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# Welcome

## Leading the way for Product Managers

**As a product manager, at some point, you will work on a roadmap.** However, there is no single view of what a roadmap should be. Depending on your perspective, it can be a plan for development, a commitment made to a customer, or a vision for management about a product's evolution.

So what is a roadmap? A roadmap is a graphical way of showing where our product is heading. It's a living document used to steer and coordinate teams across the business. It's high-level with the ever-present danger that people will assume that what they want to see delivered is hidden in the detail. A roadmap is a plan … and yes, plans change.

Above all, a roadmap is a tool. And like any tool, it can be used well or badly. We hope the insights and tips in this Journal will help you use it well.

Good luck!

**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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# Roadmaps

## 5 steps to creating a perfect roadmap

**A product roadmap provides guidance on the future plans for a product.** It shows a vision of where we want to go.

However, roadmaps come in all shapes and sizes, and there is no single right way to do them. So, if you're new to the topic or want to check your approach, we've provided this 5 step guide to help you create a perfect roadmap.

### Step 1 – assume ownership

As a product manager, you should be driving the direction of the product. As the roadmap is the tool normally used to communicate the product release plans, you should own it. This means taking responsibility for communicating, updating, and managing it.

### Step 2 – understand the target audience

There are lots of different audiences for your roadmap. Each will want to get insights and make decisions based on what they see. Although based on a common set of data, you should present the roadmap

"I find that proactively explaining how the roadmap is managed, to both customers and internal stakeholders alike, helps keep the details honest, customers totally inside the tent and promotes BETA and early adopter programs. It also helps force the pace in terms of getting roadmaps ready and communicated, and can act as a rallying cry for the product teams."
**Derek Britton, experienced product management professional, and commentator**

| | | 20XX | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Apr** | **May** | **Jun** |
| | | *Roadmap   com* | |
| **Release themes** | | **Integrated cloud** Auto backup user config and data **Reliability** Single site 99.9% uptime Dual site 99.99% uptime | |
| **Platform updates** | | **Cloud setup** XX VMWare services hosted by partner YY Dual sourced GBit internet | |
| **Maintenance releases** | Fix Chrome browser render+ | | 1 maintenan release |

Issued by Ben Jones, Product Manager. 3rd Mar 20XX.

differently to each audience to best meet their (and your) needs.

Development will want to ensure they are ready for what's coming up. They'll want to understand the long-term direction and the detail of the requirements underpinning each release.

Management, internal departments, and external partners will all want to make decisions on investment priorities and plans. They will want to know the rationale behind each release, its cost, when it will be marketed, and launch plans.

In Business to Business (B2B), customers will want to make buying decisions based on what's coming along in the future and when it is targeted for delivery. Sales will want to use this roadmap to help clinch deals. You should be careful what goes on the roadmap for these audiences, as customers may share information with your competition or ask for it to be stapled to the back of the contract. This roadmap is normally a subset of the full roadmap.

You should be clear on how version management between different roadmaps works. Explaining the differences, how often each version

"Roadmap creation is an ongoing process, not a one-off event... as are the steps it feeds into – project selection and resource allocation."
**Alexander Koelbl, Portfolio Manager, Vodafone**

| X | Q3 | Q4 | 20YY H1 | 20YY H2 | 20ZZ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| mitments | | | Candidates | | |
| | **Admin by smartphone** Security and registration functions managed on smartphone | **US compliance** Approval from US regulator **Language support** Japanese, Korean, Russian, Simplified Chinese | **Rapid setup** Pre-loaded templates Pre-delivery integration Hit team from Prof Services | **Tailored variants** Create versions of product optimized for niches in finance, pharmaceuticals, and energy industries | **End user mobile apps** Support Android, WinM Phone, Android **Laptop support** **Resilient cloud** |
| | **Full protocol support** Protocols XX and YY versions ZZ supported | | **Database upgrade** Oracle 16 Hardened MySQL **Cloud upgrade** | **Re-architect** Interprocess messaging layer optimized to handle 10x message types | **Alternate cloud** Cloud infrastructure update for improved resilience |
| ce | | 1 maintenance release | 2 maintenance releases | 2 maintenance releases | 4 maintenance releases |
| Valid to end Jun 20XX | | | *Note: Candidates are not committed to the roadmap at this stage* | | |

Fig.1 Traditional roadmap example

will be updated and how it will be communicated is an important part of managing your stakeholders.

