

The Leading Reference for technology-based products

# Product Management Journal

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## Contents

### **What is in-life?**

An explanation p04

### **Measure what matters**

In-life metrics and reporting p07

### **Documentation**

What should you have in place and top tips p11

### **Time well spent**

Focus on what's important p14

### **End-of-life**

How to successfully withdraw a product p16

### **Insight: Where the rubber hits the road**

The importance of in-life vs. new product development p22

# In-life

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product

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# Welcome

Leading the way for Product Managers

If you read about product management on the web or browse the blogosphere, you could be forgiven for thinking that it's all about creating shiny, brand-new products.

But the truth is that many of us spend much of our time worrying about in-life products – they're what bring in the money.

There's a well-known joke about a tourist who asks one of the locals for directions to a nearby city. The local replies: "Well Sir, if I were you, I wouldn't start from here."

This reminds me of what many of us face as product managers. We didn't create the product, but nevertheless, we've inherited the job of having to manage it in-life. For better or for worse, we're married to its fate.

So, this Journal covers some of the key things you need to think about if you're managing an in-life product. We hope the insights and tips will help you to do a better job and feel more confident in your approach.

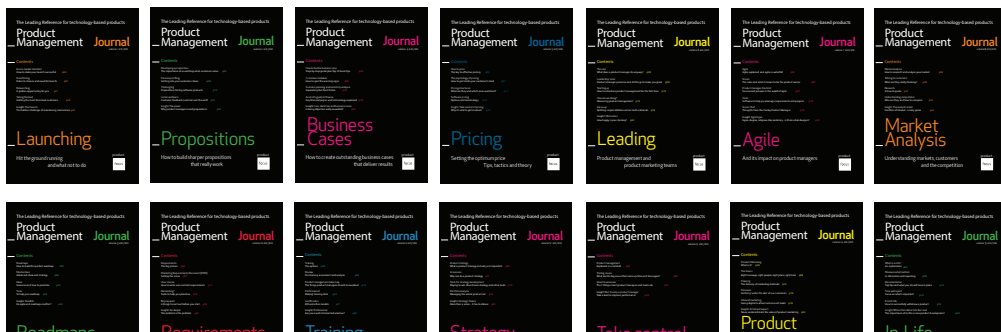


## Who's who?

The *Product Management Journal* is published by Product Focus as an independent publication for product managers with technology-based products. Product Focus was founded and is run by Ian Lunn (top) and Andrew Dickenson.

The founders continue to deliver many of Product Focus' training courses and reviews alongside their team of senior consultants.

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# What is in-life

So, what does in-life product management mean?

**The high-level process that any product-based business goes through is the same.** It can be summarized in Fig.1 below.

As a company, we're looking for opportunities (new product ideas) to make us money. Once we've chosen one, we have to get it to market by either building the product ourselves, buying it from someone else, or partnering with another company.

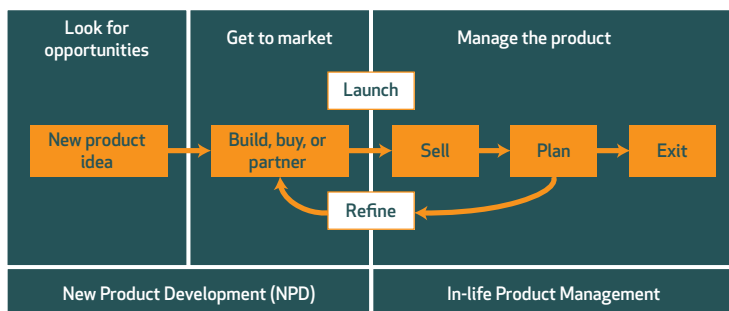


Fig.1 New Product Development (NPD) and In-life Product Management

Then we launch it and start selling it. However, it's very unusual to only sell the first version. Typically, we do some more planning, see what additional features customers want, and refine the product to produce another, better version. And we do this again and again.

Finally, at some point, we decide there is no more money to be made from this, so we exit the market and close down the product.

The period up to launch is known as New Product Development (NPD), and the time after launch is known as In-life Product Management.

### The Product Management Lifecycle model

We can look at this in more depth with our Product Management Lifecycle model (see Fig.2). This shows what's involved for any company that develops and sells products. It applies at a product, release, or feature level.

The major stages (the colored arrows) involve different teams and people from across the business. Product management is typically

