

2017

Product Planning Report

Product planning insights from the world's leading companies



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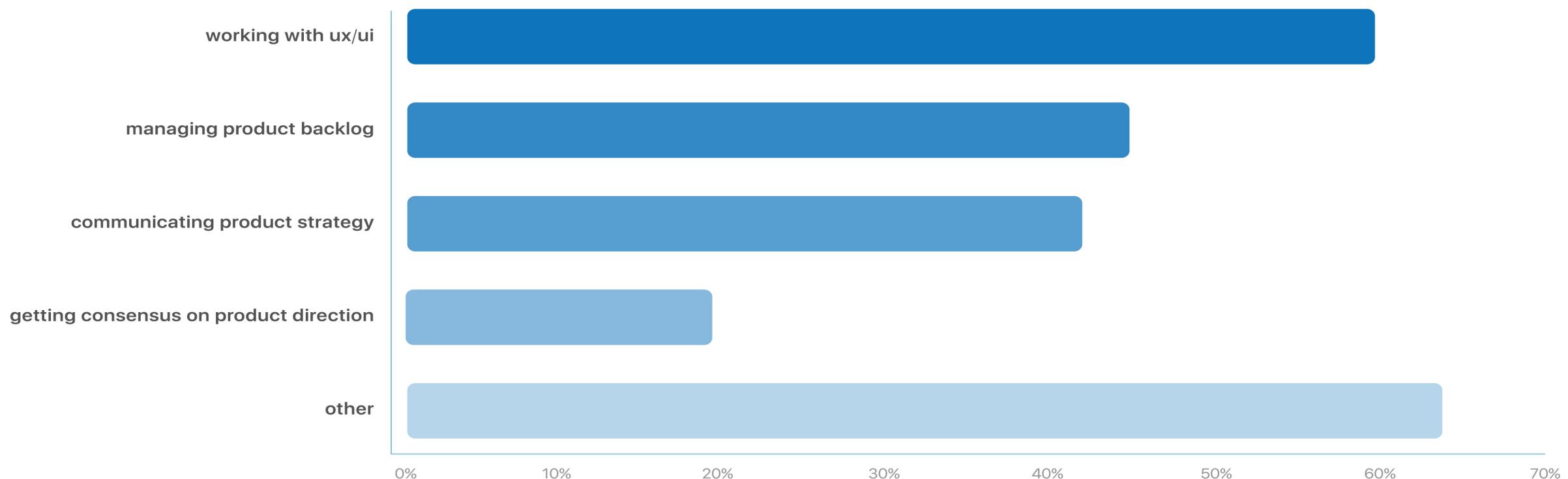
Report Highlights

1 Report Highlights

The 2017 Product Planning Report is based on the results of our annual product planning survey, as well as insight from product and industry leaders. We spoke with product managers and roadmap owners at companies around the world, from software startups to global financial services companies.

Here's what we found out:

WHAT are your biggest product management challenges?

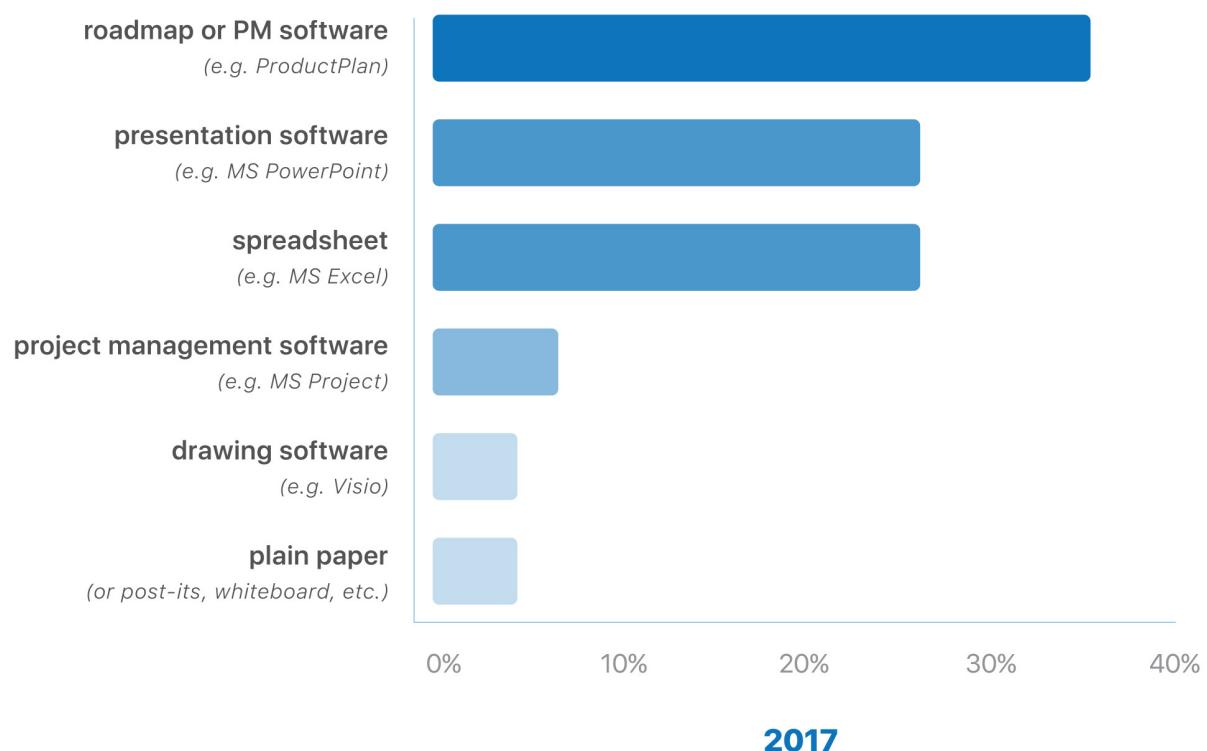


Roadmapping Software is Eating PowerPoint

Roadmap software use more than doubled in the last year (from 15% of companies to 31%) and supplanted PowerPoint as the single most popular tool for building roadmaps.

