

# How Product Ops

Can Significantly Reduce the Friction  
of Your Team



by **airfocus**

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# Why We Wrote This Guide

Our team wrote a guide not too long ago about the product manager role. In [the guide](#) we detailed the key responsibilities of product managers, how they work with their team to build products, the different roles in product management, and much more.

While the product manager role is a popular one, another role you may be hearing about more frequently is one which looks similar, product operations. As tech companies grow and product managers have increasing responsibilities, business leaders have recognized the need for individuals who can support them further to enable them to focus on building products that solve customer and business problems.

**In this guide we're going to distill the product operations role by providing details on the following:**

- Key responsibilities of product operations
- The differences between the product manager role and product operations
- Key skills to look for when hiring product operations to your product team
- The step-by-step process to add product operations
- Training, certification, and salary expectations
- Using a modern product management platform for product operations
- ... and more

**Let's get started!**



# Product operations 101

02

Product management is the practice of defining the “what” and “why” for the solutions that companies build, solutions that are meant to solve customer problems.

Factoring in business goals, available resources and constraints, customer problems, metrics, market information, and technological capabilities, product managers prioritize and make decisions that are meant to provide customer value and drive business impact.

While doing this they work to evangelize their solutions across their company and support the key stakeholders that they work with towards success.

**With these responsibilities, growing products, and product teams, it goes without saying that product managers are very busy individuals.**

Due to this they don’t always have the time to focus on areas of operational efficiency for their individual work and their team(s).

This is where product operations assists.

While an operations manager for a company focuses on regularly implementing, improving, and reviewing the company operations to ensure that the business is running smoothly, the product operations team has the same focus albeit for the product managers who serve as their customers.

**Product operations is a role that works cross-functionally with product managers and other stakeholders within their business to improve efficiencies as the product management team works through the product development process.**

Product operations may not be necessary for small product teams with a few products. With a small team and minimal products, product managers can normally handle the operational tasks required. However, as product teams and the number of products grow, then product operations should definitely be considered.

The reason for this is that as the product team and products released increases, product managers become increasingly busy addressing many operational tasks that product operations can manage.

If your team is in this boat (scaling product and product manager headcount) then what will happen if you don't consider adding product operations to your team? To be frank, your product managers will continue to spend a considerable amount of time addressing operational tasks, time that can be better spent solving valuable pressing problems for your customers, users, and business.

**Product managers and product operations have a very close relationship.**

While product managers work to support business goals by serving their users and customers, product operations works to support product managers and other key stakeholders that interact with the product(s). Though the role is mainly internal focused, there are some activities they perform that have external effects as well.

To understand specifically the value that product operations provides it's beneficial to review the product development process to see just how much product managers are responsible for.

**Though defined in a few different ways the product development process generally involves the following key stages:**

1

### **Define the problem**

Research and discovery to gather a list of problems that can be solved for users and customers.

2

### **Prioritize the problem**

Taking a deeper dive into the list of problems provided and understanding the value vs. effort for each one based on potential solutions, forecasting ROI, and determining which problems to solve based on stakeholder feedback and alignment to business objectives.

3

### **Design the solution**

Working with the product design team to solidify the scope and define the look and feel of the solution.



4

## Build the solution

Working directly with the development team as they build the solution. This involves writing user stories and acceptance criteria, answering their questions, testing their work, and unblocking members when needed.

5

## Test the solution

Testing and quality assurance prior to release to ensure that the solution is working as intended without bugs or glaring issues.

6

## Ship & measure success

Making the product available to users and customers while tracking key metrics from launch to ensure that the product is on a path to success.

Product managers have various tasks and tools that they use at each stage. While focused on defining the right solutions to solve key customer problems and assist business goals, product managers are busy people who can sometimes use assistance with streamlining recurring tasks and items.

Due to the fact that the product operations role is relatively new, there is a lot of ambiguity regarding the specific roles they play and how this role differs from that of product managers.

Let's dive deeper into what the key responsibilities of product operations are.

## Key responsibilities of product operations

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One way to think about the key responsibilities that product operations serves is to view the product manager as their customer.