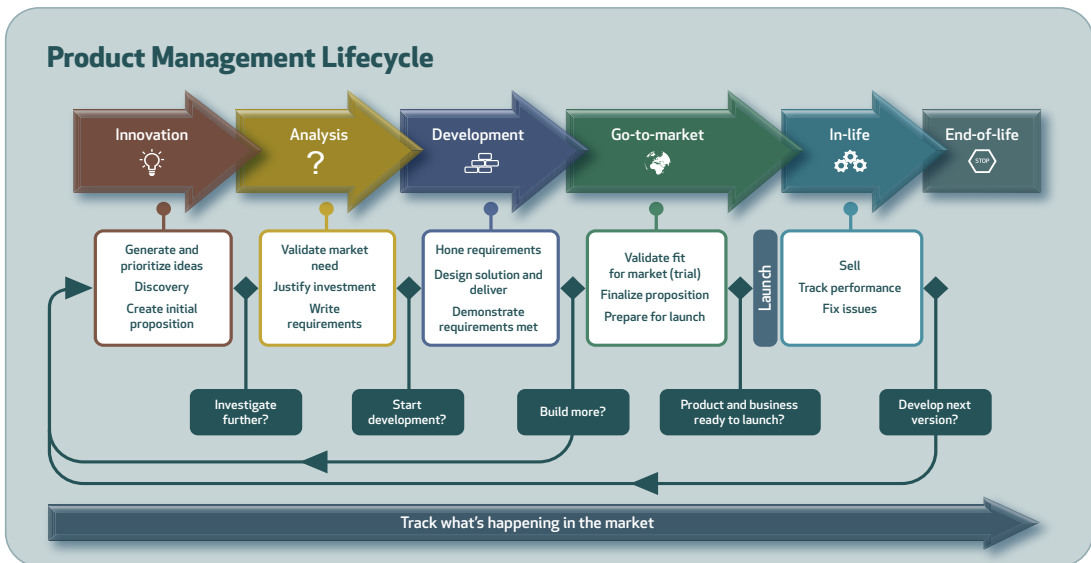


Fig.2 Product Management Lifecycle

involved in each stage – whether it's prioritizing requirements, writing business cases, checking what's been built, or managing a launch.

If we focus on the in-life stage, the key activities are selling the product, tracking performance, and fixing issues. But, we're also usually thinking about developing the next version of the product.

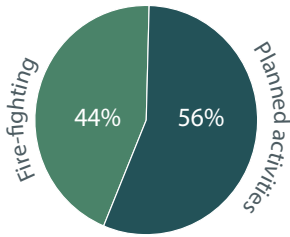
In a B2B market with a small number of big customers, product managers often get directly involved in the selling process. They attend sales calls to present the roadmap and explain the product proposition. In markets with larger numbers of customers, that's not possible (it would take too much time), so more of the focus is on helping Marketing with sales support material for the different sales channels to use or training the sales teams.

Tracking performance is a key part of in-life product management. You need to measure different aspects of your product to be able to spot problems and know how you're doing. Our article 'Measure what matters' later in this Journal covers this in-depth.

It's also important to track what's going on in the market. What are competitors up to, what are our customers saying, are there major industry trends that will affect us? As product managers, we need to understand how the market is shifting so we can update the product proposition and create a roadmap to ensure future success.

**Wise words**  
 "The only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary."  
**Vidal Sassoon**

# FIRE-FIGHTING



**Planned vs un-planned**

Fig.3 Only 56% of a product manager's time is spent on planned activities

## Fixing issues

Finally, any product will have issues – things that aren't working properly. These can range from a feature bug to problems with the pricing model or an issue with the customer experience. These things usually arrive without warning, and the product manager is asked to sort them out. This work is often known as troubleshooting or fire-fighting.

From our 2022 Product Management Survey, we know that the average product manager spends less than half their time on unplanned work. Some of this may be related to new product development, but much of it relates to in-life products and customers – which means there is pressure to sort issues quickly.

## Conclusion

Our experience is that the bulk of in-life work involves fixing issues. And, because these issues often impact customers, they are seen as urgent. Other teams are sometimes happy to escalate any issue with the product through to product management, even if they could take ownership of the problem.

The volume and unpredictability of this work can mean product managers struggle to find time to do other important in-life activities such as getting insights into the market. In addition, many companies have poor product reporting, so product managers find it difficult to know how their product is doing.

In-life product management can be very challenging!

# Measure what matters

Aligning your metrics on desirable goals is key

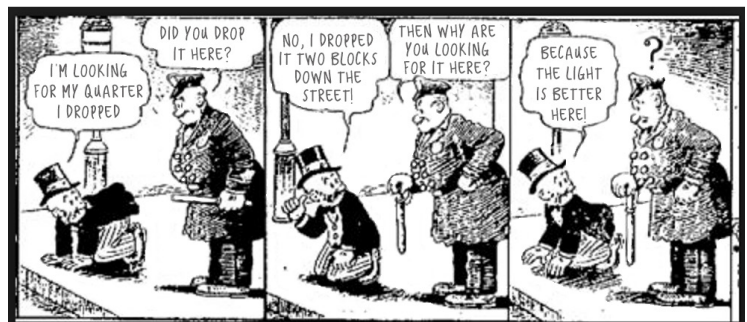
A common phrase used in business is that “you get what you measure.” The implication is that if you track something, you will then have a target, and people will focus on meeting that target.

Sounds good, but is it relevant and true for in-life products? Does it give the complete picture?

## The reality

We strongly support the idea that key aspects of a product need to be measured, and action is taken when things are failing. But, some of the realities we see are:

- No product reporting at all
- Collection of ‘vanity’ metrics that make someone feel good but don't give any useful insights
- Tracking of only those things that are easy to measure
- A scattergun approach: lots of things get measured but never used
- People having no idea what ‘good’ looks like
- People collecting lagging rather than leading metrics
- Ad-hoc collection of information



Source: [quoteinvestigator.com/2013/04/11/better-light/](http://quoteinvestigator.com/2013/04/11/better-light/)

## What's worth measuring?

Your product metrics will be of interest to many stakeholders in the organization as well as yourself. A starting point to working out what to

Fig.4 Doing things the easy way isn't always helpful

# PRIORITIZE

"Take small and regular steps to steadily improve the picture that you get. It's unlikely that you will get your perfect metrics right away."  
**Neil Chalk,**  
Product Manager,  
15below

**Wise words**  
"The successful warrior is the average man, with laser-like focus."  
**Bruce Lee**

measure is to map out these various stakeholders and think through what you and they want to know each month.

This gives you an 'ideal' set of metrics. But, to confirm which are the ones worth tracking, try thinking about them from a few different perspectives, i.e., with different 'lenses.'

