



Product Roadmaps for Beginners

A guide to creating effective roadmaps
with the right tools



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Introduction

Product roadmaps are **live, visual documents** that communicate a product's **strategic direction**.

They **bring together** all of the moving parts of **product management** and development.

Product roadmaps, when done well, express the "**why**" behind what you're developing.

Product managers and their teams may achieve various goals with the aid of effective product roadmaps:

- 1 Describe the product's strategy and vision.
- 2 Provide a roadmap for putting the approach into action.
- 3 Bring internal stakeholders on board.
- 4 Facilitate decision-making and scenario planning by facilitating discussion of possibilities.
- 5 Communicate product development projects' progress and status.
- 6 Assist in the dissemination of your plan to external stakeholders (including customers)

Over the next several chapters, we'll lead you through the **road mapping process** and provide you with all of the tools you'll need to plan properly.

However, before that...

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Product Managers aren't the only ones who use roadmaps

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Here are just a handful of the numerous examples available:

IT

Plan and track architectural projects, software implementation projects, and a variety of other initiatives.

Marketing

Organize anything from their strategies to their content calendars.

Business Operations

Plan scaling and other organization-wide goals.

Devops

Integrate the many parts of an organization that they are in charge of bringing together.

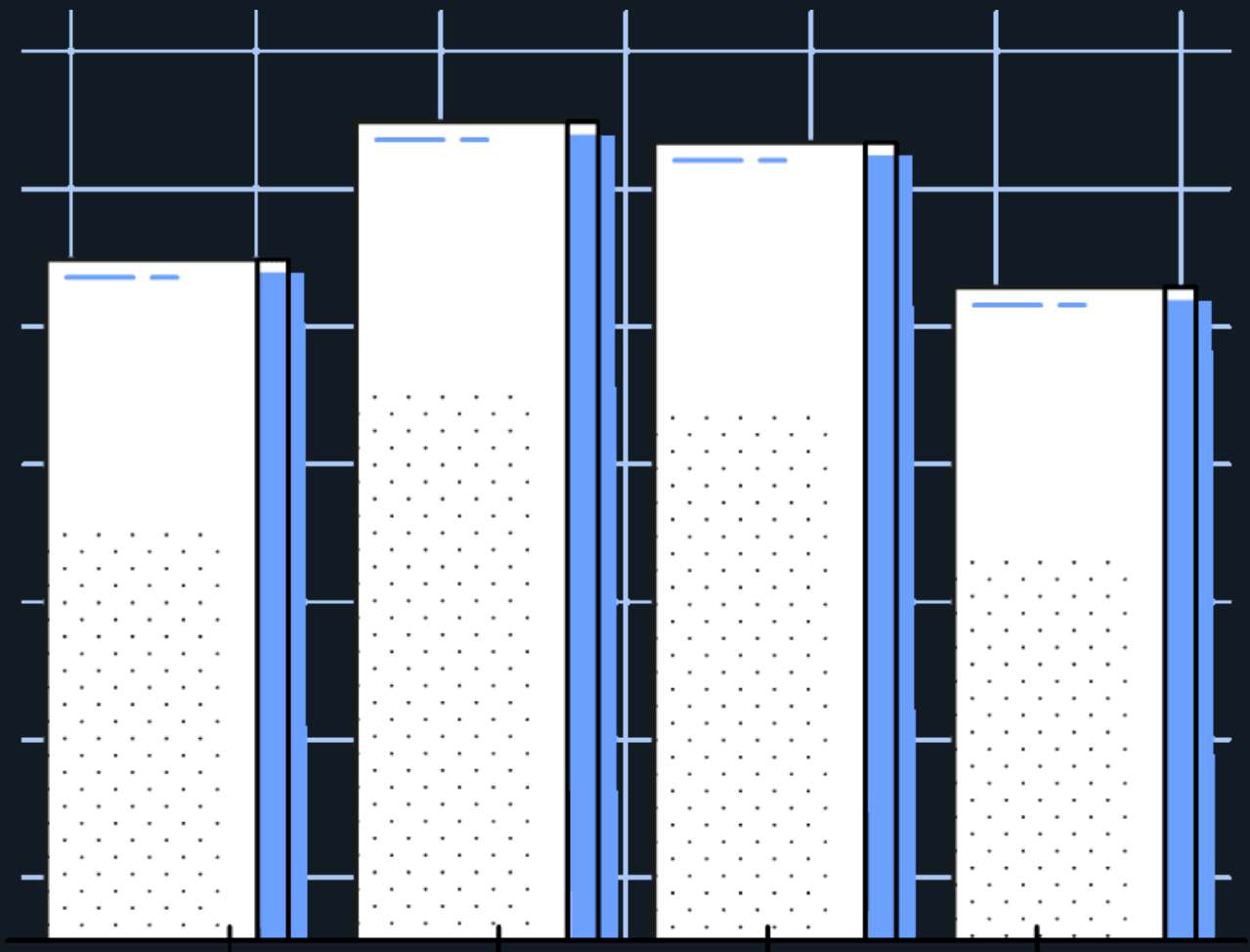
Engineers

Organize sprints.

The options are limitless. While this book is geared at product managers, persons in other jobs who are interested in learning more about roadmapping may benefit from the advice and insight we've offered.

1

Product Strategy and your Roadmap



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The first step in building a good roadmap is to define the product's vision and strategic goals.

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What occurs **before** you prioritize, construct, and publish your roadmap **is just as important**, if not more so, than what happens **throughout the road mapping process**.

Setting the **product's vision and strategic goals** — and, more crucially, getting your stakeholders to agree on them — are the first stages in developing a successful roadmap.

After all, how can you **devise a strategy** for getting there if you don't know **where** you're attempting **to go** or why? And how will you **achieve progress** if you can't convince your team to **unite** behind the plan?



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Furthermore, while goods are designed to solve problems, they must also (in most circumstances) **generate revenue**. As a result, **business objectives** are important, and the plan should reflect this.

Connecting Product Strategy and the Roadmap

A common **strategy** to guarantee your product roadmap matches effectively with both business objectives and long-term aspirations for the product is to use a **top-down approach** to strategic planning.

It also aids in the **definition of measurable goals** that are used to not just track progress but also to guide priority decisions.