Their primary concern is streamlining recurring activities for product managers/the product team, which also leads to supporting and interfacing with cross-functional teams as well.

Product managers can not build great products without the support and enablement of other teams, the same applies for product operations.



**Here are the key responsibilities of product operations.**

1

## **Managing the tech stack for the product team**

The tech stack, also referred to as the product stack, is the list of tools, platforms, and technologies that product managers rely on to perform their work.

These tools center around the following activities which include communication, data capture and analysis, customer feedback management, capturing customer sentiment, product experimentation, prototyping, user onboarding, knowledge management, and more.

There are cases where product managers in the same company use different tools. There are also cases where teams get charged more than needed for these tools because they haven't negotiated the best deals for their use case as their product and team matures.

Why? Simply because product managers may not have enough time and focus to address this.

In addition, the time it takes to find new tools when needed, manage existing tools, and onboarding new members of the team (or offboarding them when they exit the company).

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Product operations manages this entire process. From procuring tools, negotiating with vendors, and setting up their team, they ensure that the product team always has the tools that they need to perform their best work.

2

## **Gathering and synthesizing customer feedback**

While it's true that product managers should regularly keep a pulse on obtaining customer feedback, due to the stage of the product development process that product managers are in and their responsibilities, they may not be able to hone in on this area.

Product operations ensures that there's an end-to-end feedback loop. This not only includes ensuring that the right tools are being used to capture feedback, but also ensuring that feedback is logged, categorized, synthesized, and regularly shared with product managers to make qualitative data-driven decisions.

3

### **Gathering product metrics for the product team to make their informed decisions**

Adding to the above, product operations also ensures that key product data is captured for the product team. This involves acquiring data capturing tools (such as Mixpanel, Looker, or Heap), creating dashboards and reports for the team to measure the product health, and ensuring that this information is shared with the product team for them to make data-driven decisions.

While qualitative data is important to understand user and customer sentiments, quantitative data is also required to understand how users and customers navigate through the product.

4

### **Product experimentation**

Product operations ensures that there's a culture of product experimentation in the company. Along with running regular experiments they work with product managers to define best practices and the end-to-end processes of product experiments that can be followed by others.

So when a new product manager joins the team and they have an experiment they need to run there's no need to start from scratch. The process is already laid out.

5

### **Supporting go-to-market strategies with the product marketing and sales**

Product operations plays a key role in supporting [go-to-market](#) efforts with their marketing and sales teams. Marketing ensures that the world is aware of your new products, features, and enhancements, while sales works to secure deals based on your communicated value offerings.

Some of the tasks that product operations assists with includes managing in-app communication of the latest product enhancements, ensuring that there is a central repository of key information that marketing and sales requires, assisting product managers with drafting sales collateral based on the product, and more.

6

## **Seamless communication between the product team and the rest of the organization**

Communication is key for product managers as they are the glue that holds the other departments together. Multiple stakeholders within the company rely on them for frequent communication so that they can execute their tasks and responsibilities.

Product operations facilitates the communication flow. Not only by managing the communication tools that product managers use (such as roadmaps) but also creating documentation and artifacts that cross-functional teams can rely on.

For example, ensuring that all [Product Requirements Documentation](#) (PRD) are in a central location for those who require this information, detailed FAQ in a central location for internal [beta testers](#), a product wiki which details the various initiatives of the product team and more.

With these key responsibilities and focus areas product managers are nothing but happy to have product operations to assist them with their tasks. If you're interested in obtaining these benefits for your product managers by adding the product operations function then read further.



# Adding product operations to your team



## How to determine if you need a product operations team

Product operations covers many responsibilities. If one of the items below is lacking from your team or company culture it does not necessarily mean that you need to add product operations right away. However, if there are multiple that resonate with you then you should consider this decision.

### Lack of streamlined communication between the product team and other departments

As companies grow the lines of communication increase and become more complex. It's imperative to ensure that there is constant and reliable communication between product and their internal stakeholders as these stakeholders (team members from their and other departments) require key information to make informed decisions.