**The implementation lens:** Which person or system do you need to use to get the information you need? How will you ensure you get the data in a timely manner? Will it be delivered in the right format, or are you going to have to 'massage' the figures each month to show the insights you need?

**The action lens:** Do you have targets for each metric? If things go wrong, do you know what you'll do to get them back on track?

**The future-success lens:** Does the metric just show today's performance (these are lagging metrics such as revenue, profit, or platform utilization), or does it give insights to future product success (these are leading metrics such as sales pipeline activity and customer satisfaction)?

**The customer lens:** Do you know which customers would recommend you, or how easy they find it to do business with you? Customer satisfaction metrics at the product level can give you these insights. Improve these to win and hang on to customers.

**The priority lens:** Every metric you track takes effort – to collect the information, to present it, and to act on it. If you have a low number, then it helps to keep focus. These are called Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

So, while you might be required by the business to measure and report on some things, take the time to think through the ones that really matter to your product success, such as some of the leading indicators.

## Dig into your data

Tracking key data provides useful insights that can help you work out where you need to focus your efforts. But, don't be blinded by the data into ignoring other things that might be going on. You need to take time to dig into how things really work. The challenge is summarized in a quote from theleanthinker.com: "You get what you measure, but don't be surprised if people are ingenious in destructive ways in how



they get there.” The quote reflects how people can behave: if someone believes a good performance appraisal depends on improving certain KPIs, then they’ll do what they need to do to make the numbers look good, even if that means something else important starts to go awry.

### Leading metrics drive success

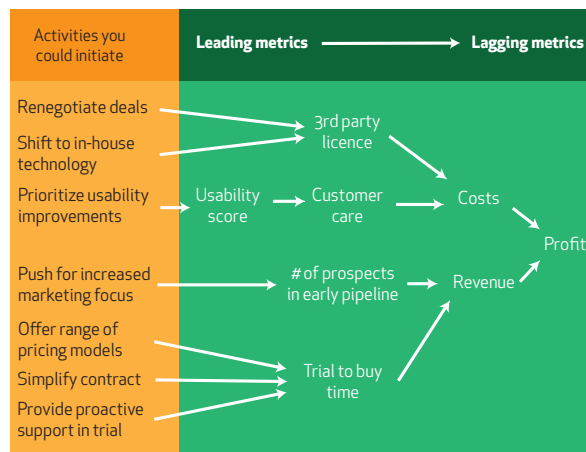
Leading metrics are all about tracking the activities and behaviors that lead to great outcomes sometime in the future (weeks, months, or years from now). Let’s take an example to talk through what we mean. Imagine you’re the product manager for a SaaS (Software as a Service) business product. One of the KPIs for your product is profit, and you need to track this each month. Profit, like revenue, is a lagging metric.

So, what influences profit? There are two sides to consider – costs and revenues.

Looking at costs first, what are the drivers a product manager can influence? Perhaps 3rd party costs are high and can be reduced by shifting to more in-house technology? Or, perhaps customer care costs are high, and that seems to be driven by usability questions that you can improve by changing the user experience.

On the revenue side, perhaps your challenge is early in the sales process – there just aren’t enough prospects entering the sales pipeline. Or, perhaps things are going wrong late in the sales funnel, with customers taking too long to move from trial to buy.

Think through what’s likely to lead to good outcomes and what you could do (or influence) to make things happen.



### Monthly dashboard

We think it’s a good discipline for product managers and useful to stakeholders to report on things every month. This is true even if you have tools to track things minute-by-minute. Your aim is to pull together a short summary of what’s going on, the issues involved, and what actions need to be taken.

A useful tip for your monthly report is to think through the time period over which you need to show metrics. If the metric is cyclical, then you’ll want to track things over the current and the previous cycle so you can compare performance. For example, a seller of cars in the

# DASHBOARD

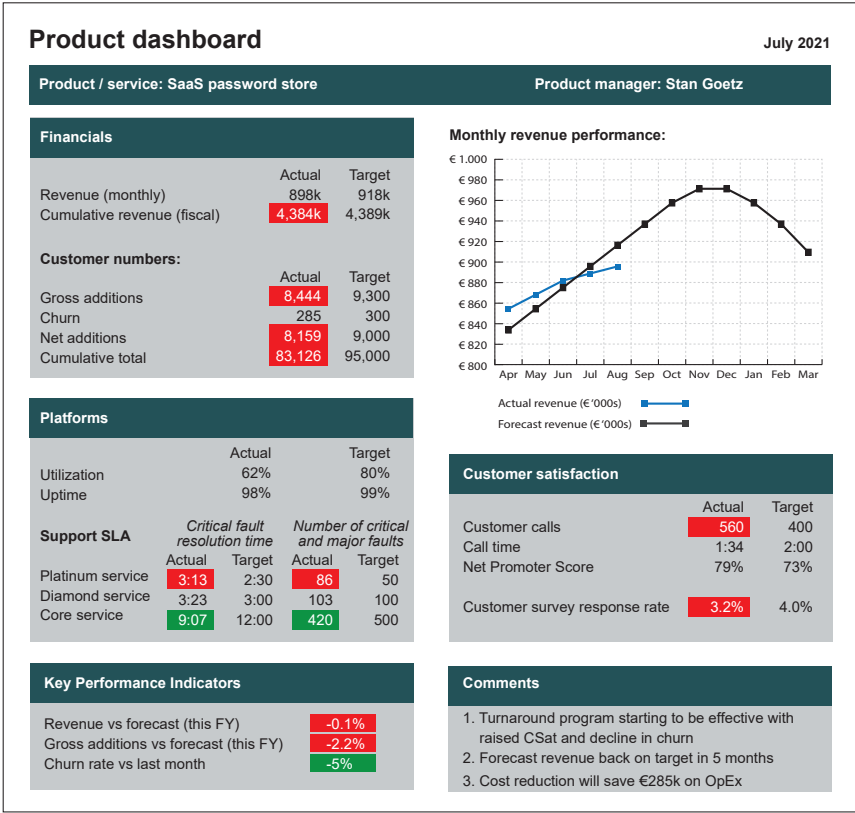


Fig5 The monthly product dashboard

## Conclusion

There is significant value in measuring key aspects of product performance, and you should focus your efforts on those metrics that really matter. It's far better to track 5–7 things that are important to in-life success than it is to track 30 things and not really know what good looks like or what you're going to do if things go wrong.