High-Level Strategy, High-Level of Success

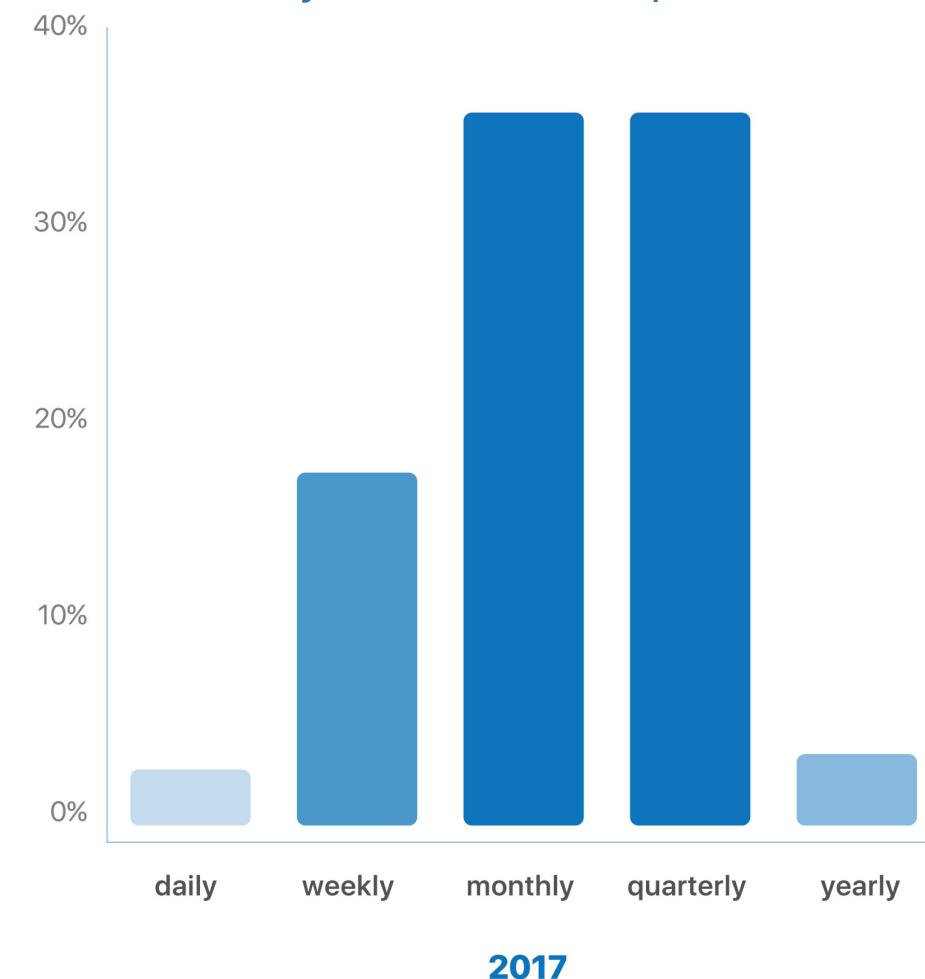
Companies that primarily use roadmap software for managing their roadmaps were 13% more likely to successfully meet their company goals than companies primarily using project management software.



Agile is Key

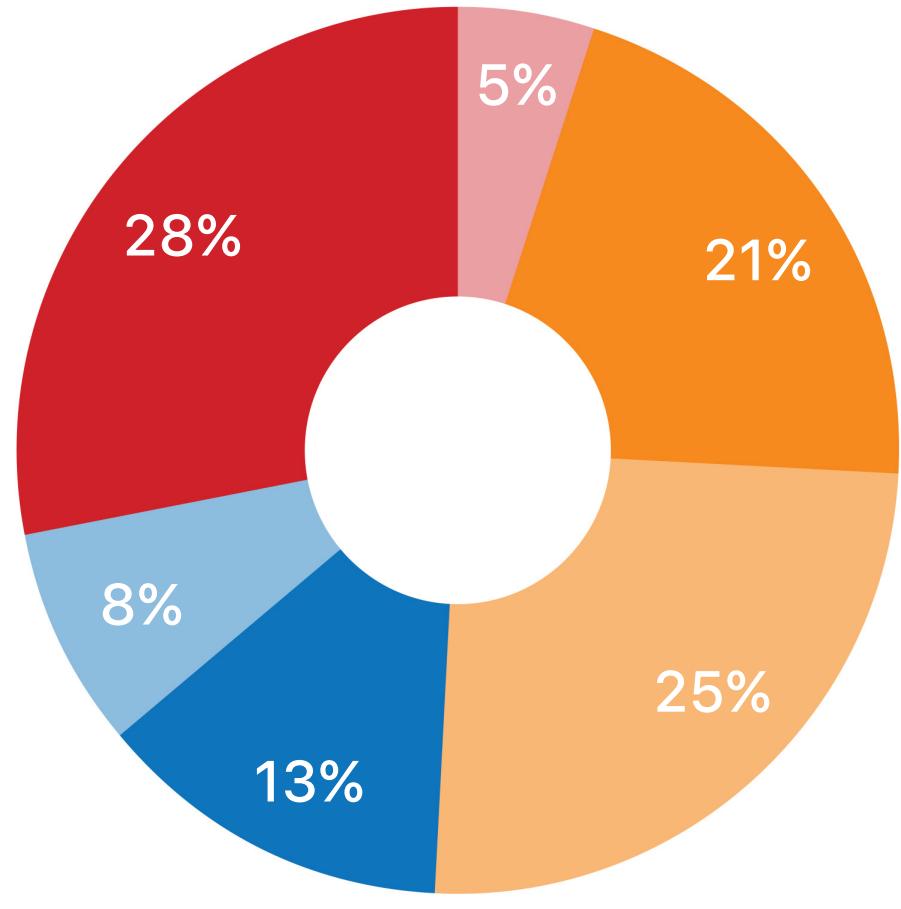
A static roadmap results in a static strategy. A majority of product managers update their roadmaps monthly.