If your product team and company are growing quickly, product operations would be beneficial to ensure smooth communication with cross-functional teams. Especially sales and marketing as they prepare and manage their go-to-market strategies.

### Product managers are too busy to manage administrative tasks

With the various roles and responsibilities that product managers have, it's time consuming to perform tasks such as adding new members of the team to the analytics dashboard, ensuring that the team has not exceeded their user limits, purchasing additional licenses when needed, onboarding new product managers, etc.

Take the load off of their plate as product operations manages these administrative tasks.

Which brings us to the next point.

### Multiple tools used by various product managers or product teams

In some companies product teams rely on different tools to accomplish the same goals.

For example one team may use Catalyst to understand customer sentiment while another relies on Customer Success. Or one team leverages Mixpanel for analytics, while another relies on Pendo.

This can be inefficient and a waste of money. Especially when there are volume discounts that vendors offer.

Not only can product operations manage the tools required, but they can also find the right tools to use and manage negotiations so that the product team can focus on building great products.

Their work may also free up some budget which the product team can apply elsewhere.

### **Poor onboarding process for customers and users**

If you're asking why product managers can't focus on this the answer is simple: they may have more pressing needs to address.

Product managers have many tasks to perform and need to prioritize their efforts. Product operations can work with customers and the design team to ensure that there is a great onboarding process for new customers and users, including the tools that are used. For both new and existing products.

### **Poor feedback loop**

Customer feedback is vital towards product and business success. Check out the [detailed guide](#) we wrote on this topic.

Besides knowing how your customers feel about your product, negative and positive sentiments, customer feedback is also beneficial for gathering improvement ideas.



If your product team does not gather feedback at all, or gathers feedback irregularly, or feedback is gathered but not distilled, shared, and actioned upon, then consider adding product operations to your team.

### **Minimal experimentation**

[Rapid experimentation](#) is used by product managers to build the minimum required to test the most valuable questions that answers are needed for.

With this experimentation product managers can quickly launch experiments, validate their assumptions, test their hypothesis, and determine the best path forward.



While this should be a constant activity among product teams, it may be missed at times or not frequent due to the sheer amount of work that product managers have on their plate.

Product operations however can handle this for the product management team. Not only can they set up experiments and manage the process from end-to-end, but they can also find and utilize the right tools and systemize the approach for others.

**To conclude, consider adding product operations to your team if one of the following is missing from your team or company:**

- 1 Lack of streamlined communication between the product team and other departments**
- 2 Product managers are too busy to manage administrative tasks**
- 3 Multiple tools used by various product managers or product teams**
- 4 Poor onboarding process for customers and users**
- 5 Poor feedback loop**
- 6 Minimal experimentation**

## **Key skills and traits to look for when hiring for product operations**

Since product operations plays such a critical role in supporting product managers and other stakeholders in their companies, the same care and attention that is placed to hire the right product manager should also be applied when hiring for this role.

Here are some of the key skills and traits to look for.

### **Strategic thinker**

Product management includes both strategy and delivery. While product managers work to ensure that the product strategy aligns with the business strategy, product operations keeps this strategy at the forefront to ensure that their plans and execution enable the product team to effectively execute on strategic plans.

Strategy is understanding where you currently are, determining where you want to go, the steps to get there, and why (how does it impact your product and business). While in the process of understanding your surroundings, the resources that are available, and your capabilities.

## Strong interpersonal skills

Hire someone who is a great communicator and has strong interpersonal skills.

Product operations works with various internal stakeholders as they train them, explain processes, prepare documentation, convince them to apply new ways of working, etc.

Writing and oratory skills are vital because they are used in multiple settings and scenarios.

### For example:

- Leading training sessions
- Crafting product documentation
- Presenting new processes to teams
- Reviewing and explaining insights from product data
- Running experiment sessions with customers and users

Communication is one interpersonal skill. Other interpersonal skills include empathy, listening, conflict management, negotiation, teamwork and leadership.

Product operations not only ensures that the glue between the product team and other cross-functional teams stays strong, but they also ensure that the product team as a whole is a well-oiled machine.