But this isn't enough – be curious as to how things really get done to understand the nuances behind the numbers. It's a great way of uncovering hidden issues such as training and process challenges.

Also, don't lose sight of the fact that the numbers never give you the complete picture. There are many activities that go on which are critical for success but tough to measure. For example – you get things done in your organization by engaging with other people. You influence them and persuade them to give their time and resources in support of you and your product. This social engagement can soak up your time but is critical for success and tough to define and measure.

UK gets a big increase in sales when the number plates change. This happens every 6 months, so any graphs looking at metrics would track for at least 6 months and ideally 12.

Summarize things in a standard format, such as the dashboard shown in Fig.5. Ideally, someone else does this for you – and you interpret the results.

Share it with key stakeholders so everyone knows what's going on.

# Documentation

What should you have in place and top tips

**As a company, we're regularly asked to review the product management in a business and suggest improvements.** For companies with in-life products, we would expect to see, in some shape or form, all the documentation described in Fig.6.

As a product manager, writing product documentation is not the most exciting of tasks. However, to make sure you do a professional job, we've provided the following tips...

## Know your audience

We're often writing to communicate with other people within our business, for example, the key elements of the proposition for someone in marketing to turn into slick collateral or a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for our support people to use. Be aware of what they'll use the document for and get quickly to the material that will be useful to them. And, be careful about using acronyms and jargon – it's easy to assume that because we understand them, everyone else will too.

## Less is more

It takes time to produce documentation – you haven't got time to

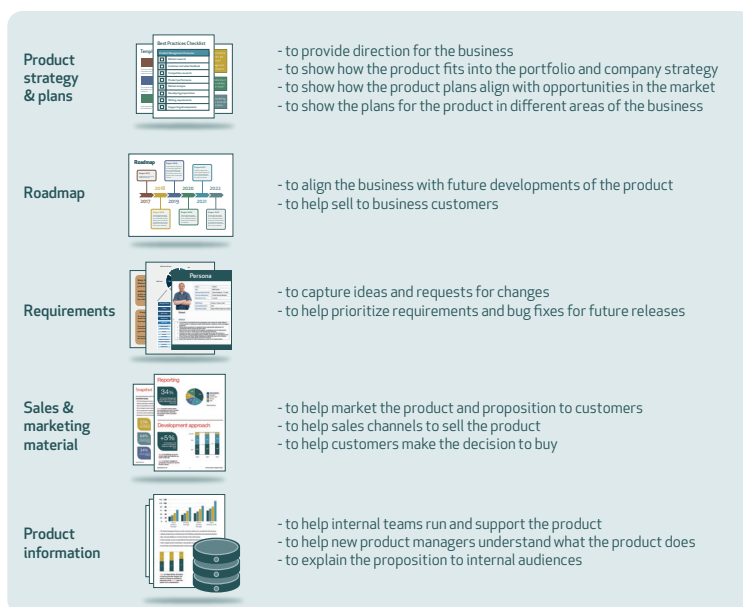


Fig.6 In-life product documentation

# CHECKLIST

waste and nor have your readers. So, think about the level of detail that is really required – can you do less? And, in what format? If you may need to present the information at some point in the future, produce a set of slides rather than a more formal document.

## A living document vs. a snapshot

Is what you're producing a 'living document' which you're committing to keeping up to date – or is it a snapshot of a situation at a particular point in time? Be clear to set expectations and use version control on living documents.

## Make it accessible

Is there a central repository (Intranet, SharePoint) where the document will be stored? Will people know how to find it and know if it is the latest, official version? If you have lots of data that needs to be sorted, e.g., a long list of requirements, is it a spreadsheet you need? Or, perhaps an online tool like JIRA, which would make it easy to share data across the business?

## Get someone to check it

Get another product manager, your boss, someone in marketing (anyone) to check your document before you publish it. It's amazing how many times you can read something and still miss obvious mistakes. If you must have people officially sign off your document, then try to keep the list of signatories as short as possible because it's a real time-waster trying to get lots of people signing off every small document update.

## The Product Book

One document we recommend all product managers maintain is called the Product Book. It's a set of slides (that you always keep up to date) with a summary of the key information about your product, e.g., the roadmap, reporting dashboard, proposition summary, strategy, plans, 'who does what' across the virtual product team.

It's the sort of information stakeholders love and means that as a product manager, you're always prepared (and look professional) when

"Within our platform we're constantly adding bits of functionality to make life easier for our end-users. Because they are relatively small, my challenge is how to tell the rest of the organization about them. I've started using 2-pagers as a halfway house between an externally produced brochure and the detailed 'quick reference' material we produce. They are basically for internal use but are professionally written with pictures and can be given to customers when needed. The feedback so far has been very positive."