How often do you update your roadmaps?



Company Size

Our 2017 Product Planning survey respondents came from a wide range of company sizes, with nearly half of respondents coming from companies with over 200 employees.



“
Keeping
internal teams
on the same page
is our biggest
challenge.
”

Product Manager at a medium-sized software company with 2-5 years of experience

2

Planning & Prioritizing

2 Planning & Prioritizing

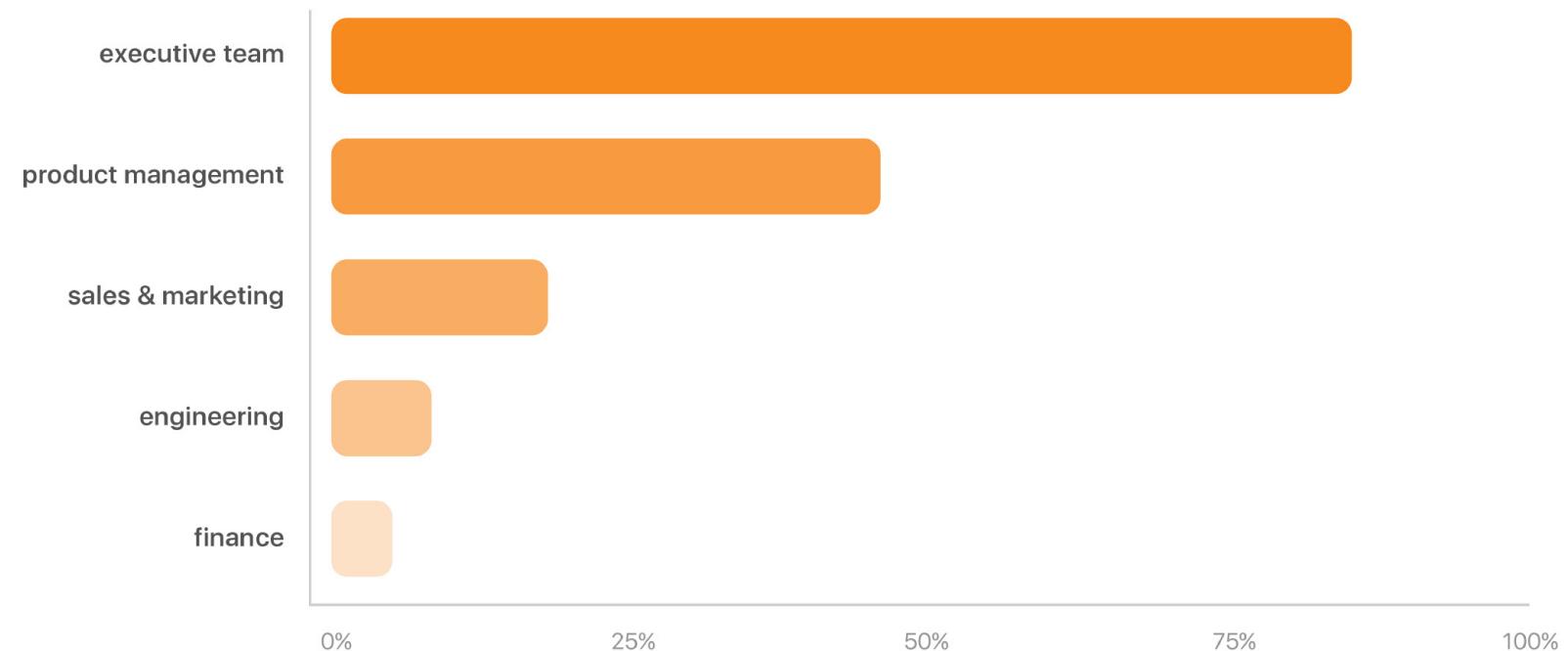
Planning and prioritization is one of the most important stages in the product development process. While different groups take different approaches, the end goal is always the same: determine what initiatives are highest priority and put together a high-level plan to achieve the goals related to those initiatives.

In our annual survey of product managers and roadmap owners, we gathered data on the most popular strategies, methods, and success-metrics at a wide range of companies.

Top-Down Strategy

For big-picture goals, a majority of companies use a top-down planning technique. 85% of companies say that the executive team is responsible for strategic goals. Broad strategic goals are often set at an executive level and then become more granular as they trickle down for execution by individual teams.

WHO is responsible for setting strategic company goals in your organization?



