to build awareness of your product and attract new users.

In-app marketing

Providing helpful prompts and calls to action within your product can encourage users to explore more features and upgrade to paid versions.

SEO

Search engine optimization (SEO): Optimizing your website and content for search engines can help potential users find your product when they are searching for solutions to their problems.

In Summary

Product-led growth has become the most recognisable Go To Market strategy in the last decade. From SaaS platforms making their way into our daily lives via Netflix, Fitbit and others; to the boom in B2B SaaS solutions used across all departments; PLG is here to stay.

Unlike other marketing strategies, PLG can not exist without true buy in from all departments. Perhaps it is this which sets it apart as being so recognisable when successful. In terms of the component pieces, it is no more or less likely to be successful than other approaches. However the consistent application of all departments to one cause is what creates such success.

If your business is already following a PLG model, and needs to supercharge the marketing element of the process, take a look at the marketing priorities listed in this guide and ask yourself the difficult questions: “Are we really doing as good-a-job of this as we could?”

And if the answer is no, feel free to use the IE resources to help you get there; or even reach out to our team via our website.

How do we get started with PLG?

- Undertake a positioning exercise
- Speak to your happiest clients
- Gain insights directly from your users regarding what they value most about your product
- Contact IE.

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About Incisive Edge

Incisive Edge is a strategy-first B2B marketing agency specialising in customer acquisition, expert in startups, scaleups and established tech companies. Established in 2009, our team have years of experience delivering high quality strategies and strategic campaigns for our clients across the B2B landscape.

We're the digital marketing agency for growth-obsessed tech companies.