**Peter Moors,**  
**Product Manager,**  
**G2 Speech B.V.**

dragged into a last-minute meeting to talk about your product. It's also a useful discipline for you (as a product manager) as it makes sure you're regularly checking on the status of your product across all areas. And, product team leaders love it because the Product Book can also be used as an emergency handover document if a product manager suddenly gets ill or leaves the business.

## Conclusion

It's naïve to believe that every product has a perfect set of documentation. However, as a product manager, good documentation saves you time and hassle because people refer to it rather than interrupt you to ask for your help.

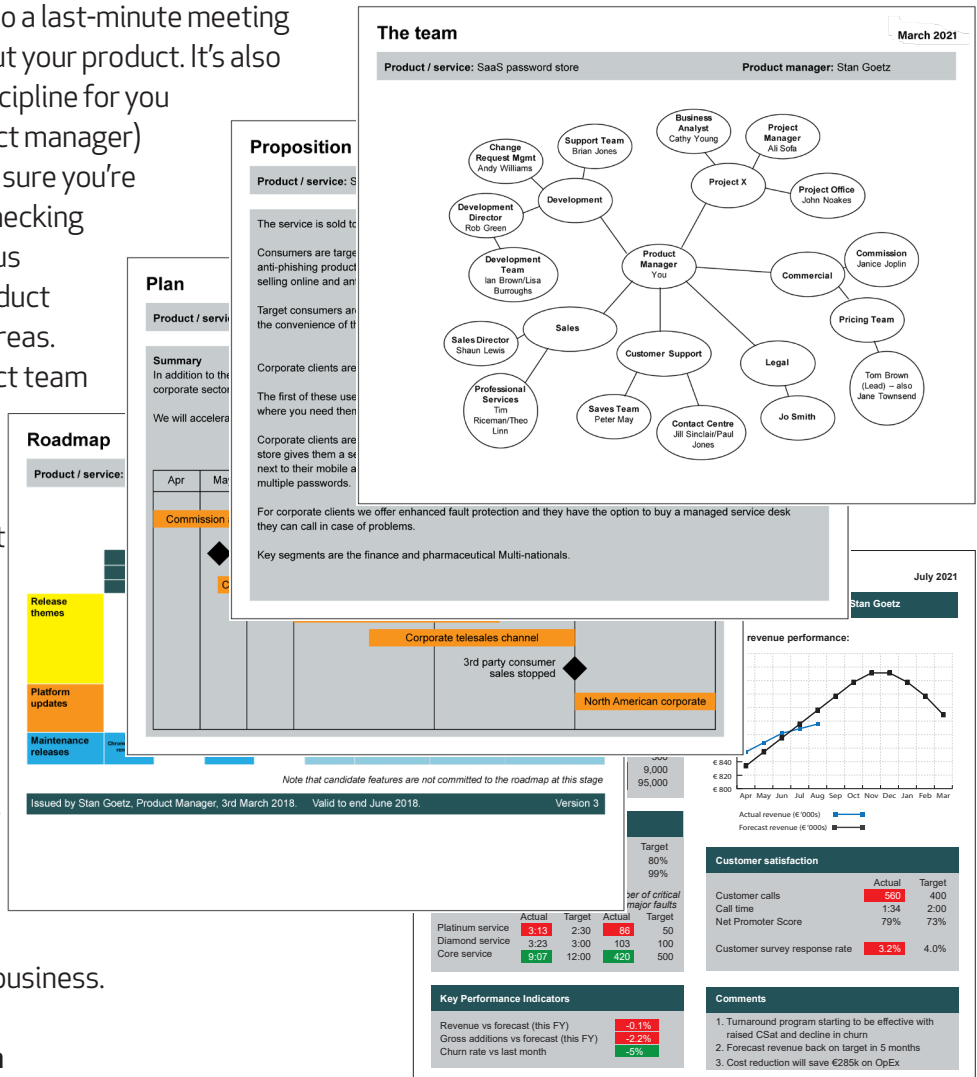


Fig.7 The Product Book

# Time well spent

Focus your and others' efforts on what matters

"When there's a demand on your time, ask yourself if you need to be involved and assess its urgency. I often skip a *stand-up* in favor of doing some research, delegate detailed questions to one of the more experienced developers and defer interruptions to deal with them all in one go so I can maintain focus."

**Joanne Butler,**  
Product Manager,  
Sword Active Risk

**Ask yourself if you have enough time to do everything you'd like for your product.** Chances are the answer is "No"!

And if that's the case, then you're not alone – our surveys frequently cite the challenge of having too much to do as one of the major issues for product managers.

Consider the product manager looking after an in-life product. Their responsibility is to try and ensure their product meets its commercial objectives and supports the company's strategy. That means covering lots of areas, including:

- Checking sales channels are effective
- Doing what you can to ensure that pricing is optimal
- Ensuring operational and technical problems are resolved
- Getting feedback from customers
- Looking for changes with the competition
- Adjusting marketing messages to keep them effective
- Managing the cost base

Even looking at this short list, it's clear product managers have lots to do! It's easy to get carried away with the noise – minor issues get flagged as disasters, or minor opportunities are hailed as the next great thing. And what's important changes over time. In the early stages of a product's life, customer acquisition and revenue are key, while later in the lifecycle, managing the cost base becomes more important.

## Focus

Some days it can look overwhelming, but you can break the problem down into three parts:

1. Take a step back to identify those issues that appear most important and urgent. A useful tool is the 2 x 2 matrix from Stephen Covey's 7 habits book, as shown in Fig. 8. Things that are urgent but not

important are the killers of time as they're sometimes tough to identify and resist.

2. Work out which important ideas have the potential to be most impactful. These are the ones on which to focus your effort.