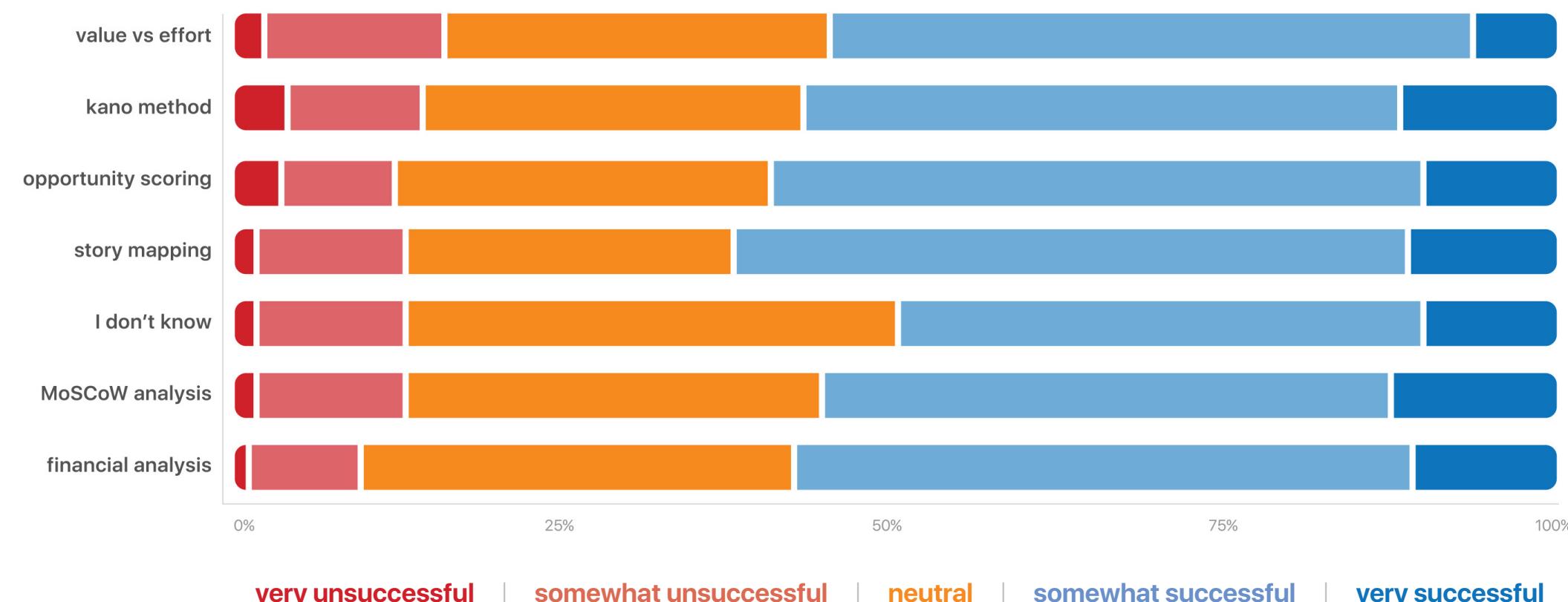
Prioritization Methods

Whether you're developing a new product or maintaining an existing product, there are several different techniques you can use to determine the most important initiatives. In the end, the technique you choose isn't as important as the conversation your team has about the priorities. And even if you disagree about the specific

prioritization method, if you can get agreement on the criteria, you're ahead of the game.

Most importantly, if you don't have a prioritization method in place, you're less likely to achieve your overall company goals.

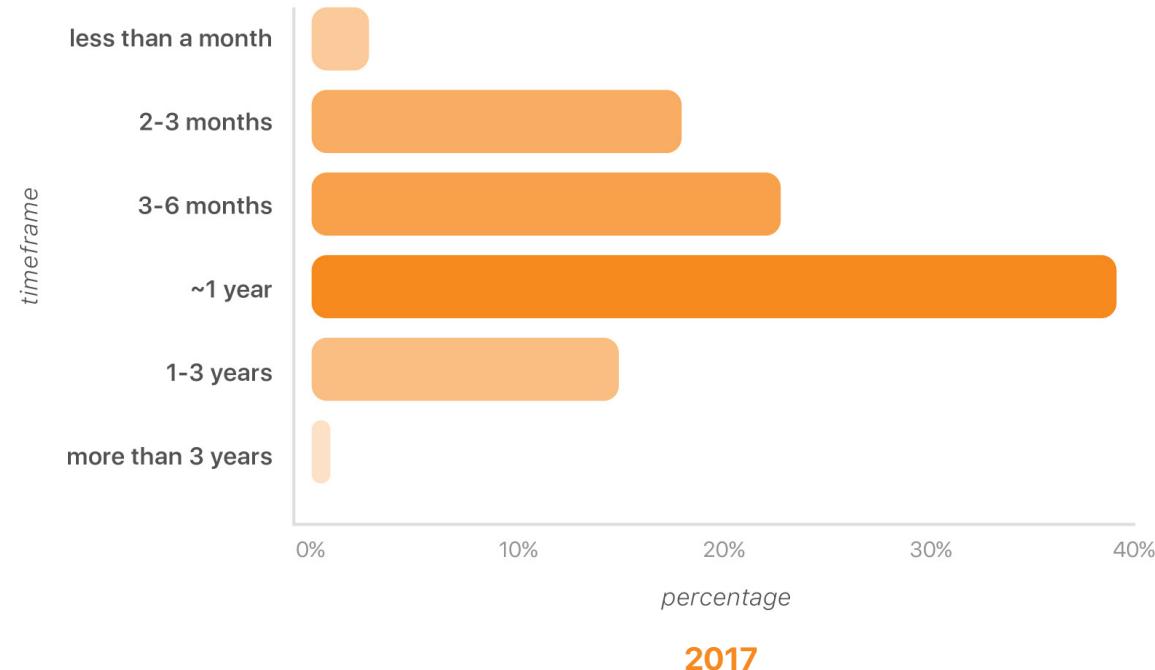
HOW successful are you in planning and prioritizing your initiatives?



The One-Year Plan

The question of how far out you should plan your roadmap is a common point of discussion among product teams. As more and more teams shift to agile, the timelines for roadmaps have become shorter and shorter. The majority of companies plan their roadmaps using a 3-12 month timeframe, while only 18% of companies plan out more than a year.

How far out do you plan your roadmaps?

