Plan 06: Get approval & communicate the plan

Your proposed best product plan is ready: Now you need the requisite executive-level approvals. You'll also want final buy-in from the teams that design, develop, market, and sell your product. Ideally, you've been collaborating with key stakeholders through the entire process, so everyone is on board with the plan and this step is a formality. After final approval, communicate and review the plan with the extended product team, including Sales, Marketing, Services, Support, Finance, and Operations.

Checklist

- ☑ Start with a data-driven product plan.

- ☑ Communicate through a plan report that shows feature prioritization and why features are included.

- ☑ Earn approvals you need.

- ☑ Share and share again.

1. Start with a data-driven product plan.

With a validated, data-driven product plan, it's clear **why** the plan contains what it does.

Teams and individuals within your company have different and sometimes conflicting priorities. Inevitably, there will be highly desired features that *don't* make the cut, so some people may be disappointed. However, if you can clearly demonstrate which priorities were considered and why decisions were made, your plan will be defendable and stakeholders are more likely to support it.

Core principles of data-driven plans
1. *Capture and monitor market signals.* Collect data from your target market, including non-customers, to inform product plans.
2. *Continuously measure and test.* Constantly stay in touch with the market to ensure your plan reflects reality.
3. *Make data-driven product decisions.* Check your intuition and insights with data that supports your plans.

2. Communicate the "why."

Plenty of product management blogs explain how to develop influence and communication skills—cue the drama coach. You certainly need those skills when feature prioritization and product planning are overly influenced by opinions—the loudest voice(s) in the room—or the most recent crises. It's always good to have strong influence and communication skills, but you'll have a much easier time explaining and defending a data-driven product plan that's based on consistent business drivers and backed up by data.

For example, your Sales leaders insisted that they need Feature X to close a big customer opportunity next quarter. But Feature X has a relatively low score across the key business drivers you used to establish plan priorities. Plus, both customer and market surveys show that Features Y and Z have higher value for existing *and* potential customers. So, Features Y and Z are in the next release, while Feature X is a candidate for a future release. Sales may not be delighted, but they can clearly see that the revenue potential with Features Y and Z offsets the potential loss of the current opportunity. Over time, the market-first framework helps all stakeholders support their requests with more and better data.

3. Earn approvals you need, then share the plan.

Executives have an easier time approving product plans when you provide prioritized features backed by data and show that plans incorporate key business and product line priorities. You can demonstrate plan scenario options, show executives the implications of different scenarios, and explain why the proposed plan contains what it does.

If executives don't approve the plan, you already have the data you need to make adjustments, compare alternatives, and create a plan they are more likely to approve. You'll have more clarity and, most importantly, better outcomes.

4. Share and share again.

Now, share your approved plan: Present and distribute it to the entire extended product team, and make your documented feature prioritization, business-driver values, and research available to all. Schedule calls and meetings to review the plan with key stakeholders and

record a plan presentation that you can share broadly. Create a visual product roadmap to help people see what you're planning to release and when.

Next: Everyone can get to work to design, develop, market, and sell. And you get to start thinking about what's in the next release!

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