3. Work out to what extent you need to be involved and to what extent the responsibility (or accountability) can be delegated to others. Your job is to ensure things get done; it is not necessarily to do them yourself.

Do these things well, and you can save yourself time and know that you're doing the best for your product.

	Urgent	Non-urgent
Important	Some - deliverables - crises - meetings	Preparation Planning Strategy Relationships Prevention
Not important	Some - interruptions - crises - emails - meetings	Many - emails - calls - pet projects - time wasters

## Getting help

To the third point above, it's important to get others in the organization to own the resolution of product issues. A good way to get started is to establish a virtual team of people with an interest in the product – sales, marketing, operations, development, support, finance, etc. Meet regularly to review the current situation and establish owners to resolve issues.

If you're faced with significant challenges and need a level of support that's just not going to come from your ad-hoc requests for help, then it might make sense to kick off a more formal Product Improvement Programme (PIP). Formalizing things can be a great way to get senior support, budget, and a re-energized and committed virtual team focused on resolving short-term challenges. The PIP will include representatives from relevant teams and only last as long as needed to resolve the operational, support, or performance challenge.

## Conclusion

The reality of the job is that we always have a to-do list that's too long and a range of things on which we can focus. Spend your time on what's going to give you the best payback for the effort expended. Make sure you leverage the expertise and capacity elsewhere in the business. And, don't forget the 80:20 rule – 80% of the success comes from 20% of well-focused effort.

Fig.8 Categorize demands on your time to focus on what's important

"Beware the 'wouldn't it be nice if ...' conversations unless you can tie the suggestion to solving a current issue or making the feature simpler to use or even more valuable to the user."

**Neil Chalk,**  
**Product Manager,**  
**15 Below**

# End-of-life

How to successfully withdraw a product

**At some point, every product comes to the end of its life – we're faced with the challenge of withdrawing it from the market.**

So how do you decide which products to withdraw? Well, would you describe any of your products as sick, lame, or lazy?

### **Sick, lame, or lazy?**

**Sick products** are ones that just aren't making any profit for the business.

**Lame products** are limping along but are in some way hampered by severe problems. It might be that the underpinning technology is no longer available, or the product is limited to a declining market. Maybe a local product in a multi-national is being replaced with a single global product to be used by all markets.

**Lazy products** are those which are doing OK but could do a lot better with more focus from the business. It may be that a marketing program to help sell the product will pay dividends. Or more investment in the roadmap will broaden the appeal to customers.

Regardless of whether your product is sick, lame, or lazy, a renewed focus may turn things around. But sometimes, the business case just doesn't work, and the long-term plan must be to withdraw the product from the market.

### **Cradle to grave**

In some industries, the full product lifecycle can be mapped out from start to end. An example is microchip manufacture, where end-of-life planning happens as part of each new product business case as it's clear the product will only last in the market for a short time.

In other businesses, products are launched and updated with little consideration given to when they will need withdrawing from the

"Choosing to EOL a product is a tough thing to manage. You have to create options for transitioning customers, support the internal teams who've put their time and energy into building the old product, and explain to management how you'll replace the current revenue stream."

**Denny Russell,**  
Co-Founder and  
Managing Partner,  
Venture Tactical



market. It all depends on product success. However, at some point, someone will conclude that a product is sick, lame, or lazy, and plans are made to withdraw it from the market.

## Planning for end-of-life

Just like product launching, there are a set of steps you need to follow when withdrawing a product. See Fig.9 below.

There is the point at which you stop doing any new development. Perhaps this is separated into when you decide not to develop new features and when you decide not to do bug fixes. Then there is the point at which you stop selling the product. That should be easy, but sometimes the message doesn't get through to Sales.

Then there is the point at which you no longer offer support and finally the point when you turn the product off (i.e., it stops working). This is also known as 'Remove from Service.' In readiness for this, some investment is often needed to update systems and to develop tools to help migrate customers to a new offering.

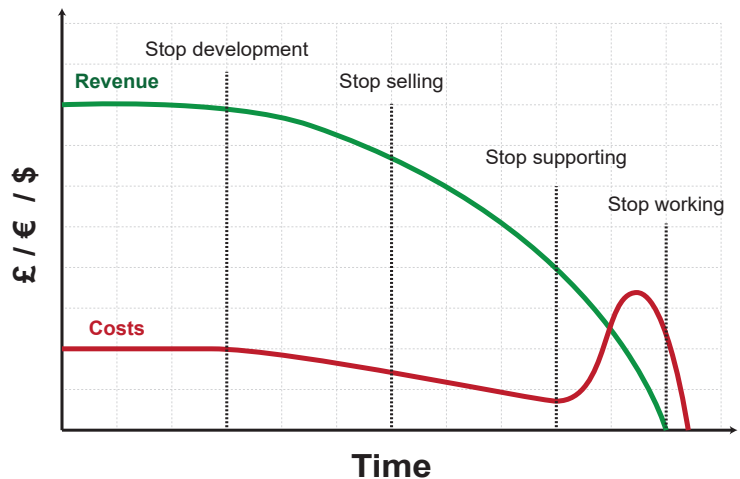


Fig.9. The financials at end-of-life

## What can happen

You communicate to your customers that you will be withdrawing the product in a year's time and that it will stop being supported in 6 months' time. This feels to you like plenty of notice. You hear nothing.

You stop support 6 months later, and your support team resources start to be allocated to other projects. But, the support calls still come in, and as you don't want to upset customers, you continue to help them.

Then you send out the final email saying that the product will stop working in 3 month's time. All hell breaks loose.