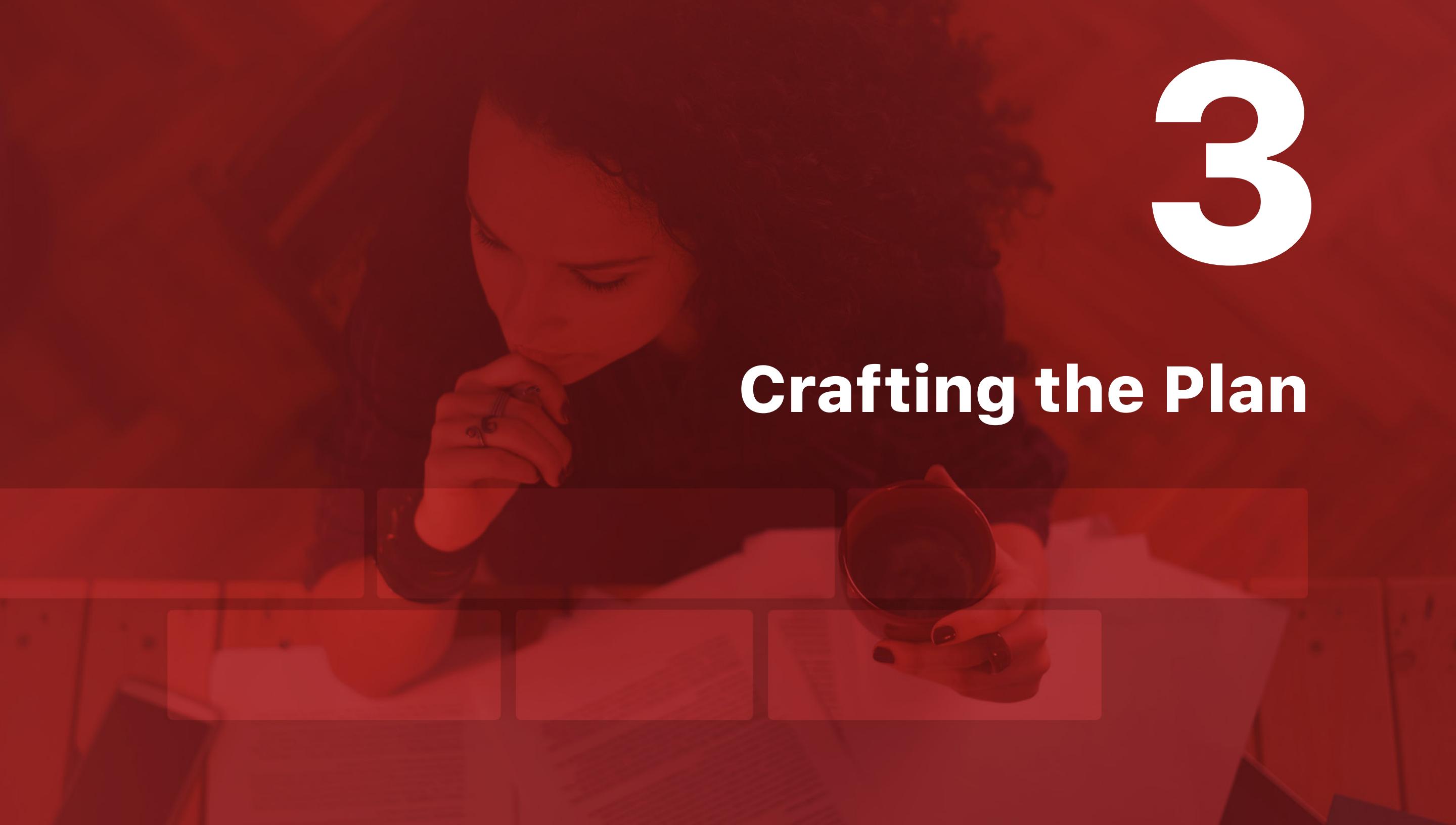


We conduct a yearly planning, but anything more than six months constantly changes. Also, unforeseen issue escalation affects the committed roadmap, resulting in the delay of product releases.

Product Manager at a large software company
with over 5 years of experience

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Crafting the Plan



Crafting the Plan

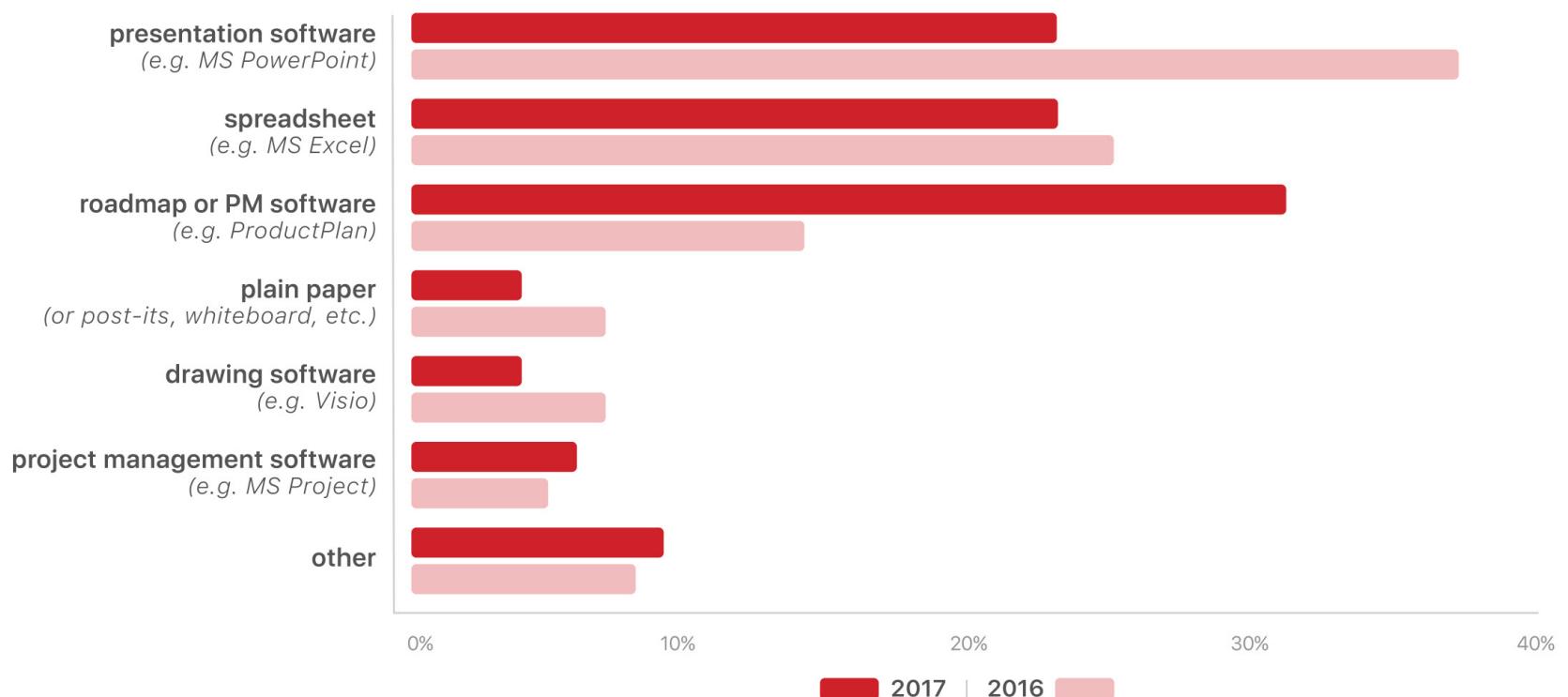
Building a roadmap is the process of translating your high-level ideas into a tangible, visual plan in order to communicate your strategy. Depending on the size of a company and the teams involved, a roadmap can take many forms.