| Product name: | Travel service | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Product Vision: | Provide the best comprehensive travel booking experience online | | |
| Product objectives | Increase the number of registered users by 5% during Q3<br>Increase the number of combined purchases, 5% of all purchases are for multiple services in Q4<br>Decrease the number of abandoned purchases by 10% by end Q4 | | |

| Timeframe | Now | Next | Future |
|---|---|---|---|
| Themes | **Let's go somewhere** | **Show my perfect options** | **Don't waste my time** |
| | Enable customers to buy a basic travel service | Provide better options to users to optimize conversions | Minimize the effort to purchase |
| | | **Show me some love** | **What else might I want?** |
| | | Encourage registration and return | Make combined purchases easier to find and select travel options |

| Issued by: | Sarbani Pal (portfolio manager) | Issue date: | Mar 3, 20xx | Valid until: | Jun 30, 2011 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Fig.2 Agile roadmap example

## Step 3 – decide on the format and tool

There are many different formats that can be used for roadmaps. The example in Fig 2. is often used for Agile software development when committing to dates isn't something you need to do. It links the product vision and objectives to the themes you're working on now, what's next in the pipeline and what you are hoping to do in the future. Whether you need to put dates on your roadmap will depend on your context. Product roadmaps rarely pan out as planned, and so if you can avoid committing to dates, you have much more flexibility to build what's possible and makes business sense at the time – the essence of an iterative agile approach.

However, in some business contexts, you have to put dates on your roadmap, for example, in B2B markets where there are contractual commitments with powerful customers where success is critical for your business. Another example is legal/regulatory changes with punitive penalties for the business if dates are missed (remember GDPR).

Companies often have a standard format for roadmaps, so it's easier for all stakeholders to understand what's being planned. If there isn't

one in your company, then why not propose yours, based on what you read here, to facilitate better communication across the business?

Most roadmaps are created from requirements documented in an Excel spreadsheet and then drawn on PowerPoint slides. These tools are familiar, flexible, and widely available to writers and reviewers.

However, there are many other tools that support roadmapping. These are most useful when you're managing complex products with extensive developments. In our article on roadmapping tools on p.18, we list different tools and ideas to help your select the best.

### Step 4 – gather input and create themes

You will probably already have ideas for what should go on the roadmap from talking to customers, Sales, and Development. You may also have an Excel spreadsheet with a long list of requirements. You need to filter, prioritize and package these ideas into a series of major themes to put on your roadmap.

We suggest high-level themes because it makes communication simpler and allows you to keep certain details vague. It also helps to limit scope themes, and then it's easy to push back. The use of themes, combined with broad delivery windows as you move into the future, helps you to be more confident that you can deliver what's shown on the roadmap.

The trick at this stage is to have a process that you can publicly share for making decisions on what goes onto the roadmap, i.e., on what basis are judgments taken. This helps to keep discussions with stakeholders focused on the decision-making process rather than becoming a fight about their favorite features. See our article on Ideas and how to prioritize them on p.14.

It often helps to engage in some shuttle diplomacy when you're trying to finalize a roadmap. Hold separate meetings with key stakeholders to understand their priorities and concerns and get their buy-in. "I've got a draft set of priorities – will you help me refine them?" When you collaborate with your stakeholders, it makes life easier as they feel some ownership of the roadmap – it becomes partly theirs. "I'll present our priorities to management next Tuesday."

"Never tell the sales force your launch date until you are certain you will hit that date. Ideally, you should only be one sales cycle away. This is the principal difference between a product that's launched and one that escapes."
**David Groves, Director of Product Management, Azzurri Communications Ltd**

### Step 5 – communicate with a call to action

Ideally, you will get to present your roadmap to the target audience in person. However, this may not always be possible, which is why it is important to clearly set expectations regarding the accuracy of timings and content on your slides.

Whenever the roadmap is presented, you should have a call to action, e.g., a request to provide feedback to you or to agree to the roadmap plan.

For B2B customers and sales teams, describing themes and features as 'candidates' is an excellent way to provoke this. These are items that are under consideration, and if there is sufficient market demand, they may be committed to the roadmap. It's a great way for Sales to have a conversation with customers about what they would like in the future and for you to get useful feedback.

Some product managers run a quarterly meeting with each of the suppliers who provide the building blocks for their product. They go through their supplier's roadmaps to spot any future changes that could have an impact and which they need to plan for.

### Conclusion

Creating a roadmap is part of an ongoing process of managing and regularly updating your product plans. If you follow this guide and do a professional job, your credibility and influence will rise.