# CASE STUDY

Customers call in saying they never knew, they haven't made plans, and can you please extend the life for another year! Sales tell you that a major deal will be lost if you withdraw the product! The time, effort, and cost to close down the product become much larger than expected.

## Case study

One company we work with has a SaaS (Software as a Service) product supported on various browsers and sold into large enterprises. They decided to withdraw the product because they had just launched a new one to replace it. However, the new product didn't contain all the functionality that the old product contained. The other problem was it only worked on the latest version of Microsoft Explorer. They thought this would be fine as they believed that most of their customers were on the latest version anyway.

Once they started the end-of-life project, they discovered they had a set of customers in the public sector who were still using a version of Microsoft Explorer that was 6 years old. They couldn't update to the new product because other key systems they were using only worked on the old version of Explorer. Plus, these customers also relied on some obscure functionality that the new product didn't have.

The solution was to launch a new 'support' proposition. These public sector customers were willing to pay a large amount of money to continue to get support on the old product because the cost of the alternative, a redesign of their software and processes, was astronomical. The new support proposition for the old product became a very profitable revenue stream for the company.

## Migrating customers

Existing customers might be quite happy with your current product. They don't want to have to go to the effort of changing their existing solution – they see little benefit.

If you've got another product to migrate customers onto, then generally, things are much easier as you can sell the benefits of the new product. However, in some instances, you may not, and it becomes much tougher to tell customers they have to stop using the product.

One trick that companies use is to put up the price of support. Support costs typically go up anyway. No one wants to work on supporting an end-of-life product, so it becomes more difficult to find the resource. So companies hike up support costs. This gets the attention of customers who have to think about whether to pay or find an alternative solution.

## Wise words

"If you don't cannibalize yourself, someone else will."

Steve Jobs

## Cannibalization

Many companies face the issue of when to stop promoting their big profitable main product in favor of a newer, lower-cost alternative that they've just launched. Encouraging them to migrate to the new option keeps the customer with the company and stops them from moving to a competitor with a similar low-cost alternative.

The challenge is this: start too early, and you will forgo a lot of profitable revenue that is easy to collect. Start too late, and many of your customers will have already begun looking around for alternatives and may move to a competitor. When do you eat your own income stream to protect long-term revenues?



*Photo copyright  
Matt Hagan/  
Cairns Snake Catchers*

## End-of-life checklist

If you are planning to end-of-life a product, we have provided a short checklist of things to think about below. All can impact on the costs, risks, and timescales of product withdrawal.

- Start by getting a list of all customers, suppliers, and partners and talk to your legal and procurement teams to understand any contractual commitments you may have.
- Find out if there is any technology on which your product relies that will become obsolete before your planned withdrawal date.
- Think about when you can realistically shut down the relevant business support systems. You may find you need to update or renew contracts on supporting products and systems.
- Are there stocks of a physical product that you need to manage? Do some need to be retained to meet customer commitments? When can they be sold or scrapped?
- Is development required to build customer migration tools? Do you need to inform an industry regulator?

*"When replacing an old product, take the time to talk to some real users to see how they use it, how it fits with their processes and other IT systems. You don't want to start User Acceptance Testing on your new product only to find out that customers can't work without some functionality you'd thought wasn't important."*  
**Georgios Lekkas,**  
Chief Product Officer, Objectway

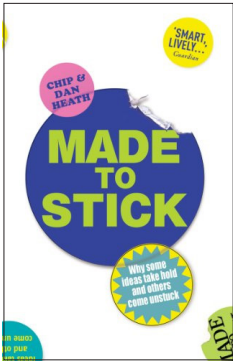
## Conclusion

At first glance, closing down a product can appear easy. But be warned, our experience is that it can be a lot more work than you expect, without the excitement and profile of working on something new.

# The Review

Reviews of great books for product managers

## Book Review



**Made to Stick** by  
Chip and Dan Heath  
(Arrow, 2008)

"To communicate a message, do you choose accuracy at the expense of accessibility or accessibility at the expense of accuracy. In many cases, this is a false choice - if a message can't be used to make predictions or decisions, then it is without value."

**Adapted from  
Made to Stick**

**Making sure your message of what's important gets into the minds of internal teams and prospective customers is key to success.** You'll never forget the opening urban legend in *Made to Stick* about the 'kidney heist,' just as you'll probably never eat another bag of popcorn once you've read how a scientist at the Center for Science in the Public Interest chose to present how it was made.

*Made to Stick* is a great read with lots of examples and tips on how to make sure your message doesn't get forgotten 5 minutes after it's been delivered. And, it doesn't just cover fun stories and urban legends – it has useful tips for any of us who need to get what some might consider boring information into people's heads.

The book summarizes the approach in two steps: (1) come up with the core idea – the intent you are aiming to achieve and (2) follow six principles to communicate the idea effectively. That's it!

Refining things down to the 'core idea' takes thought and time. Often we feel frustration at dumbing things down. But that's not what this is about – it's about using simple language to clearly articulate the **best** message that encapsulates what you're trying to communicate. An example is used from Southwest Airlines who are **THE low-fare airline**. Knowing this lets employees and customers do things that align with that core idea (and avoid things that don't).

The 6 principles of (1) Simplicity, (2) Unexpectedness, (3) Concreteness, (4) Credibility, (5) Emotions, and (6) Stories are what you'll use to communicate your idea. The book gives lots of examples of how to use these principles to make your message effective.

As it's a book on sticky ideas, you can imagine there's a wealth of great stories, it's a fun read, and you'll learn lots of tips to help you in your role.

# Have your view

Thank you to everyone who submitted quotes for this Journal. We're sorry there is not enough room for them all, but two of the best are shown below.

