



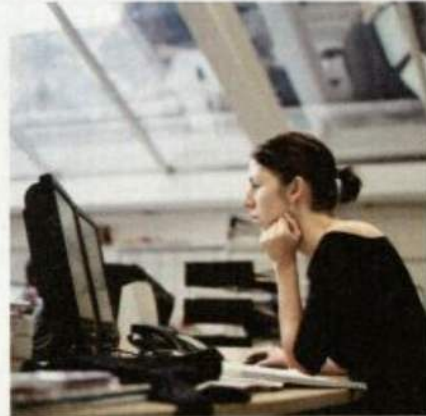
**CASE
STUDY**

In the Vapor

Linda Galhardy, a computer engineer at Gink, rushed to finish her technical description of FlashTime, a new handheld video game console her team had developed. She and her team had suffered through two long months of 18-hour days with no weekends off in order to get to this point. They were exhausted.

But, they succeeded in developing a prototype of the console, and they had created a couple of innovative games. The purpose of Linda's technical description was to update Gink's management on the project and persuade them to begin planning for production. If everything worked out, the game console could be released in October.

This mad rush all started when Gink's management read on gaming blogs that CrisMark, Gink's main competitor, was only six months away from developing a new handheld gaming device that would revolutionize the market. According to the bloggers, CrisMark's console had a small screen, much like a Nintendo DS, but it also allowed the gamer to project video onto any blank wall. According to reports, CrisMark had figured out a way to keep that video from shaking or turning with the controller. If true, this handheld game would revolutionize the market and take away a significant chunk of Gink's marketshare.



Fortunately, Gink had some smart engineers like Linda, and it had a reputation for more reliable and innovative consoles and games. Consumers tempted to buy CrisMark's console would probably be willing to wait a couple of extra months for a similar console from Gink. Gink's engineers and designers would have time to catch up.

Gink's management was impressed with Linda's presentation, including her technical description and the prototype. The marketing division was brought in immediately to begin working up the advertising and public relations campaign. Linda was congratulated and told to wait for management's answer.

A week later, Linda's supervisor, Thomas Hale, sent her a text message with a link to a popular consumer electronics blog. On the front page of the blog was a picture of Linda's prototype and a story taken from "leaked" sources. The story was surprisingly accurate.

She was furious, but she didn't know whom to blame. Did the marketing department leak the information? A week later, several consumer electronics blogs reported that CrisMark was abandoning its attempt to develop their revolutionary new handheld console. Anonymous sources said CrisMark abandoned the project when they heard Gink was ahead of them in developing the new product.

Soon afterward, Linda's boss, Thomas, called her into his office and told her the FlashTime project was being "slow-tracked."

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"You mean we're being killed slowly," Linda said angrily.

"Well," replied Thomas, "we need to make it look like we weren't just floating vaporware. So, you and a couple designers are going to stay on the project part-time. A year from now, we'll quietly pull the plug."

"That's garbage. We can do this, Thomas!" Linda said loudly. "We can make this console!"

Thomas said in a reassuring voice, "This thing was never going to get made anyway, Linda. Management just wanted to get something into the blogs to head off CrisMark. It worked. As soon as our 'leaked' story hit the blogs, CrisMark's stock dropped like a rock. They had to cancel the project to concentrate on their current products. Management just wanted to scare them off."

Linda couldn't believe what she was hearing. "So we were just making up some vaporware to scare off CrisMark?"

Thomas nodded. "Yeah, and it worked. Congratulations."

If you were Linda, what would you do at this point? Would you play along? Would you try to convince management to continue the project? Would you leak the truth to the blogs? Would you strike out on your own?