Along with taking inputs surrounding areas of improvement from other departments and fielding requests, they also have to navigate through internal changes and the competing internal priorities of stakeholders within the company.

Only someone with great listening skills, the ability to resolve conflicts, influence others, and communicate effectively can listen to and work with teammates to ensure that everyone is aligned on a common mission and working towards the same goals.

## Technical

Similar to product managers, product operations members also [do not have to know how to code](#). However, it definitely helps to have someone that is technical.

In [8 Skills You Need to Be A Successful Product Manager](#) we mentioned that product managers need to be able to navigate technical discussions with their team. This holds true for product operations as well.

An ideal candidate has a good understanding of how software and technology works. So much so that they can have technical discussions with development teams, work effectively with them when needed, speak to technical trade-offs with vendors, and also step in for product managers when needed.

## Reliable team player

Product operations as a role is relied on heavily by the product teams they support. An ideal candidate can enable their key stakeholders by supporting them with the tools, communication, and resources that they need to succeed in their roles.

## This involves:

- Spending additional time with product managers to explain why they are proposing certain changes
- Training the product team on how to use new tools
- Assisting the product marketing team with drafting marketing communication
- Gathering and distilling key customer feedback that the product team can use to make data-driven decisions
- Spending additional time with members of the company to understand their frustrations and improve processes and communication between product and other teams

## Process-oriented thinkers

Since product operations are constantly working on setting up processes for the product team and finding efficiencies they are able to understand the big picture but also take steps to standardize practices that will save time, money, and ultimately lead to key results.



## Leaders

Leaders set a vision, chart a course, and can rally others around them with inspiration, motivation, and effectiveness to achieve stated goals. This is one of the core responsibilities of product operations; finding areas of improvement and leading their team through implementation to support stated goals.

Leaders train and support others and help them grow. They enable those around them to do their best work, mentor others, and grow others to be leaders.

They are kind to those they interact with but are also assertive when needed.

Product managers trust product operations to make their jobs easier. And their company trusts them to chart the course that will enable the product team to have stronger relationships and processes for the entire company to build great products and reach business related goals.

## Driven and motivated

Since supporting resources, training and certification, are so minimal for this role an ideal candidate is someone who is willing to read, learn, and experiment as they continue to learn and grow to assist their team and company with reaching set goals.

They set a goal and are relentless towards ensuring that it is accomplished.

## Product management experience

It helps to have product management experience. Not only because product operations works closely with and for product managers, but also because as part of the role they perform a few similar activities that product managers perform, just in a different capacity.

For example, collecting and distilling customer feedback or working with product marketing and sales on go-to-market plans for new features and enhancements. So an ideal candidate is someone who has gone through, if not all, then at least some steps of the product development process.

## Step-by-step process to add product operations to your team

With the many benefits that product operations provides, don't be hasty to add them right away. With any new hire or team there should be a process to follow to ensure that everyone is set up for success.

As you're making the decision however, here's a step-by-step approach to consider.

1

### Start with "why?"

Before making the case to hire product operations, know the specific reasons that you want to hire them.

- Is your company growing quickly and communication between the product management and cross-functional teams is becoming sparse and lacking clarity?
- Are your product managers too busy to manage many of their regular administrative tasks?
- Does your product onboarding need improvement but can't be addressed due to the product team's workload?

- Are product managers and product teams using different tools which accomplish the same goals?

Know the specific problems that you want to solve as this will inform the items that the product operations team starts tackling.

2

### Start with listening

Once you've hired your first product operations member, their first steps should be to speak with the key stakeholders in your company, listen, and take notes.

While you may have a list of items that you think they should address, they may discover other areas of improvement based off of their discussions and observations.

Though product managers are the customers of the product operations team, product operations also works with and serves other functions within the business as well.

Similar to how a product manager will perform customer discovery calls to understand customer sentiments, especially where there are unmet needs, product operations should do the same with product managers, developers, sales, marketing, and other key stakeholders that the product team works with.

3

### Prioritize the focus areas

After performing interviews with their stakeholders, product operations may have a long list of key findings. This list should be shared with the product team, and other stakeholders as well if beneficial.