The method of top-down strategic planning is quite simple.

Begin by establishing your **high-level product vision**, and then utilize it to create concrete, measurable product objectives.

Your product plan is therefore informed by your vision and goals.

As a result, your roadmap sits on top of your more **detailed release plan and backlog**.

Let's take a look at the product vision and goals, which are the two aspects of the product strategy that come before the roadmap.

Product Vision

Also known as a mission statement or a product vision statement, is a succinct, high-level description of why your product exists. It's a guiding light, out of grasp at the time but always present as a steady reminder of the planned path.

Product Strategy Goals

You may extract product goals from the product vision, which will affect the efforts on your roadmap. Developing product goals is the first step in turning your product strategy into a workable plan. The product goals of each company will differ. You may create objectives that are product-specific, company-specific, or more broad.

Your objectives should ideally be **quantifiable** and easily linked to measurements and KPIs that can be **tracked** (KPIs). These are the sorts of objectives that your **stakeholders will respond to** the most.

How frequently should your product vision and strategic objectives be revisited?

Strategies, like most things in life, are rarely set in stone, especially in business. Your **product vision statement** should be **aspirational** and broad enough to remain **consistent** over time. Product managers should, however, be prepared to change it (and even pivot) if required.

Strategic goals, corporate objectives, and key performance indicators (KPIs) are all aspirational in nature. However, they will, by their very nature, **require modifications**, updates, and resets over time. The rate at which you make those modifications will differ depending on your company.

Many companies create different levels of strategic goals for different time periods. They may, for example, set certain standards for where the firm should be three years from now, then break those benchmarks down into smaller milestones along the way and time-box those milestones to keep them on pace to accomplish the longer-term goal (i.e. quarterly check-ins).

Many product managers find it helpful to extract a set of more **granular objectives** and KPIs to be accomplished along the way from those goals.



Make sure all are aligned on strategy



A short reminder before we go on to the next chapter, where we'll talk about how to create and prioritize your roadmap.

Early and often **communication** with stakeholders is **essential**. Ascertain that your team, executive stakeholders, and the whole business will support your product vision and strategic goals. When you start talking about more specific topics like which features to implement next, **getting consensus and alignment** today will make your life lot simpler afterward.

Furthermore, the conversations that will definitely arise as a result of presenting your organization's vision and strategic goals are chances to get input that might help you re-adjust your goals.

2

Developing Product Initiatives



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You may begin developing your roadmap if you have a strong product vision and a set of strategic objectives.

