

How To Create a Successful Product Roadmap

Before creating a product roadmap, you need to be clear on what the **business goals are for the year.**

Product management is a business strategy role, this means that everything that a product team works on, whether it's building a new product from inception, a new feature, or a minor enhancement, must relate to business goals.

Business strategy is when management defines the steps that the business will take to accomplish particular objectives. Product strategy is how the product(s) will evolve to assist the business in accomplishing these objectives.

How does a product manager define which initiatives to work on, problems to solve, and features to build?

Again, everything should tie back to the business goals. Before thinking about what to work on, determine the "why" and how it may, or may not, drive business objectives.

If the goal is retention, then focus on initiatives that support retention. The same applies if the goal is increasing sales, or a successful expansion.

Product [roadmaps are created](#) with input from multiple stakeholders, internal and external.

A stakeholder is anyone who has direct or indirect influence on a product.



Internal stakeholders are the individuals inside of a business. For example members of the senior management team, designers, and developers. For custom internal tools, internal stakeholders can also be the users of the product.



External stakeholders are those who can influence the product however they do not work within the business. These include customers, industry analysts, trade unions, and development agencies.

Multiple stakeholders **provide feedback** throughout the [product lifecycle](#) on areas of improvement. This can be via enhancement requests or feature requests.

Product managers should have **one central location to store this feedback**. Keeping this feedback with details on who requested it, why, priority, and more.

Based on the main goals for the year and resources available, product managers then prioritize which initiatives to work on ensuring that they relate to the key business goals and the amount of resources available.

As the roadmap is crafted internal stakeholders should receive opportunities to share their thoughts. **This is important because product managers do not work in silos.**

The design and development team should have their input, sales also needs a chance to weigh in based on the discussions they're having with prospects, and customer success will share their thoughts from feedback that they have received from customers.

These teams are free to share their thoughts. However, with limited resources and varying opinions there must be one person to make the final decision on what goes in the roadmap, and what is taken out.

This person is not the CEO, it is the product manager.

6 Steps to Creating a Product Roadmap

- 1  Store stakeholder input throughout the year in the product backlog with detailed notes
- 2  Clarify the business goals and determine the product goals for the year
- 3  Gather a list of items from the product backlog that tie to the business goals
- 4  Prioritize product backlog items with key stakeholders (understanding value and effort)
- 5  Place these items on a [roadmap template](#) and share with your team
- 6  Revisit the roadmap throughout the year to ensure that it is updated and modifications are shared

7 key ingredients of successful product roadmap

Want a roadmap that aligns your team members, inspires them, clarifies expectations, and can be used to help your company reach its goals?

If your answer is yes then pay close attention to the following advice.

1

Do not stick to feature based roadmaps

Don't get us wrong, feature based roadmaps are beneficial depending on the need.

There is a time and a place to communicate features, and that is when you fully understand the problem that you are solving

Unfortunately, however, many treat feature based roadmaps as to-do lists; all of the items that need to be delivered by a certain date.

And it's only natural that they are used and interpreted as a project plan. With each item delivered, stakeholders mentally cross

it off of their list and await the next one. Feature based roadmaps are feature-focused, not **outcome focused**. They often jump to the solution without fully understanding the customer's needs or outcomes

Product teams need to be objective oriented; don't simply build features for the sake of output, but rather to align with the goals of your business and help customers achieve their ultimate goal.

How does one get away from sticking to feature based roadmaps? Start by beginning with the end in mind and then work backwards.

What specific objectives do you want to accomplish at the end of the year or quarter, and how will the product evolve as a result?

Also, focus on themes rather than simply features.

New features are always nice but customers want an overall experience that will make their lives easier.

Focus on the bigger picture. It's not about the number of features you have but rather the quality of your features and how they benefit customers.

2

Keep the roadmap up to date

Product teams are successful when their cross-functional teams are successful.

A great product manager acts as a quarterback for their team, giving them the tools, information, and support that they need to be successful.

A successful product is a team activity.

While the product team, with the assistance of design and development, may build the product, the marketing team shares it with the world and the sales team sells it. And of course other teams play a part as well.

Stakeholders both internal and external rely on the roadmap so that they can know what's coming, manage resources, and plan their work so that they can be successful.

So along with the formal roadmap presentations that you have quarterly and yearly, when changes are made to the roadmap update it at the earliest (internal and external). And if these changes are critical (initiatives swapped, dropped, added, or delayed) make sure your team is aware.

This is where having a product tool like [airfocus](#) is useful. Save yourself the hassle of constantly updating and repeatedly sharing new files with manually created roadmaps.

3

Have an executive friendly roadmap

Cater your content to your audience.

The **customer facing roadmap should not mimic the roadmap for your internal team**, and the roadmap for the executive team should not mimic the customer facing roadmap.

So when putting your roadmap together ensure that you have one that is executive friendly. They too want to know what the key product initiatives are.

Business executives are busy people. They have employees to manage, initiatives to manage, a company to run, and goals to reach among their other responsibilities. They're not concerned about the minute details, they're concerned about what the key initiatives are, when they will be delivered, critical dependencies and risks, and when key milestones will be met.

These are the key pieces of information that should be presented on an executive friendly roadmap.

And when communicating with them it helps to spell out how the initiatives on the product roadmap will tie into each department's goals.

How do you ensure that the roadmap is aligned to the targets of other departments?

Start by understanding the business goals, gather inputs from team members, and involve key stakeholders in roadmap prioritization discussions.

4

Use a timeline roadmap

A **timeline roadmap** lists the initiatives in a **timeline view**.

Product managers need to give their team the information they need to be successful. Having a timeline roadmap lets your team know what items will be expected.

However, always set expectations by making it clear to stakeholders that the timeline roadmap should not be interpreted as a project plan.

5

Focus on users and customers

A product roadmap can include internal initiatives (for example tackling tech debt).

However a product roadmap should focus mainly on users and customers.

Customers pay for your product and ultimately keep the bills paid. Users and customers use products to help accomplish their goals and are happy to support products whose mission they believe in.

As the roadmap is crafted, put yourself in the shoes of your customers and ask:



If it is not easily accessible to your users and customers, what will your team's response be when customers request information on your roadmap? Have a response and process defined with your team.

6

Tailor the roadmap to customer feedback and insights

To ensure that your roadmap speaks to customer needs and wants ensure that you're regularly gathering customer feedback to uncover insights on how you can improve your product.

Check out our guide on [How to Use Customer Feedback for Business Growth](#) to accomplish this.

7

Prospect requests

A product team is not beholden to stick 100% to every item listed on the product roadmap.

Other stakeholders may expect this, but this is why it's important to regularly level set expectations with stakeholders.

Product managers should regularly hold conversations with their stakeholders

(internal and external) to understand what pains them, how they are using the product(s), further opportunities to be discovered, and more.

It should not be the case that a month before the roadmap is due, a product manager starts uncovering the key issues that are paining stakeholders.

Always gather feedback, store it in a central location, and use it to uncover future opportunities for product improvement.

Also be willing to engage in discussions when team members have a request that may impact roadmap deliverables.

This does not mean that you have to say "yes" to requests, in fact you should say "no" more than "yes". However, be willing to have these discussions. If something can't be worked on now then maybe it can be worked on in the future.

Product managers must [ruthlessly prioritize](#) and be strategic to make the right decisions.



Create beautiful roadmaps and share them with your team in minutes. Make better decisions by using our built-in prioritization tool with ready-to-use prioritization templates. [Try for free](#)