

How to Create Compelling Product Roadmaps

Tips and Best Practices for Success

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The Product Marketing and Product Management Experts™

About the 280 Group...

The 280 Group LLC provides consulting, contracting, training and templates to help companies define, launch and market breakthrough new products. For more information or a free consultation call 408-832-1119 or visit their website at www.280group.com.

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About This White Paper

This white paper is part of the Product Roadmap Toolkit™, which provides you with the training, knowledge and templates to help you create more compelling and effective product roadmaps. The content of this white paper is at a fairly basic level - the toolkit includes much more in-depth information.

The Product Roadmap Toolkit includes:

- A 43 slide seminar with narration
- 14 types of Roadmaps
 - Multiple Product Lines
 - "Golden Feature" Internal/External
 - Timed Release Internal/External
 - Theme-Based Internal/External
 - Matrix
 - Market & Strategy
 - Visionary
 - Competitive, Market & Tech Trends
 - Technology
 - Technology across products
 - Platform
- 75 roadmap templates
 - Quarterly
 - Yearly
 - Combined
- Feature prioritization matrix
- Project prioritization matrix
- Solution component matrix
- A free 30 minute consultation to discuss your Beta program with the 280 Group experts.

For more information on the Product Roadmap Toolkit go to www.280group.com.

Introduction

Product Roadmaps can mean the difference between success and failure when delivering and marketing products. They can be one of the most effective tools in a Product Management professional's arsenal. Done correctly they can help win and keep large customers and partners, and can guide the engineering and strategic planning efforts of a company. Unfortunately most Product Roadmaps are created "On The Fly" and under pressure when sales or the company management makes a last-minute request. As a result they don't have the impact they should, and can be a source of much trouble if you aren't careful.

As a Product Management professional who is responsible for the overall success of your product, it is important that you create a product roadmap that is compelling, can drive the strategy for your company and development efforts and can provide your partners, press, analysts and customers with a clear idea of where you are headed. This paper will include some of the tips and best practices that I have found to be helpful in creating product roadmaps during my twenty year career in Product Management.

Why a Product Roadmap?

There are many different reasons for developing product roadmaps. It could be that your sales force is losing a large deal and they need to reassure a customer of your future directions. Or it could be that you are briefing the press or analysts and want to reassure them of where you are headed. It might be that you need an internal roadmap to guide engineering efforts and assign resources according to well-thought-out priorities. Or you may need a roadmap to get your company's next round of funding.

There are wide variations in terms of definitions and uses for roadmaps. The first step is to decide what type you need and what it will be used for.



Types of Roadmaps

There are five types of roadmaps that are the most commonly used: Market and Strategy, Visionary, Technology, Platform and Product (Internal & External). Each type is good for specific uses, and you may also choose to combine them to create a bigger picture story.

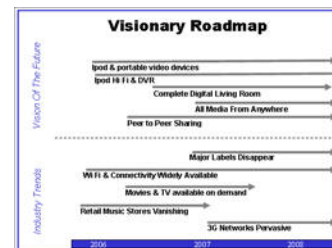
Market & Strategy Roadmap		
	Year One	Year Two
Markets	Healthcare	Financial Manufacturing
Partner	XYZ Company	
Build in-House		2.1 Release
Acquire		Data analytics

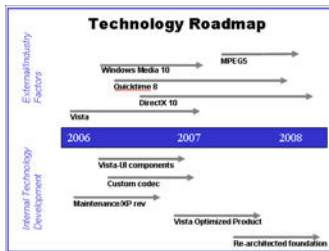
Market & Strategy

Market & strategy roadmaps paint a picture of which markets you will be going after and how you plan to develop the products for each segment. For example, in year one you may want to enter healthcare by partnering with another company. Or you may want to enter the financial market in year two by building products in-house or acquiring products.

Visionary

Visionary roadmaps paint a big picture of trends in the industry and society in general. By showing the trends you can then show how your products fit into the bigger picture and how you are taking advantage of the momentum happening in the market.



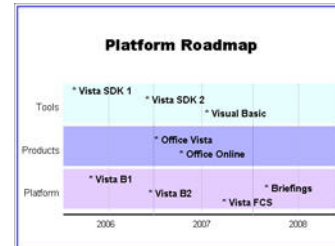


Technology

Technology roadmaps show what trends are happening in the overall industry in terms of technology, and then allow you to map your company's products and releases to them. They are an excellent way to show how your company is taking advantage of up-and-coming new opportunities created by technology.

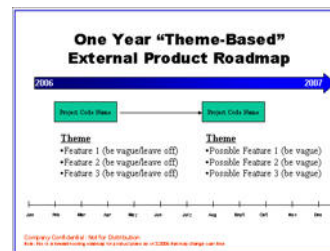
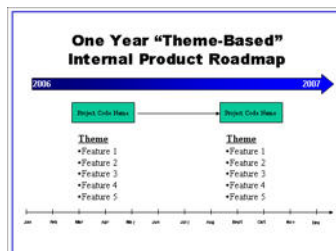
Platform

Platform roadmaps are used by companies that have an overall platform strategy that relies on partners working closely with them. Examples of platforms includes Windows, the Palm OS, Google, MacOS and many others. In a platform roadmap you show what will be happening with the core platform software as well as what the platform company will be delivering in terms of their own products and the development tools that partners will need to use to support the platform.