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You may start thinking about the roadmap if you have a **strong product vision** and a set of strategic objectives that match with both the vision and the organization's overall goals. Specifically, which product efforts should be included in the roadmap and where they should be placed in relation to one another.

It's crucial to know where to go for feature ideas to assess. You shouldn't just make up a list of ideas and suggested features out of thin air; you should try to set up a method for **gathering feature ideas** and incorporating as many sources as feasible.

Let's have a look at a few places where you might get **inspiration** for new **product features** and initiatives.

Where Can I Get New Feature Ideas?

User Feedback

Your customers know more than anybody else what your product requires. Request input from them, but keep in mind that this is a skewed sample of data. Also, don't let one-off feature requests get in the way of your overall product vision.

Metrics & Analytics

The opinion is significantly less persuasive than objective evidence. If you already have real-world user data on your product or related items, you've got a valuable source of business information to help you decide whether concepts are worth pursuing.

Analyst Research

Examine industry studies on your product category (for example, from Gartner and Forrester) to see what sorts of products work, with whom, and why.

Competition

Of course, your objective is to bring a one-of-a-kind and valued product to market. Competitors, on the other hand, provide useful information. Learn what clients enjoy and dislike about rival items, as well as what they wish they had. Just remember to think carefully about distinctiveness to avoid imitation items.

Customer Success, Marketing, and Sales

For useful product insight, look no further than your own company's other teams. Prospective clients and customers are constantly in contact with your sales staff and customer success managers. Inquire about popular feature requests, use patterns, and customer concerns.

Remember that you shouldn't be expected to come up with every new product feature as a product manager.

It doesn't matter where you get your ideas from. On the other hand, terrible ideas may originate from anyplace (including your executive team, your biggest customers, and your smartest engineer).

It's up to you to determine **which** of those **suggestions** should be **incorporated to the roadmap** and given a chance to shine. This is when feature prioritization comes in handy.

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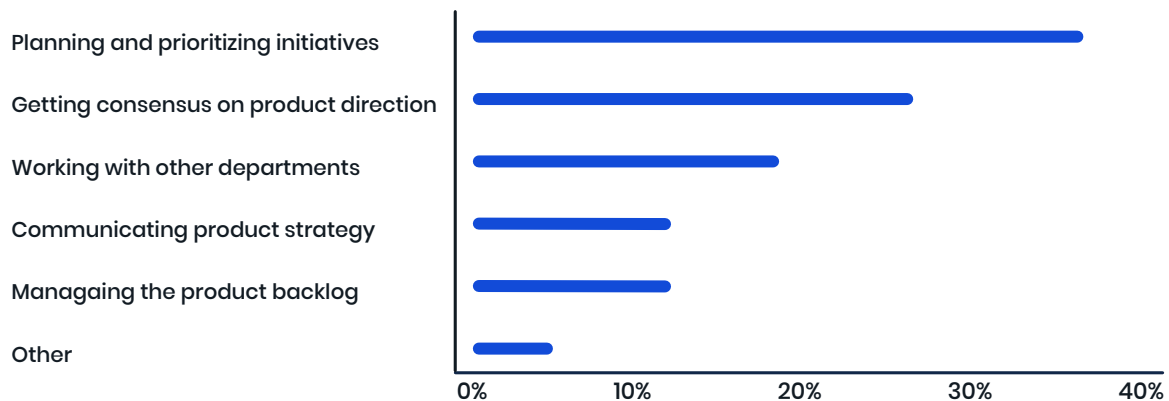
Product Roadmap Prioritization



“ **A clear prioritizing structure may make difficult decisions a little simpler.** ”

Prioritization is difficult. Product managers must **constantly weigh** resources, expectations, customer requirements, technological debt, and other factors.

What is your **biggest** product management challenge?



A clear **priority structure** may help make these difficult decisions a little simpler as your organization's core center for your goods.

Furthermore, when it comes time to defend your product plan, having a defined priority system is highly beneficial. Outliers and one-off initiatives will always exist, but when all potential features are prioritized in the same way, it becomes more difficult for one individual or team to derail your product plan.

We'll cover a few **general recommendations** for **roadmap prioritizing** in this chapter, as well as a few prioritization frameworks to explore.

Roadmap Prioritization Tips

1

Prioritization should be approached as a collaborative effort. It not only encourages team buy-in, but it also provides a variety of viewpoints. It's also a lot more enjoyable.