Good luck with your roadmapping!

|   | Tip | Why |
|---|-----|-----|
| 1 | Be vague on dates, e.g., quarters, half, or full years | This gives you more wriggle room if things slip |
| 2 | Use high-level themes and avoid detail (or link to somewhere where you can change the details behind the scenes) | It's high level enough to show the vision but allows you to drop features and still declare victory |
| 3 | Publish with a version number and in PDF | It makes it more difficult for Sales to alter and is portable across many platforms |
| 4 | Put a caveat as a footnote such as: "Correct at date of issue, details may change, contact [product manager] for latest version" An expiry date ensures out-of-date versions are not used | Limits the damage from people using out-of-date material for their planning |
| 5 | Where possible, align with what's 'hot' in your company or in the market | Gives you a bigger chance of garnering support within the business |

# Masterclass
## Advanced ideas in roadmap strategy

**In the first article, we looked at how to build a roadmap.** However, there are many other ideas and related topics that can help you when working with roadmaps.

The first looks at deciding how often you release a product and what to include.

### Frequency of releases

As a principle, small releases shipped more often help reduce interdependencies and give you more flexibility.

In the world of Software as a Service (SaaS), code updates are often made instantly available to all users. However, for many products, a key decision is whether to have regular release dates at certain points in the year or wait until something new is finished.

Many companies decide to wait until they are happy with the quality of a major new release before shipping. Minor enhancements and bug fixes are made available whenever they are ready.

Often what drives the release of a major new development is the need to take advantage of the promotional opportunities at a major industry event, e.g., the GSM World Congress or CeBIT. In other industries, for example, tools for accountants, a new release must be delivered before the start of the financial year to reflect any changes in legislation.

Many companies prefer the predictability of regular release dates, for example, once a year for a major launch and quarterly for minor updates. These 'time-boxed' deliveries mean that features are often cut to make sure that dates are hit. Customers that need to go through a cycle of evaluation, testing, and rollout for each release can appreciate the ability to plan that this gives them. But they can also complain if there are too many releases they have to deal with.

> "The roadmap is an undervalued sales tool – in wholesale telecoms. Differentiation of near-commodity products is difficult, but arming your sales team with a roadmap and delivering against it sends out two fundamental messages to customers: we are continuing to be progressive, and we deliver against our promises. These may be all that's needed to swing the deal."
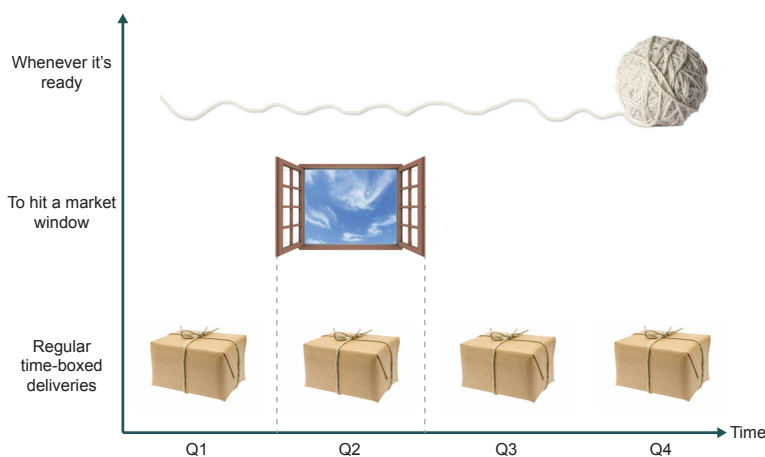> **Jonathan Wright, VP Products, Interoute**

Fig.3 Timing your product release

"Roadmaps are especially tricky in solution sales. We want to make sure the customer knows that they are on a good journey with us, BUT we want to make sure we 'sell what's on the truck', not futures."
**Jamie Clifton, Product Manager, Bridgehead Software**

A new release gives Sales something to talk about and creates an opportunity for customers to buy from us. So, are frequent releases a good thing? Actually, a balance needs to be struck between the benefits of more frequent releases and the internal cost and customer 'pain' of taking each release. Internal costs are incurred with testing, releasing, training staff, and marketing a release, as well as in supporting multiple different versions 'in the field'. Be aware of the commercial, deployment, testing, training, and support impact of each release for your customer. If you can minimize these, then you're in a position to increase the pace of releases.