"I'm not a big golf fan, but I found myself watching the Open highlights recently. During the commentary, I was reminded of the adage, 'drive for show, putt for dough.'

Just like product management, I thought.

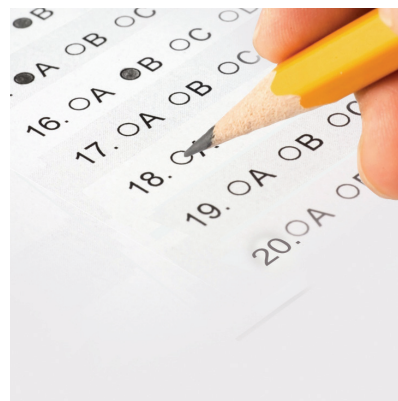
After a frantic build-up and months of effort, Product Managers typically get noticed at our product launch. The delivery of shiny new product collateral, briefing webinars, and early sales presentations hit the radar of most departments.

But the wise Product Manager knows that the bulk of profit is delivered at the middle of the product lifecycle. Focusing time and effort on keeping product marketing materials current and fresh, creating initiatives to keep sales teams engaged, and pushing maintenance costs down can extend the central portion of the lifecycle curve. This quiet effort can stroke a mediocre financial performer into a bonus buster."

**Rick Gelaky, Product Director, International SOS**

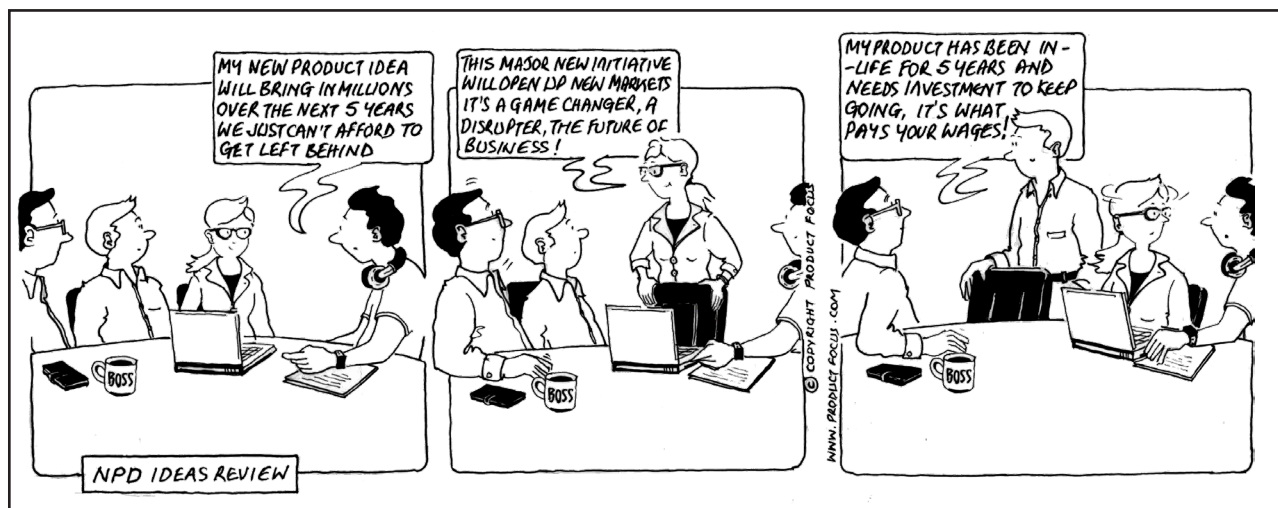
"Creating a cross-functional virtual team to look at an in-life product with issues, starts to drive ownership' of the product into the organizational functions beyond product management. This can be very effective when product management is a new function and/or not very mature."

**Matthew Vizor, Director, Advisor**



## Annual Survey

We use our survey to benchmark product management each year. Let us know if you'd like to take part. You can **download the latest results** from our website.



# The Insight

In-life – where the rubber hits the road



"It was once said to me by a PM Director – companies don't make money by conceiving, designing, or introducing products – they make money by selling products. We can't get away from that, and therefore in-life product management should be regarded as one of the most important disciplines in any company."  
**John Kelly,**  
Product Manager,  
Dell

**You may have heard the expression 'where the rubber hits the road.'** It's the point at which a theory or idea is put into practice.

It often seems that the people working on creating new products get all the glory, compared to those of us working on in-life products. New product development is exciting. It's a world of possibility. It's working on ideas that will potentially bring big rewards to the business. It's all about the potential upside with little talk of failure – which makes it easier to get people enthused and onboard.

It's also a chance to learn new stuff, get in front of senior management with good news stories and develop your career.

In-life, on the other hand, is where reality bites. Of course, things can go well, but often they don't. Let's be honest. Most products fail to hit their commercial targets. The job is about dealing with day-to-day problems, fire-fighting, and trouble-shooting. Perhaps the product is underperforming, or sales teams are focused on selling other products. So, you have to battle within the business to get things fixed.

In-life product management can feel like doing roadworks – a necessary evil. The job is tough and unglamorous. You often have to work hard with little recognition, get your hands dirty, and persuade unwilling people to do what's best for the product. But if you don't, everything grinds to a halt.

Who, in their right mind, would swap working on new products for working on in-life products?

Well, we would.

In-life products bring in the money – your role can have a huge impact.

And working in the trenches helps you develop a strong feeling about all the moving parts needed to deliver success. It's a great education in the realities of established business and not just start-up daydreams.

In many jobs, you will be working on new product development and in-life product management at the same time. Don't neglect the in-life part – it's where the rubber meets the road.



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