2

Keep the amount of items you're prioritizing to a minimum. Concentrate on the overall picture rather than the minor minutiae.

3

Categorize and organize projects into strategic themes (for example, "increasing happiness" for a certain persona is an appropriate grouping).

4

It's a good idea to know the consumer value of each endeavor before you start ranking them. Rather than your beliefs, customer value should be based on information acquired from consumers.

5

Begin by making a preliminary cost estimate for each item.

Product Roadmap Prioritization Frameworks

Here are a few more methods for **quantifying the various variables** among the additions, upgrades, repairs, and other items vying for limited resources in your product roadmap.

Quantitative Methods

Before presenting your results to a bigger audience, quantitative prioritizing approaches are helpful for undertaking some early prioritizing on your own. They may also help you steer your product strategy discussions so that they aren't only based on personal opinion.

Value vs. Complexity

The Value vs. Complexity approach evaluates each opportunity based on its business value and the relative difficulty of implementing it. The matrix is straightforward: the projects with the most value and the least amount of work will be the low-hanging fruit for your plan.

Weighted Scoring

Weighted scoring allows you to apply the Value vs. Complexity approach while also layering in score to achieve an objective outcome. Product managers may promote a more productive debate about what to put on the product roadmap by utilizing a scoring mechanism to prioritize strategic projects and important features.

Kano Model (Customer Delight vs. Product Function)

With the Kano model, product managers may evaluate possible features based on the joy they bring consumers vs the potential investment they make to develop the feature.

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative prioritizing approaches can provide excellent opportunities for cross-functional prioritization collaboration. As you'll see, a couple of the strategies that follow are particularly suited to collaborative tasks.

Moscow Analysis

Must-haves, should-haves, could-haves, and will not have at this time (or occasionally "want") are the four types of projects represented by the abbreviation MoSCoW. First and foremost, important stakeholders and the product team must agree on goals and priorities. After that, sort your suggested features into one of the four MoSCoW buckets. With so few alternatives, it's typically easy to see which efforts are genuinely important.

Buy-a-Feature

Buy-a-Feature is a technique for prioritizing a list of prospective features with consumers or stakeholders. The strategy is straightforward but enjoyable.

Make a list of prospective features and give each one a "price" (based on a relative cost to develop it). Give each participant a predetermined amount of money and then ask them to purchase the features. Some people will bet everything on a single characteristic they're enthusiastic about, while others will bet all over the place. As a consequence, you'll have a prioritized feature list.

Opportunity Scoring

When it comes to outcome-driven innovation, opportunity scoring is a sort of gap analysis. Without going into too much detail, the goal is to evaluate and prioritize prospects based on their value in relation to consumer satisfaction. Customers are asked to rate the significance of each feature, as well as how pleased they are with it now, in order to perform opportunity scoring. Your opportunities are those aspects that are really vital yet have a poor consumer satisfaction rating.

Affinity Clustering

Affinity grouping may be a fun way to prioritize. The concept is simple: everyone brainstorms ideas on sticky notes. Then, as a group, start grouping related objects together and naming them. Finally, the entire team proceeds to rate or vote on the groupings.

Creating a Story Map

Story mapping is an excellent technique to organize and prioritize user stories while documenting the MVP. In a nutshell, the goal is to construct task-oriented narrative cards, group them together, and then organize them in priority order for each group. The next step is to draw a line across all of the stories to split them into releases/sprints.

Three Things to Keep in Mind When Prioritizing

There are three things to bear in mind concerning priority before we go on to actually developing the roadmap.

Your priority framework is always shifting.

While it's critical to establish your priorities, it's equally critical to recognize that they will most certainly change over time.

Prioritization should be done as a group effort.

Outside of the product department, your coworkers provide vital insights on your users and market.

Your capacity to express your priorities is only as strong as your ability to prioritize.

You should be able to explain "why" and justify your product strategy using your prioritizing methodologies.

4

Best Practices for Creating a Roadmap



It's time to start **constructing your roadmap** when you've decided on your product vision and prioritized all of your efforts. We'll go through a few excellent practices to keep in mind when you create your plan in this chapter.

Collaborative Roadmap

Building a product roadmap is frequently a fluid discussion—a compromise between competing agendas. Allowing each stakeholder to lead their own efforts inside their respective domains is a frequent strategy to collaborate throughout the construction phase.