## Minimum Viable Product

The idea of the Minimum Viable Product (MVP) comes from the world of start-ups and entrepreneurs. In the early days of a new start-up, no one really knows whether an idea will be successful or what version of the idea will create a viable business. To get to a sustainable business, they have to try out different ideas, learn quickly and evolve their product and business model. They need a strategy that allows them to screen and refine product ideas quickly and as cheaply as possible. So they launch with MVPs which are the simplest products that will address the customer's need and that the customer will buy.

An underlying assumption is that the only really valid feedback is from customers who part with their hard-earned cash. Questionnaires, focus groups, and customer interviews are fine, but none demonstrates real customer behavior... what a customer says they will do and what they actually do can be very different. A typical tactic is A/B testing, where two versions of the same product are sold at the same time and the most successful one taken forward.

The idea of the MVP can drive our roadmap. Keeping launches to the bare minimum ensures we don't develop stuff that customers don't want and means we get to market early and start learning. This is particularly relevant when we're launching a new product in a new market.

When the market is unknown and uncertain, the challenge for product management is to explore options quickly to get to a sustainable business model. Many start-ups never get to this point and go bust trying. However, once established, the focus of product management is about optimizing what we've got. In a growing market, this can mean grabbing share, and expanding quickly. In a falling market, it can mean cutting costs to maximize profitability. And, as we get to end-of-life, we need to validate if a product is still viable and look for alternative products and technologies that can meet customer needs.
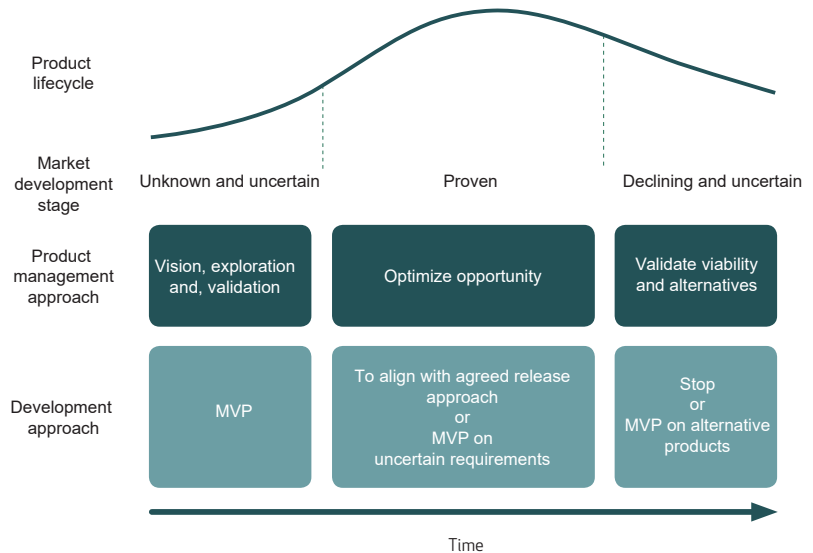


Fig.4 The focus of product management at different stages of the market

## Launch dates

As part of the roadmap plan, each release will be given a target date. This will be fairly precise for things in the near term and vaguer for releases further out. However, it is important to be clear about what these dates actually mean. For major launches, making a distinction between different parts of the launch process can be a powerful product management tool. It helps customers understand the product and get ready to purchase as soon as the product is fully available.

We use the terms 'ready to tell' (the market), 'ready to trial', 'ready to sell', and 'ready for service'. If you work in B2C (Business to Consumer),

some of these dates might coincide, but if you work in B2B (Business to Business) on products with long sales cycles, these may be many months apart.
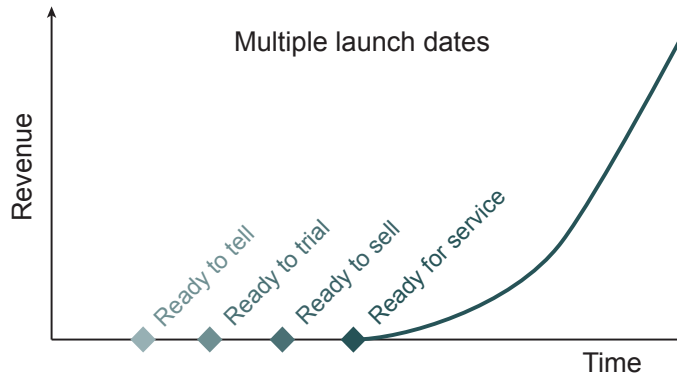
'Ready to tell' is the point at which you can announce the product to the market. There is pressure to go early in order to maximize PR value and catch the eye of possible early-adopter customers. It may be many months before development is complete, so you need a certain level of confidence that everything will go to plan.