Our survey focused on the tools that companies use to build roadmaps, as well as the different methods of building and maintaining a roadmap (timeframe, frequency, etc.). Based on the responses, flexibility is a top priority for product managers building roadmaps.

The Right Tool for the Job

It's no surprise that the number of people using specific roadmapping software has doubled over the last year, chiefly taking the place of companies using PowerPoint to build roadmaps. Many survey respondents cited the need to update and share their roadmap as the main reason for moving from PowerPoint to native roadmap software.

What tool do you primarily use for your roadmaps?



Does the right tool influence success?

While choosing the correct roadmapping tool can have an impact on your team's overall success, it's more important to find a tool that fits with your company's process or objectives.

Companies using tools like drawing software to build roadmaps are more likely to be unsuccessful at meeting their goals, compared with companies using other tools.

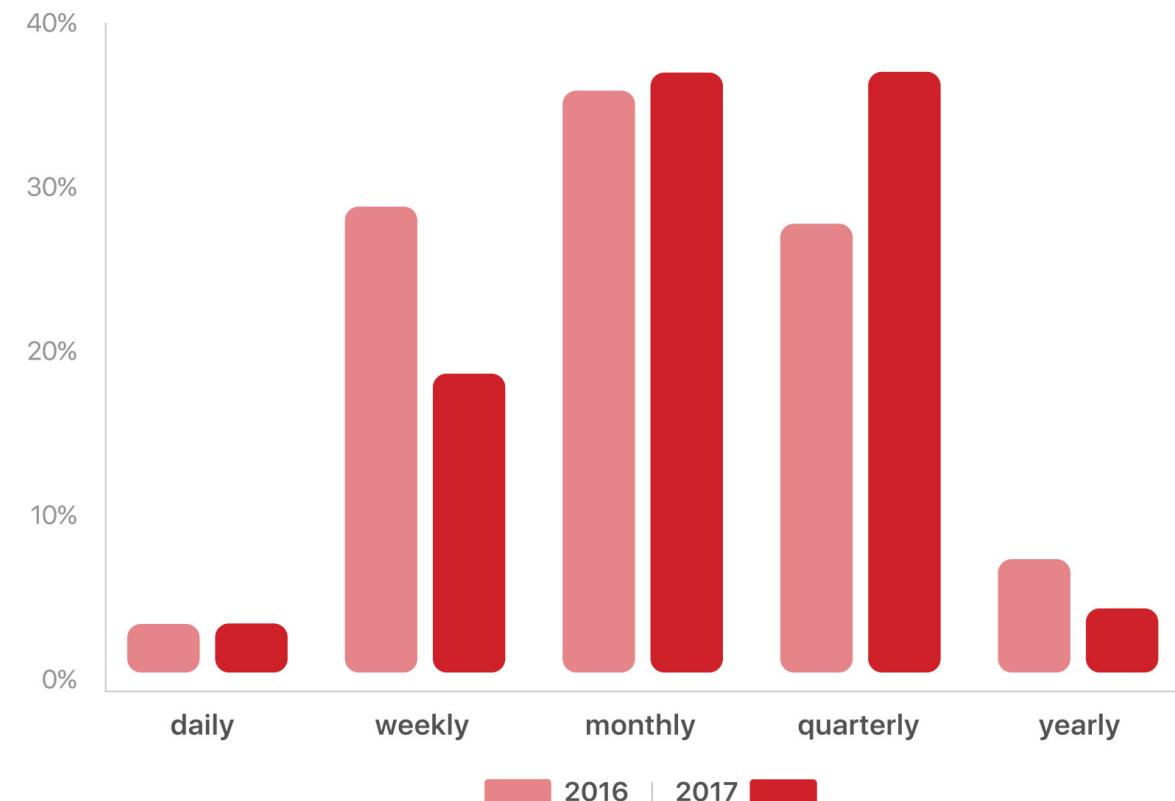
Likewise, companies using plain paper to build roadmaps were significantly less likely to be successful at meeting big-picture goals.

The Shift to Agile

As teams continue to move to an agile model, roadmaps have become increasingly flexible out of necessity. Compared with 2016, significantly fewer roadmap owners updated the roadmap on a yearly basis. The most popular cadence for updating roadmaps was on a monthly basis, followed by weekly and quarterly.