This provides a chance for product managers to hear the feedback that their peers provided and understand how the stakeholders that they work with feel about their working relationship.

#### For example:

- How do they feel about the frequency of communication and current communication channels?
- Do product managers within the company like the suite of tools that they use?
- How does the product team feel about their lack of experimentation (does everyone agree that it's too minimal or are they fine with the current frequency)?
- Does sales and marketing feel enabled when new products and features are released?

The team should then find the common themes among the feedback provided and prioritize which problems to tackle first.

4

### Outline the first few initiatives to tackle with defined objectives

Once the problems have been prioritized, choose the first couple of initiatives that product operations will tackle.

It helps to have project plans in place (depending on the scope and scale of the work) and track these initiatives with frequent communication on progress and challenges.

It's also important to define objectives. One can leverage the [Objectives and Key Results \(OKRs\)](#) goal-setting framework for the work the product operations team performs.

Keep in mind that product operations is a part of the product management team. So if product managers use OKRs to set and manage their goals and objectives, then the product operations team should do the same.



For best practices on how to set up and use product OKRs, check out our [Report OKRs Roundtable](#).

This report is based on the roundtable debate about setting up OKRS that we held in January 2022. We gathered some of the industry's most renowned thinkers and writers on product OKRs to consider what it takes to set OKRs properly and use them effectively.

## 5

### Have a retrospective

Post-completion of the first initiative, or first few initiatives, have a [retrospective](#) on how the initiative went. The same process that is followed for products.

#### Some items to discuss:

- What went well?
- What went poorly?
- Were the objectives achieved?
- What are the areas of improvement for future product operations initiatives?

This retrospective is beneficial for the new product operations team to celebrate successes, but also find areas to improve as they continue to work on other initiatives and with other stakeholders in the business.

From here the product operations team focuses on their key responsibilities as they continue to support product managers with building great products as they work through the product development process, streamline activities, and improve communications among various stakeholders.

# Leveraging a modern product management platform

There are key capabilities that are needed from a modern product management platform to facilitate the processes and work that product operations performs as they support product managers and other business stakeholders.

A reliable modular product management platform not only makes life easier for product managers, but also product operations as well. This is due to the capabilities and flexibility that is provided to enable product teams to perform their best work, in a way that fits their processes.

Let's dive deeper and see how such a tool facilitates the responsibilities of product operations within a product management team.

## Collecting and distilling customer feedback into key insights for the product team

Customer feedback is vital for product managers to understand how their customers feel about their products and find areas of improvement. If feedback is not being collected then there are golden opportunities that product managers are potentially missing out on.

When collecting and managing feedback it's beneficial to have a central repository where all customer feedback is stored.

That is where a tool such as [airfocus Insights](#) comes in handy.

**With airfocus Insights you can:**

- 1 Keep all product feedback organized**
- 2 Connect insights to product discovery and strategy**
- 3 Keep your product team and customers up to date and close the feedback loop**

Check out [this article](#) to learn more about airfocus, the only modular product management platform in the market



## Running and managing product experiments

When determining which experiments to run, it's important to plan and communicate this information to your team.

Use an [experiment-driven roadmap](#) to outline the experiments that product operations will run within a given time period to find new [opportunities](#) that product managers can leverage.

This roadmap lists the entire workflow of the experiment including a detailed description of the experiment, the hypothesis to be tested, important links for reference, and more.

Not only will the product team be kept up to date on the experimentation plans, execution, and have the results once available, but also members of cross-functional teams that may be interested in this information as well.

airfocus comes with multiple out-of-the-box [customizable templates](#) for product teams to leverage as they work to build better products, keep stakeholders informed, and manage the product development process as a whole.

## Outcome-based roadmaps

Product operations are embedded directly in the product team as they assist their team and company with reaching stated goals. While timelines are important, it's imperative to have clearly communicated outcomes for the multiple initiatives that are managed throughout the year.

This is why [outcome-based roadmaps](#) are valuable, they clarify the expected results of roadmap initiatives, focusing mainly on the KPIs.