'Ready to trial' is the point at which you ask customers if they would like to trial the product. It has to be working at some level, but there may be elements (e.g., billing or support) that are still not ready. The sooner you can run trials, the sooner you can get feedback to make fixes, and the sooner prospective customers can kick off their purchasing process.

At 'ready to sell', the product can be sold to customers. If there are long ramp-up times to set up or customers are willing to go on a waiting list, this may be some time before the product is ready to use. The 'ready for service' date is the point at which the product is fully operational. This is usually the milestone used on roadmaps.

### Budget buckets

One of the challenges when planning releases is allocating budget across different types of development. It's tough to prioritize between housekeeping improvements such as clearing up technical debt (e.g., fixing underlying issues such as platform scalability or performance) and customer requests, bug fixes, or new roadmap features.

While we can attempt a ROI (Return on Investment) comparison of these different investment choices, it's often just not possible. For example, replacing a technology that is obsolete might generate no new sales but is essential in keeping the product going.

Fig.5 The meaning of dates on the roadmap must be clear

"In the high-tech and Agile world, roadmaps are more important than ever. We must make choices and live them. Aligning operations in different functions is vital to success. The roadmap is the enabler for alignment."
**Magnus Billgren, Strategy Activator & Founder, Tolpagorni Product Management AB**

Many companies find the best way of handling this is to allocate budget across different strategic investment buckets. New ideas are associated with the relevant bucket enabling a sensible comparison between similar types of projects to determine priorities.
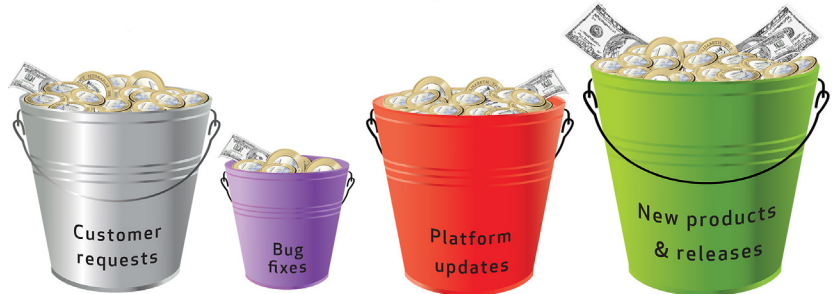


Fig.6 Allocate budget to similar types of work

## Different types of roadmap

The roadmap format is a great way to communicate insights on any relevant changes expected in the market.

You can show what is expected with technology trends, competitor moves, or regulatory changes. See Fig 7. below.

It can make sense to have separate roadmaps for each topic, but if the important stuff can be distilled down to fit a single page, it will make it easier to use.

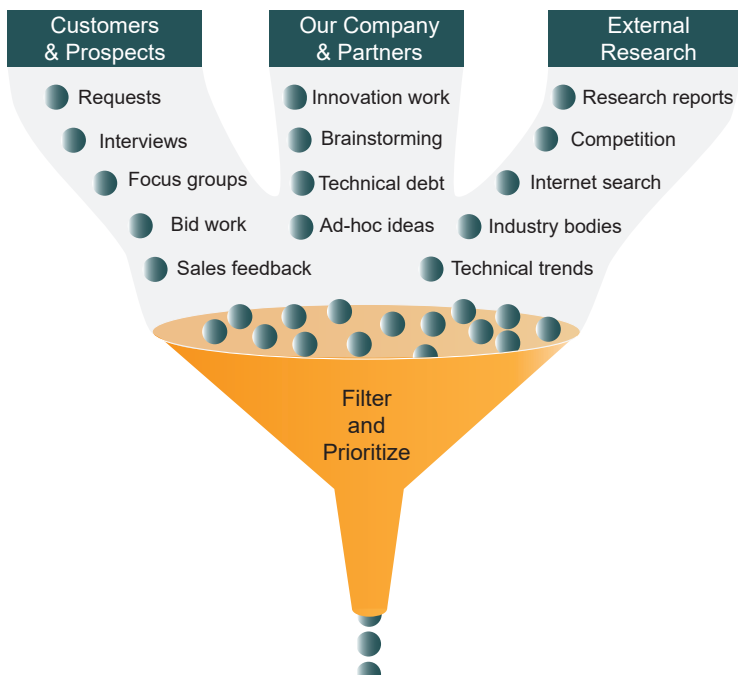| | 20XX | | | 20YY | | 20ZZ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Q1 | Q2 | H2 | H1 | H2 | |
| Partner insight | | ◆ *multiple enhancements* Release XX extends mobile app support | | ◆ Release ZZ overlaps our cloud offer | | ◆ End of partner agreement |
| Competitor insight | ◆ *Competitor A Initial cloud offer* | ◆ *Competitor B integrates with partner Y* | | ◆ *Competitor A Global enterprise cloud* | | |
| Technology trends | ▲ Consultation on interface standard | ▲ SSD achieves price / capacity parity | | ▲ Wizard based config to half deployment cost | | ▲ Technology YY gains widespread adoption |
| Regulatory changes | | ◆ Regulatory consultation starts on ZZZ | ◆ Regulator recommendation | ◆ Standard XX obsolesence | | ◆ Standard XX obsolesence |