Assume you work for a huge software business as a product manager. You may have a roadmap that outlines all of your User Interface (UI) activities, another that outlines all of your Application Programming Interface (API) projects, and yet another that is driven by your architects and outlines your entire software strategy.

As a product manager, you must keep informed about all of these efforts. But you can't be an expert in all of them, or even possess them all. It is, nevertheless, your responsibility to establish priorities. You must be able to tie together all of those distinct roadmaps into one portfolio plan and create an easy-to-understand image for the executive team to win their buy-in in order to see the big picture.

Visual Roadmap

One of your primary responsibilities as a product manager is to act as a product advocate. A high-level graphic presentation can help you get support for your plan. This is one of the reasons why creating a visual product roadmap is a smart idea.

Remember. *Keep it high-level, use color and large fonts.*

Dynamic Roadmap

A product roadmap is a high-level strategy plan that outlines your product's long-term goals – which means it does not have to be written in stone. If you need to change your course, you must be able to update your roadmap on a regular basis.

You can no longer foresee what will happen years from now in an agile environment. The reality is that you must adapt quickly to market changes, client demands, stakeholder demands, and other factors. As a result, your plan must be a live document that accommodates modifications.

The frequency with which you update your roadmap is determined by the number of information you give as well as the timeline for the plan. If your plan is long-term (greater than 12 months) and at a higher strategic level, for example, it may not change as frequently as a short-term roadmap with particular features.

5

Popular Roadmap Styles



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The first step in creating a roadmap is deciding on a design style

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Despite the fact that the number of possible roadmap designs is infinite, the **three most frequent** are Timeline, Roadmap without Dates, and Kanban.

In this chapter, we'll go through **when** various styles are appropriate, as well as some of the **benefits** and **drawbacks** of each.

Timeline-Based Roadmap

"What are you doing and when will it be done?" is a question that every product manager has heard before. If your CEO asks you this question, a timeline-based roadmap might be a useful tool in assisting you with your response.

A timeline-based roadmap explains how your projects are related to one another through time. It graphically illustrates how long you plan to devote to certain activities and when you expect to accomplish them. Your endeavors are often organized in a bar chart on a grid that reflects a specified timeframe.

Although your roadmap may include dates, it's usually a good idea to keep them high-level and not too detailed from a product management viewpoint. Show efforts that span a few months without specifying a particular start and finish dates, for example. You must manage stakeholder expectations, and the more explicit the timeframe, the more you are creating expectations for certain dates and capabilities to be delivered.

Timeline-based roadmaps are useful for visualizing product timelines among various projects. However, focusing on deadlines rather than strategic goals is a typical issue for timeline-based roadmaps.

Roadmap Without Dates

By removing timing constraints from your roadmaps, you'll be able to focus more on modeling the process – how you'll get to your final objective. While there are many similarities between timeline-based roadmaps and roadmap types without dates, the key difference is that no dates are associated with your efforts.

Kanban-Style Roadmap

Kanban is a project management concept that originated in the "just in time" manufacturing industry. It's currently commonly used to display a timeline, priorities, and progress. The quantity of work in progress (WIP) is matched to the team's capability using Kanban. As a result, it provides teams with more planning flexibility, faster output, clear focus, and transparency throughout the development cycle.

Limiting the quantity of work in progress is a core tenet of kanban. Due to a lack of attention, personnel, or skill sets, WIP restrictions can show bottlenecks and backups in the team's workflow.

You want to show stakeholders the status and priorities for each step of your development with a Kanban-style roadmap.

For example:

- Approved
- Validated
- Ready for Estimation
- In Progress
- Ready



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6

Sharing Your Product Roadmap



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Product managers understand the importance of sharing their product roadmap with internal stakeholders.

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Successful product managers understand the need of **sharing their product roadmap** with internal stakeholders, in addition to interacting with stakeholders often during the product planning process. Part of the position is sharing the roadmap with other departments, including sales, management, marketing, and engineering.

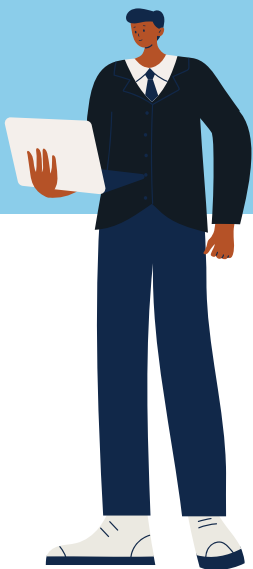
If your target audience consists of **executives**, your aim will most likely be to persuade them to **support** your approach or approve your plans. If your target audience is a **different department** inside your company, your aim will most likely be to **communicate product direction** and get consensus.