Given that roadmaps function as a strategic communication document, it's no surprise that a small percentage of teams (3%) update their roadmap on a daily basis.

How often do you update your roadmaps?



PMs who plan for shorter time frames (<6 months), are more likely to meet their organizational goals.

“

Communication and presentation formats have been one of the biggest pains with product planning. How do you get the most information across while

a) not committing to dates that may not be achievable and

b) giving everyone the level of information they require to understand what is going to be delivered and why.

“

We try to separate the concept of the product roadmap (strategic vision and direction) from the development plan (execution of development/launch to achieve the product roadmap).

”

Product Manager at a small software company with 2-5 years of experience

”

Product Manager at a medium-sized software company with over 5 years of experience

A photograph of four people in a meeting room, looking at a laptop screen together. A large white number '4' is overlaid in the top right corner.

4

Communicating the Plan

Communicating the Plan

As one of our survey respondents noted, “communication is the top challenge at many companies” when it comes to product strategy. A roadmap functions not only as a planning tool, but as a strategic communication tool for ensuring teams within a company stay in sync with the high-level plans in different departments.

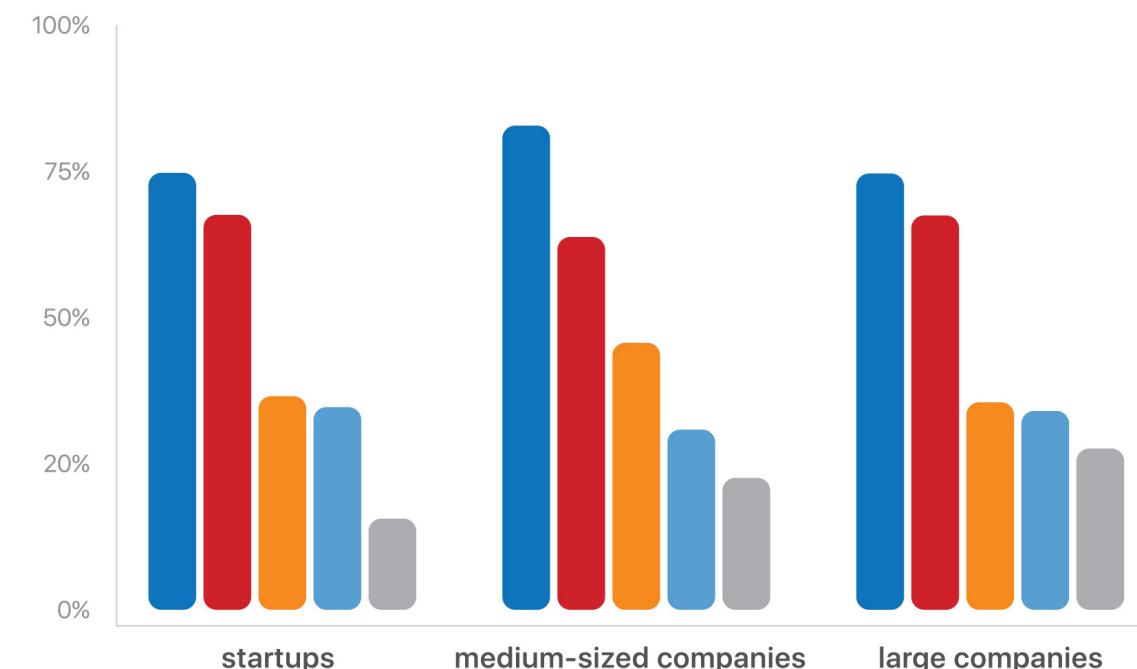
Stakeholders

At every company size, executives are the primary audience for product roadmaps, showing that roadmaps function as a strategic document (as opposed to a detailed task-management tool).

For 78% of companies we surveyed, the primary audience is the executive team. The second most popular audience is the product team.

Many survey respondents commented on the importance of having a roadmap that can be quickly understood, particularly by the executive team.

Who is the primary audience for your product roadmaps?



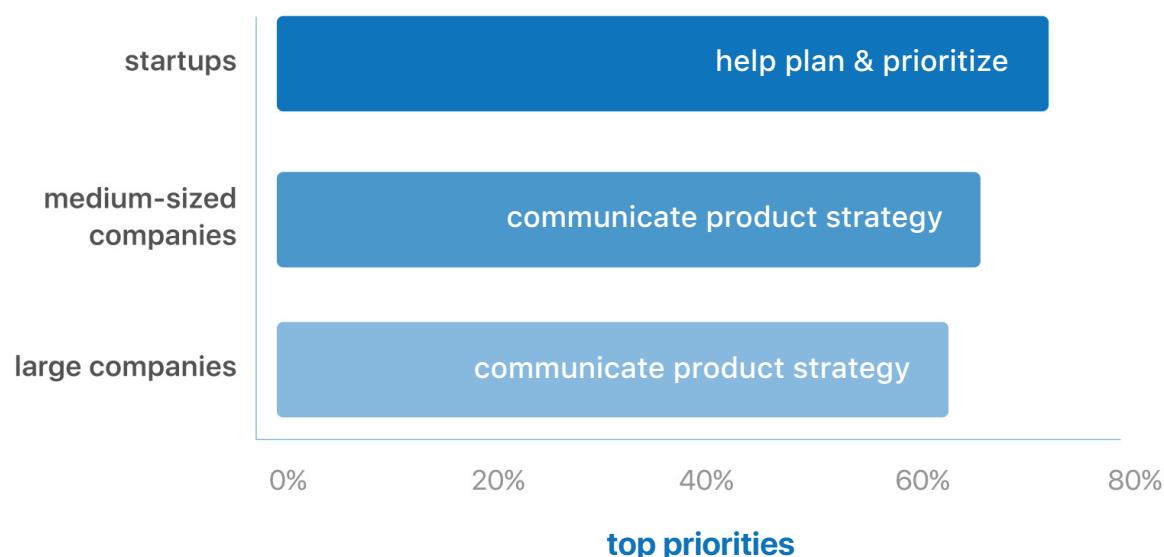
executives | product | sales | marketing | prospects

Different Needs at Different Stages

As companies grow, communicating product strategy becomes a bigger challenge. Our data shows that the larger the company, the more difficult it is to communicate product strategy. Startups and small companies, however, often focus more on using roadmaps to plan and prioritize features and initiatives.