Fig. 7 Roadmap relevant things in the market

# Ideas
## Sources and how to prioritize

**As a product manager, it is unlikely that you will ever be short of ideas to add to your roadmap.** There is usually much more that you want to do than can be delivered. This makes it vitally important that you pick the right ideas to take forward.

### Sources of ideas

Fig. 8 below shows the wide variety of sources of new ideas for your product. Getting information directly from customers, requests from within the business, and market research are the three main areas. We often call these ideas 'requirements,' although at this stage, they have not made it onto the roadmap.

These candidate ideas will come to you at different times, and you need a process to capture them ready for the point at which you can do the work to assess them properly. Most product managers use simple tools like Excel and Word to collate these ideas.



| Customers & Prospects | Our Company & Partners | External Research |
|---|---|---|
| Requests | Innovation work | Research reports |
| Interviews | Brainstorming | Competition |
| Focus groups | Technical debt | Internet search |
| Bid work | Ad-hoc ideas | Industry bodies |
| Sales feedback | | Technical trends |

Filter and Prioritize

Fig. 8 Gather, filter, and prioritize requirements

### Dealing with requests

One of the biggest challenges is having to manage the variety of different requests that come through to you as a product manager. Many of the requests will be from senior people, making them very compelling and difficult to say 'no' to. If your CEO asks, then a good

Fig.9 You can't please everyone

Diagram wording adapted from Slideshare by **Bruce McCarthy, Chief Product Person, Reqqs**

response is, "If you want that, what should we take off?" For example, if Sales say you need to develop a new feature for their customer to win the business, you have to make a decision based on the development costs, potential revenue, whether other customers might need the same feature, and if it aligns with your current roadmap.

Usually, you'll make the decision about whether a request goes on the roadmap, but some requests will be high-profile, and their inclusion or exclusion will be controversial. For these, it's likely you will make a recommendation to your management, who will resolve things through high-level negotiations across the business.

# INSIGHT

## The prioritization process

After you've gathered a set of candidate ideas, you need a process to decide which will make it onto the roadmap.

This can be hard as a big backlog of requests is difficult to manage, and stakeholders may have wildly differing views on goals and priorities. Also, after you've decided on the roadmap, dissatisfied stakeholders may argue for changes at a time when you want to focus on delivery.

To simplify things and get everyone aligned, you need to establish clear criteria with which to assess roadmap candidates. Typically this is done by assessing them based on their value and the cost and risk to develop. The table below shows different attributes that we have seen used.

| Value examples | | Cost or Risk examples | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Revenue | 1 | Cost (Dev, marketing...) |
| 2 | Cost of delay | 2 | Technical risk (complexity, skills...) |
| 3 | Aligned with release theme | 3 | Delivery risk (resources...) |
| 4 | Profit (e.g. Net Present Value) | | |
| 5 | Relief of customer pain | | |
| 6 | Validates learning | | |
| 7 | Essential to customer win | | |
| 8 | Relieves technical debt | | |

Fig. 9 Options for how to measure what's important

You'll need to decide on the criteria that make sense in your business and on their relative importance. It's worth getting key stakeholders involved at this stage so they are brought into the process.