A [Key Performance Indicator](#) (KPI), is a measurable value that aligns directly to an overall goal or objective of a business.

They are used to evaluate how well a business and its employees are achieving their targets. Check out our article on how to [set, measure, and track KPIs](#) to learn more.

An outcome-based roadmap begins with the product vision and works its way down to the specific items that will be delivered to see this vision through. In sequential order you will see the product vision, followed by the goal, intended outcome (with metrics), and what will be delivered as a result.

In between this, from outcome to features, you may also see the opportunity(ies) to pursue, ideas, planned solutions, followed by features and then user stories. It really depends on how detailed you want this roadmap to be.

**This roadmap is helpful because it clearly communicates to stakeholders how delivered items tie directly to the product and company vision, and the goals to be reached.**

This is one of the key roadmap templates that we offer, among many, at airfocus. Accomplish your goals with your team by getting started with this roadmap [here](#).

Our product roadmap templates come with [powerful views](#). Use a Table, Chart, Board, or Timeline view. airfocus is a modular tool that enables you to customize roadmaps according to your team's needs.

## **Improving the go-to-market process with product marketing and sale**

Product operations supports sales and marketing teams with their go-to-market plans around the product. Not only ensuring that there is a standard process that can be followed for new products, features, and enhancements, but also for ensuring that there is clear communication among the various stakeholders involved on when items will be released.

A product launch roadmap can facilitate planning and communication. This roadmap outlines the steps and milestones to release a new enhancement, feature, or product.

It looks similar to a [Gantt Chart](#). Organized by specific dates, or months, it displays key milestones and tasks to complete until launch date.

With this roadmap, product operations can include key internal stakeholders and assign tasks to product, sales, product marketing, and other team members, as they prepare for general [availability](#).

It's important to note that this roadmap is not specific to the product team. With airfocus, members of other departments and teams can receive access, remain informed on updates, and have their work tracked.

## Streamline product activities with modularity and multiple integrations

Product teams rely on multiple tools. One of the reasons that some product teams use so many tools is because many product tools simply lack flexibility.

Not enough product tools built in a way that support product teams as they grow and encounter new challenges.

As product operations is responsible for managing the tools that the product team uses, it's imperative for product teams to have a modular tool that is configurable to their needs.

airfocus is a modular platform that gives you the ability to add the applications that you need (building blocks) as you manage products from [vision to delivery](#).

It also provides two-way integrations with your favorite software development tools. Track the status of synced items in your development tool of choice right from airfocus.

Some of the development tool integrations that are available include Jira, Trello, Asana, and GitHub. Some of the feedback tool integrations include Intercom and Google Chrome. Check out the full list [here](#).

See your initiatives through to completion with the existing tools that your product teams already rely on.



# Product operations as a career

05



## Roles and seniority of the product operations role

One key difference between product operations and product management is that product management has many more levels of the role.

**The various roles and levels of seniority for product managers include:**

- Associate product manager
- Product manager
- Senior product manager
- Group product manager
- Head of product
- Principal product manager
- Director of product
- VP of product
- Chief Product Officer

**However, for product operations the current levels of available roles are more limited. They generally boil down to these four:**

- Product operations specialist
- Product operations manager
- Senior product operations manager
- Director of product operations

The tasks and responsibilities will vary per role. As you climb up the ranks the amount of tasks, responsibilities, and stakeholders you interact with increases.

While these are the four levels of the role that are available, this is not to say this won't expand further in the future.

One thing to note is that due to the overlapping responsibilities between product operations and product managers, individuals can transition between both roles.

## Product operations salary expectations

According to Glassdoor, one of the main tools relied on by professionals to get the inside scoop on companies with employee reviews, personalized salary tools, and more, the average annual salary of a product operations manager is \$105,145. While this is the average amount, the lowest end of the range is \$65,000 with \$171,000 being the highest.

Here we're focusing on the United States market, as such these salaries are in USD.

The difference in range can be due to the company, industry, seniority, and one key factor which many forget, negotiations.