In any situation, you must be clear and compelling so that stakeholders understand and agree with your approach and goals.

And, as we've discussed in earlier chapters, you should **generate and maintain** numerous versions of your product roadmap, regardless of the format you use.

You'll always have **rapid access** to the relevant roadmap view and amount of information for a certain audience this way. After all, you never know when someone will ask for a copy of your product plan. When they do, you want to make sure they have the most **up-to-date information in an easy-to-understand style**.

Here are some tips for sharing your roadmaps with a select group of people:



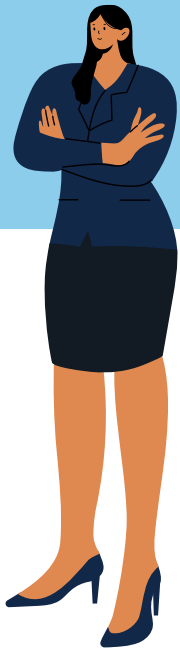
Sharing Your Product Roadmap with **Engineers**

Your **development staff** spends a lot of time on the nitty-gritty **details**. They are frequently assigned jobs that are only a few days or weeks in duration—small stories, bug patches, minor modifications, testing, and so on.

It's common for these teams to lose sight of the **product's larger goals**, which means you'll miss out on some of the unique ideas these experts may bring to the table.

When discussing your roadmap with your engineers, you'll want to encourage them to **look up** from time to time to see the **larger picture**.

Some **higher-level strategic information** should be included in your developer-focused roadmap view. However, there must be sufficient **tactical specificity** so that people know what they will be working on in the short or medium term.



Sharing Your Product Roadmap with **Executive Stakeholders**

You'll want to give a **complement** to the big-picture work they're always focused on on your executive-facing plan. Allow them to understand how the **work** that has to be **done now** will aid in the realization of their **long-term goals**.

"As you know, this is our five-year vision for the product," you would tell your executive team. We'll get there eventually. But first, let me go over what we have planned for the coming year. We're aiming to create income right now as well as get closer to that long-term goal."

Even with a one-year perspective, you'll want to keep **specifics to a minimum**. Your bosses are unlikely to be interested in hearing about your resource allocation strategies or the interdependencies between tiny ventures. So reduce the tactical specifics to a bare minimum.

Present just enough information to **visually navigate** through the upcoming year's **major milestones**.



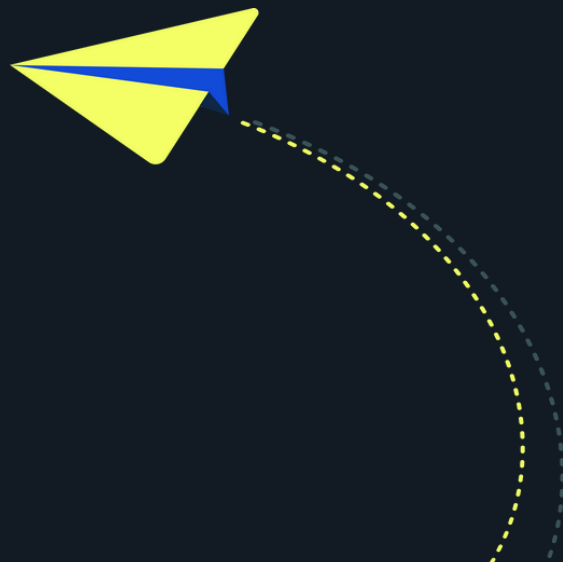
Sharing Your Product Roadmap with **Your Sales Team**

Your sales staff will be constantly thinking about how your product can assist them **close deals**. You should only show the **relevant details** though.

Focus on **impending features** when sharing your roadmap with sales. You should also put your **strategic justification** for each feature you've prioritized directly on the roadmap.

One word of warning, though: dates should be avoided at all costs. Even if you clearly state that a date on a product roadmap is merely an estimate, at least some of your salespeople will interpret it as an implied guarantee.

As a result, **be wary about incorporating dates** in your sales-oriented custom view roadmap.



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