After that, you need to decide how to score things. A simple system that rates the candidate feature against criteria and scores them 0 – 5 often works best. The relative importance of criteria is shown by a percentage figure used to weight the score.

| Feature | Value | | | | | Cost or Risk | | | | | Priority score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Revenue | | Theme alignment | | Score | Cost | | Delivery risk | | Score | Value / Cost or risk |
| | 60% weighting | | 40% weighting | | | 70% weighting | | 30% weighting | | | |
| Candidate 1 | 4 | 2.4 | 3 | 1.2 | 3.6 | 4 | 2.8 | 3 | 0.9 | 3.7 | 1.0 |
| Candidate 2 | 2 | 1.2 | 2 | 0.8 | 2 | 5 | 3.5 | 4 | 1.2 | 4.7 | 0.4 |
| Candidate 3 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 2 | 1.4 | 1 | 0.3 | 1.7 | 0.2 |
| Candidate 4 | 5 | 3.0 | 5 | 2.0 | 5 | 3 | 2.1 | 2 | 0.6 | 2.7 | 1.9 |

Fig.10 An approach to calculating priorities

It does mean doing a little bit of work in advance, e.g., mini-business cases, on each candidate feature, to understand them in enough depth to make a valid assessment. You should include colleagues from development to help you and to get them bought into the process.

Once scored, candidates can be prioritized for inclusion on the roadmap, and they can also be charted to help communicate priorities and quickly evaluate options. See Fig. 11. Those that fall in red are undesirable; those that fall in amber are low priority and will also normally be discarded. Those in the upper right area have the strongest potential. Seeing candidates on a graph helps you make the trade-off between their value to the business versus their cost or risk.
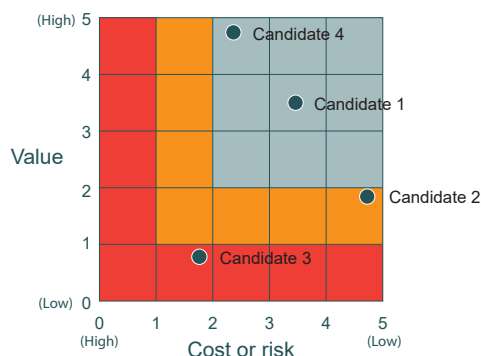


Fig.11 Priorities being considered for the roadmap

You can find you have similarly scored features. Often this is because you've overcomplicated things with too many assessment criteria – if so, remove those with the lowest weighting. Also, you may find that your weightings are too evenly distributed – if so, ensure you're really reflecting the business priorities.

## Conclusion

A key part of your role as a product manager is to be an expert compromizer. This means being able to make trade-offs and judging the relative importance of roadmap options. It's about making objective decisions. It's about deciding what's best for the company as a whole after taking a balanced view. Having a standard process to prioritize roadmap candidates makes it easier for you to explain and justify the decisions you make and recommend.

# Tools
## What's the best option for you?

**Many of us get by with spreadsheets and presentation tools to collate, filter, prioritize requirements and present our roadmaps.** But if you're working on a complex product, are inundated with new ideas, or are working across different locations and time zones, it may be time to adopt one of the many tools designed to help.

The decision to use a tool will be driven by the amount of work to do, the number of people involved, and the importance of the roadmap. Do the risks of getting things wrong justify the investment of time and money in buying and learning a new tool?

You can download our Top 10 Recommended Product Management Tools from the resources section on our website.

There are tools specifically for generating ideas and others specifically for prioritizing requirements that help in the early stages of the roadmapping process. Some of them can take you all the way through from creating ideas to generating your roadmap.

We've no affiliation with the top 10 vendors below, and most offer a free trial so that you can check them out for yourself.
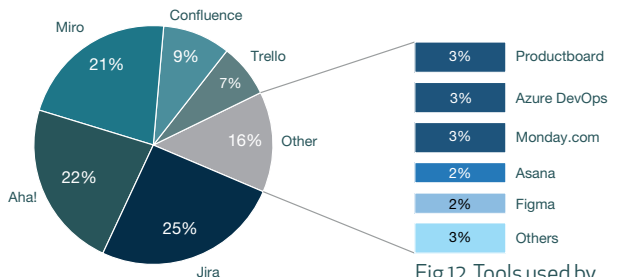


Fig.12 Tools used by product managers to create roadmaps

## Priority features of tools to help you roadmap

**Organize all requirements in one place** so they can be edited, viewed, and managed together.

**Make it a trivial task to grab snippets from everywhere** so that required information from emails, blogs, web pages, survey answers, etc., can be pulled into the tool and accessed at a later date.

**Enable introduction of mock-ups and workflows or navigation paths** as documents that illustrate a feature. These make it far easier to communicate a requirement than a ream of text.

---

**Regardless of which tool you're evaluating, here are six things to consider:**

1. Who's going to need access, and what do they want from it?

2. Will the tool fit with your existing processes, or do you have to change to fit with the tool?

3. Will it scale for all the users who'll need access?

4. Does it do what you want but is not so overladen with features that it's difficult to use and will scare people off?

5. Will it work on the devices used (PCs, tablets, etc.)?

6. Does it capture the information you need and not demand lots of extra stuff that puts people off using the tool?

---

**Support feedback and traceability of requirements** so when progress is completed (or abandoned), they can be taken off the list and stakeholders informed.