To put this in perspective, the average annual salary for a product manager in the US is \$113,146. With the lowest range being \$73,000 and the highest being \$175,000.

These numbers do change for the senior product operations manager and senior product managers as well.

Here are the details of the annual salary expectations for this role according to the seniority levels.

### Product operations specialist

Average annual salary: \$62,651

Range: \$34,000 - \$116,000

### Product operations manager

Average annual salary: \$105,145

Range: \$65,000 - \$171,000

### Senior product operations manager

Average annual salary: \$130,111

Range: \$107,000 - \$158,000

### Director of product operations

Average annual salary: \$168,775

Range: \$124,000 - \$229,000

These amounts do not include signing bonuses, stock options, or benefits.

While the product operations role is still relatively new and growing in popularity, it's safe to say that companies understand the benefit of the role and pay generously as a result.



## Jobs availability for product operations

If you're interested in product operations we're happy to say that there are many available opportunities for this role.

At the time of publishing this guide, there are 7,993 job postings on Glassdoor available for the product operations role in the United States.

And this is just Glassdoor, keep in mind that there are other platforms that job seekers rely on and that recruiters often have roles available which are not directly posted online.

There are more product manager roles available than product operations. However, this is no surprise as product manager ranked #10 on the [50 Best Jobs in America for 2022](#) list with 17,725 jobs available and a 4/5 satisfaction rating.

Product operations manager did not make the list, but again, the role is relatively new so give it some time.

## Job description

The job descriptions for product management roles are generally uniform across the board with some slight variations depending on the product, skills required, company, and industry.

Product operations job descriptions are fairly similar as well. For example, when viewing the job posting for Pilot.com, a San Francisco based company that provides accounting software for growing businesses, **their job description for Product Operations Lead states:**

- Define and evolve our operational processes as we build for scale
- Integrate with Engineering, Product, and Design to define specifications for, test, launch, and ensure successful adoption of new product features
- Analyze our current operational processes to determine opportunities for automation and improved customer experience
- Partner with Customer Success, Sales, and Marketing to advocate for customer needs

**Looking at Meta, one of the most well-known and successful product companies, their job description for Product Operations Manager (a managerial role states):**

- Directly manage a team of Product Development Specialists and Product Specialists.
- Develop an in-depth understanding of how Facebook develops products, the priorities of the product teams you support and lead your team in providing data-driven recommendations.
- Define vision, strategy, tactics, and behaviors required to achieve medium and long-term goals.
- Provide motivational leadership to your team and enhance a strong culture of trust and commitment to impact.
- Create a structure for your team to solve ambiguous business problems and partner with cross-functional teams to resolve user experience issues and deliver against shared product outcomes.

- Shape actionable recommendations about complex issues critically and concisely.
- Be prepared to directly manage large projects and coordinate across stakeholders as needed to ensure the right resourcing, execution and communications are in place to deliver meaningful results.

Again, expect to see variations in the tasks and responsibilities based on the company. However, the tasks will be based on the key responsibilities of product operations.

## How about qualifications? What key qualifications do software companies look for when hiring for this role?

Since product operations works so closely with product managers, have similar responsibilities, and are pivotal members of the product team, the qualifications are generally similar to those requested of product managers.

### They will center around the following:

- Post-secondary degree or diploma in business administration or computer engineering
- A required amount of years of relevant work experience
- Ability to break down and clarify complex problems into solution-focused action plans
- Ability to derive insights from large sets of data
- Excellent project management skills
- Experience working cross-functionally with teams to reach stated goals

- Great communication skills
- Motivated and a hard worker

These requirements may also vary depending on the company and role.

## Courses and certifications

Due to the popularity of product management there are a plethora of courses and certifications available for those who not only want to break into the role, but even for those with experience who simply want to level up and expand their skills.

While there is no one standard product management certification recognized by all, there are a few that are recognized by many companies and product leaders that display one's competency. These include those offered by [Product Hall](#), [Product School](#), [General Assembly](#), and more.

There is no equivalent however for the product operations role.

From our brief research we found one course on Udemy, [Exploring Product Operations](#) by PluralSight, and [Getting Started with Product Operations](#) by Produx Labs.