Often, the inherent qualities of a larger company (large team sizes, distributed workforce, etc.) make it more difficult to keep everyone in sync with high-level product strategy.

What are the primary objectives of your roadmaps?



“
The major challenge is in maintaining the roadmap, backlog, prioritizing, and constantly giving a simple view for stakeholders while maintaining a detailed view for product teams.

”
Product Manager at a medium-sized software company with 2-5 years of experience

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Looking Forward

Looking Forward

Challenges for Product Managers

Product managers play a critical role in an organization's strategic direction. They are at the intersection of many important feedback streams — customers, colleagues, executives, and other constituencies. They are also constantly pulled in different directions by market changes and other external factors. Product managers need to digest this continuous stream of (often conflicting) data wisely, and lay the foundation for the company's product vision.

Product managers are faced with an ever increasing pace of product cycles. Innovation cycles and market shifts have drastically increased in the last decade. Moving into 2018 (and beyond), the pace of innovation will continue to increase even further.

Modern product managers have to adjust their planning process accordingly. Product managers have to think long-term, while also remaining flexible and course correcting quickly (and often). Therefore it is important to implement an agile product management process so that product managers can spend most of their time on what matters most – their organization's product strategy.

“
Despite efforts to plan based on resources we have, we still end up committing to dates and scrambling to meet them.
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Product Manager at a large Financial Services company with more than 5 years of experience

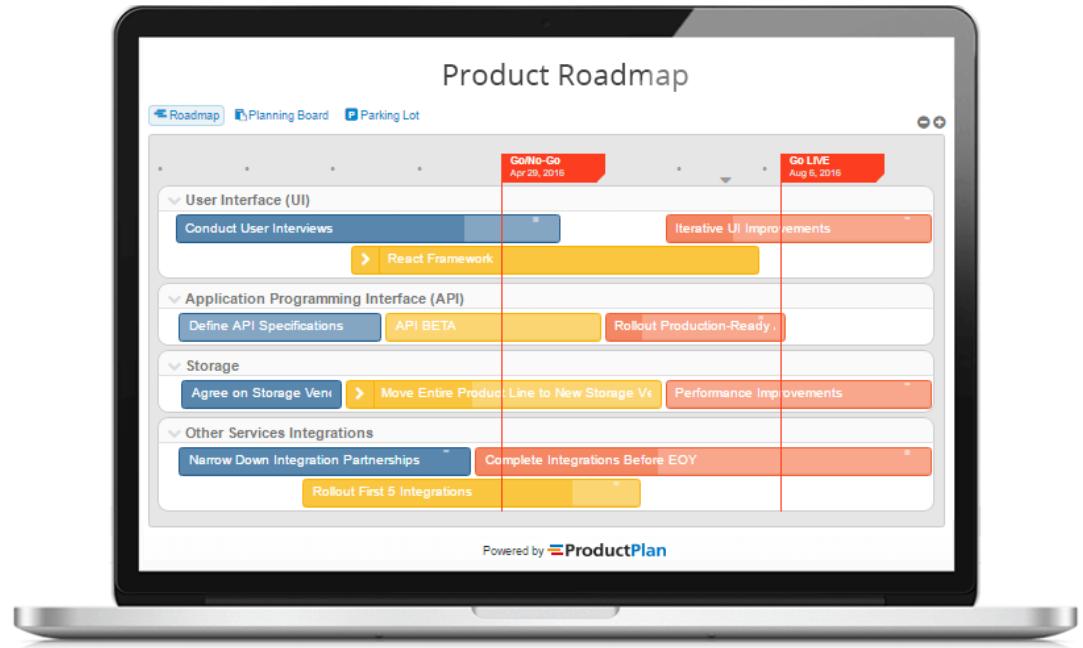
The Needs of the Enterprise

Planning in the Enterprise has additional considerations when compared with smaller organizations and startups:

- 1. Planning and communication:** There are often more stakeholders requiring engagement and approval. These stakeholders are often distributed geographically. In addition, larger organizations require longer timeframes for planning, requiring product managers to begin the process earlier than in smaller organizations.
- 2. Roadmap process:** Within Enterprises (especially those with multiple product lines), it's common for each team or product manager to have their own distinct way of developing and communicating the roadmap. Standardizing the process through software or other methods can help overcome these challenges.
- 3. Software adoption:** For roadmap software specifically, adoption of the software may be challenging in Enterprises. More teams and stakeholders need to evaluate and approve particular solutions. In addition, larger product teams may use a variety of point solutions for roadmaps, customer feedback, project management, and other needs. For these reasons, roadmap solutions must be easy to adopt with minimal training. The products will ideally integrate with other solutions the team is using, and allow integration with a company's existing solutions (e.g. project management software, Single Sign-On).

“
It's difficult to coordinate and get alignment between departments.

”
Product Manager at a medium-sized Media company
with <2 years of experience



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ProductPlan is the easiest way to plan, visualize, and communicate your product strategy. We believe roadmaps are essential to create organizational alignment and ship successful products. Our intuitive features for building, managing, and sharing roadmaps help teams across the globe convey the big picture in one place.

**Quickly plan
and show your
strategy to
get alignment
across
your entire
organization.**