**Prioritization** should be a core feature and provide an objective way of ranking and grouping roadmap candidates.

**Communication to stakeholders.** All stakeholders, not just the product manager, should have access to the roadmap content and planning. These should show a level of detail that is appropriate to their needs.

**Make the output visually stunning** to draw in readers who'll be more likely to absorb and critique its content.

"Analysts report that as many as 71% of software projects that fail do so because of poor requirements management, making it the single biggest reason for project failure." **Christopher Lindquist, Fixing the Requirements Mess, CIO Magazine**

# The Review

Reviews and feedback for product managers

## Book Review

Product Roadmaps Relaunched: How to Set Direction while Embracing Uncertainty by C. Todd Lombardo, Bruce McCarthy, Evan Ryan, and Michael Connors (O'Reilly, 2017)

**Product Roadmaps Relaunched brings a new perspective to the debate on roadmaps.**

The book is very welcome given the increasing criticism from some parts of the product community, saying that roadmaps don't work anymore. Organizations that have embraced truly agile development struggle with the idea of having a long-term plan while customers and senior leaders want to see where the product is going. Are roadmaps a concrete plan or a guide? Should they have firm dates and releases on them?

The authors behind the book have recognized these issues and captured the best practice guidance on how to balance these competing demands. The book covers both the high-level philosophy for roadmapping and practical advice on what to include. Core elements and optional additions are illustrated with examples to make it easy to imagine how you would use the approach.

To adopt this new roadmapping approach, you might also need to relaunch how your organization looks at them. To educate and evangelize how this new approach will fulfill the need for guidance without the often criticized constraints on solutions and dates. The book helps with these areas too.

Blast off and (re)launch your roadmap to help guide your products to a better and more successful future.

# Have your view

**We've had thousands of people attend our product management and product marketing training course.**
We're often asked … well … what else can you offer?

We know that every business has a slightly different view of the roles of product management and product marketing. We think that makes it important to be able to apply product management ideas and best practice to whatever situation you find yourself in. There is no one right way to do something – you need a big tool bag and to be able to pull out the best tool for the job that needs doing.

If you complete our course, we have an exam that will lead to our Product Management Certification. This certification demonstrates a level of competence and ability to apply product management concepts and best practice to real-world situations.

If you lead (or aim to lead) a product management team, department, or function, why not learn the skills you need on our Leading Product Management course?

Finally, if you're leading product management and want to check how you're doing, we offer our Product Management Review. This is a structured analysis of your product management by Product Focus as independent experts. The output is a set of practical recommendations on how to set up product management if you're just starting off or, with an existing team, a roadmap of recommendations to help you move to world class performance.

# The Insight

## Do Agile and roadmaps conflict?



**Wise Words**

"In preparing for battle, I have always found that plans are useless but planning is indispensable."
**Dwight D. Eisenhower, US Army General, and 34th President**

**How can you do a roadmap when what you plan to develop is constantly changing?**

Agile approaches like Scrum or Kanban support fast-changing requirements by delivering through a series of short development cycles constrained by time or capacity. Product managers maintain a backlog of the highest priority requirements, and those at the top are worked on in the next cycle. This backlog is constantly being changed. That's the beauty of the Agile approach. You can change direction based on better knowledge, customer feedback, and competitor moves. You can evolve to the perfect product.

Roadmaps appear to be the opposite of this. They look into the future and show what will be delivered and when. They are a plan with milestones that are communicated across the organization and to customers. Some say they make promises that can't be delivered and limit your ability to pursue new ideas.

But **this is a fallacy.**

A roadmap is a high-level plan – major themes rather than specific features. It communicates the vision that drives the development and strategic direction of the product. The 'Epics' of Agile become the themes delivered on your roadmap. Keep these at a high level, and you retain the flexibility to change or cut the features that make up each one and still claim victory. And if a great new idea comes along – well, plans can change. And in most organizations, roadmaps are vital to help everyone plan.

Unlike the dream of pure Agile, most products aren't developed and immediately launched to customers. There are other people and resources within and outside the business that have to be lined up. Business cases have to be developed. System updates planned in. Customer commitments met. Training sessions booked. Trials run. These all have to be planned in advance, and the roadmap is the tool that drives this activity.

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