Why are there so little courses available? This is largely due to the fact that it's a new role and, keeping in mind that many of the responsibilities overlap that of a product manager, it may be the case that course instructors have not seen a need to design specific courses for product operations.

As the role increases in popularity then there may be an increase in available courses in the future.

In the meantime, for those looking to break into this role it may be best to consider formal product management training and experience.

We'll continue to share updates on the product management space and keep an eye out as this role develops. Subscribe to our [Product Digest](#) and join thousands of product experts who enjoy our weekly curated roundup of product management news, articles, and learnings, delivered straight to your inbox.

## The career path of product operations

There are currently four key levels to the product operations roles.

Similar to product management, one starts at a junior level working with another more experienced product operations manager. Eventually, as they gain more experience and skills they rise up the ranks to manage and lead the product operations team along with setting and executing strategy for this team.

**Here's what the current career trajectory generally looks like:**

### Product operations specialist

- 0 - 2 years of experience
- Assists an experienced product operations manager with their tasks and responsibilities as they gain experience

### Product operations manager

- 2+ years of experience
- Fulfills the key responsibilities of a product operations manager

## Senior product operations manager

- 5+ years of experience
- Manages and mentors other product operations members
- Works with additional teams to support their product operation needs
- Assists in setting and executing on the strategy for the product operations team

## Director product operations

- 10+ years of experience
- Makes hiring and firing decisions for the product operations team
- Sets and ensures the strategy of the entire product operations team
- Works with senior management to ensure goals are aligned and execution towards company goals

These requirements may differ per company.

Many of the roles and responsibilities of product operations overlaps with product managers. In many companies product managers perform these tasks when they do not have product operations to work with.

Also due to the fact that they generally interact with the same stakeholders, it's possible for individuals to switch back and forth between these roles.



One key thing to note however is that product operations is more internal focused. Due to this they receive less exposure (not exactly zero) with customers. They also do not make the build/no-build decisions, critical prioritization decisions for products like product managers do, or set product strategy.

However there is frequent cross-team collaboration, setting and achieving goals, as well as interfacing with stakeholders.

# Frequently asked questions



## What is product operations?

Product operations is a function that works with the product management team and other key stakeholders in their company. While they carry many key responsibilities their main focus is to reduce the administrative burdens on their product management team so that product managers can focus on building great products for their customers and users as they work through the product development process.

## What are the key focus areas of product operations?

Product operations focuses on the following areas:

- Tools
- Customer Feedback
- Communication
- Feedback
- Experimentation
- Product onboarding enablement
- Go-to-market enablement with marketing and sales

## How does product operations differ from product management?

Product managers make data-driven decisions to build and support digital solutions that solve business goals and provide value to users and customers.

Product managers are the customers of the product operations team. Product operations does not make strategic decisions on what gets built, or define product strategy, nor do they work with design and development on delivering solutions.

## Which tools does product operations rely on?

Product operations rely on similar tools as product managers. These tools center around communication, data analysis, customer feedback, customer sentiment, experimentation, prototyping, onboarding, and knowledge management.

## What are the key skills to look for in a product operations member?

Some of the key skills to look for when hiring for product operations include:

- Strategy
- Interpersonal skills
- Technical
- Reliable team player
- Process oriented
- Leader
- Driven and motivated

## What is the average salary for a product operations manager?

The average salary of a product operations manager in the United States is \$105,145 USD.

## What's the highest level that one can reach with this career path?

Currently the highest level within the product operations role is Director of Product Operations.

# What next?

Now that you've made it to the end of this guide we hope that you have a much better understanding of product operations, the value it serves, how to embed product operations with your product management team, and more.

We make it a point to share learnings and best practices with our community to take action as they build world-class products.

If you currently have a product operations team or are interested in adding one to support your product managers and organization, then consider using a modern product management platform that adapts to your team's various needs, facilitates communication, strategy, and delivery across departments while integrating with multiple tools, and more.

Trusted by product teams from all industries, get started with a [14-day free trial](#), or book a demo [here](#).