Product (Internal & External)

Product roadmaps are used to show when product releases will be available, what their overall theme or main features are and what secondary features will also be included. Internal roadmaps can be used for driving development priorities, communicating to upper management and other departments and for use in obtaining funding for the company. External roadmaps are used for communicating to customers, partners, press and analysts. External roadmaps should be based on the corresponding internal roadmaps, but should be much more vague.



Eight Step Roadmap Process

When we create product roadmaps for our clients we use an eight step process:

1. Decide the detail level & amount of time you want to spend creating the roadmap(s)
2. Assess competitive moves, market and technology trends
3. Gather & prioritize requirements
4. Decide on the timeframe that is most appropriate to use
5. Choose an organizing strategy for features
6. Build your Internal Roadmap
7. Get buy-in on the internal roadmap from your team(s) and finalize
8. Create an External Roadmap based on the internal roadmap

Explaining the entire eight step process is beyond the scope of this white paper. However, we will discuss feature prioritization and strategies for organizing features into logical release categories.

One other thing to note: as you go through the roadmap process it is critical that you explain it to your team and engage them along the way. By doing this you'll ensure that they understand how the roadmaps were developed and also ensure that they feel some ownership and that their opinions have been factored in. The result will be that no one will be surprised with the end results and you are much more likely to get full buy-in on the roadmap(s) you create.

Prioritizing Feature Requests

After you have gathered up a master list of all feature requests you'll need a way to logically sort through and prioritize them. The easiest method for this is to use a prioritization matrix. The matrix allows you to create categories such as revenue impact, strategic importance, customer pain level, etc. and then to assign a weighting to each one. Once you have ranked each feature using the criteria and weighting you can then sort based on total score and you get a ranked list of which features are most important.

			Weights	25	25	15	15	15	15	10	10	Calculation
	Application/Feature	Details	Requester	Pain for User ¹ (0-5)	% of customers impacted ² (0-5)	Total revenue from existing customers ³	Revenue from new customers ⁴ (0-5)	Key product differentiator ⁵ (0-5)	Competitive necessity ⁶ (0-5)	Add new customers ⁷ (0-5)	Add new revenue ⁸ (0-5)	TOTAL SCORE
1												
2												
3												
4												
5												
6												
7												
8												
9												
10												
11												
12												
13												
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A feature prioritization matrix (such as this one from the Product Roadmap Toolkit) can help you make logical choices about which features are most important.

Strategies for Organizing Features

Once you have gathered and prioritized the features, you need to decide which strategy you want to use to organize them. There are three strategies generally employed: Themes, Golden Features and Timed Releases.

Themes

Themes are a simple and effective way to organize your releases. To create a theme take the original list of prioritized feature requests and begin to classify them into similar categories to see if any trends emerge. For example, it might be that the majority of requests are for product stability or for increased performance. There might be a trend towards better security in the product, or a trend towards multi-user collaboration. The key is to identify whether there are one or two high-level categories that have a large number of features that fall logically under them. You can then group them into releases to put on the roadmap, each with its own theme.

Golden Feature

The idea behind the Golden Feature technique is that you choose a single feature that is the absolute most important priority for the release, and then you get the entire team to rally around it as the focus. This single feature provides enough customer value to hang the entire release on. It is compelling enough that all of your customers will want to upgrade (and some potential new customers will be further convinced to purchase). And it is simple enough to communicate from a marketing and competitive point of view that it gives your product a noticeable boost. Ideally you should be able to describe the Golden Feature in one to five words. Some examples might include: 1.) 30% Faster Performance 2.) Import MS Word files or 3.) Double your battery life. It has to be simple and very compelling - if your release has a long list of features, but you can't find a one to five word value message to communicate, it's going to be very hard to build a marketing campaign and keep your product focus.

The Golden Feature technique is particularly effective if you are on short release cycles or are doing a point release (1.1, 1.2, etc). Many of your team members may want to include all kinds of other features that can be of varying interest and value to your customers. If you can get them focused on the one Golden Feature for the release (and in agreement that everything else is a "nice to have" priority but that you won't hold up the release for it), you'll have a much better chance of success. You'll also have a higher likelihood of meeting a tight schedule, as you can plan the release with more certainty if the Golden Feature is the only critical path item.

Timed Release

The timed release strategy uses pre-determined release dates to drive the schedule rather than features. You decide on a release interval (quarterly, every six months, once a year, etc.) and then you take the prioritized feature list and estimate which of the top features can make it into each release. If a feature misses the release it gets moved to the next release.

The timed release strategy has the advantage of providing your customers, partners and internal company constituents with known ship dates they can plan around. It also alleviates the pressure of everyone trying to vie to get their "pet" feature into the next release, since they know that there will be another release coming along shortly. The downside of the timed release strategy is that it doesn't work very well for features that have long development cycles. If your team is working on a feature that will take several release cycles to complete they may be pulled off to finish work for the interim releases.

Roadmaps with Multiple Product Lines

Oftentimes you'll want to create a roadmap that includes multiple product lines. To do this first follow the procedure for creating single product line roadmaps. From there you can use a multiple-project prioritization matrix to decide which projects are most important to the company, which should be funded and resourced and which should be cut. As with the feature prioritization matrix, the multiple project matrix can have any criteria you wish, such as strategic importance and revenue potential.

Once you have prioritized all of the projects you can then create an internal and external roadmap showing all of the product lines together. Note: because there is so much data, multiple product line roadmaps usually only include the theme or golden feature for each release, and a separate roadmap is used to convey the full details of the release for each product.

