



**THE PRODUCT MANAGER'S
ESSENTIALS HANDBOOK –
VISION, STRATEGY AND
DECISION MAKING**

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Introduction

“Vision animates, inspires, transforms purpose into action.”

Warren Bennis

Have you ever wanted to peer into the minds of other Product Managers (PM), to see exactly what makes them tick? Better yet, to see what makes their ideas become reality and understand how those ideas will eventually tick for their end users?

Well, that’s why we created this handbook -- to help Product Managers expand their knowledge and perhaps learn other ways they can take their vision, build it into a cohesive strategy and make those decisions that make their product what they envision it to be, a delight for their end users.

Product Managers are like the superheros of the product world, there in the background working quietly, whether it be the latest hotel booking app or a child’s learning game, developing their super vision to create products that succeed in their target market.

CREATING A STRIKING PRODUCT VISION

Defining a vision for your product gets the product ball rolling. Think of your product vision statement as an elevator pitch, short and to the point, a quick summary that will articulately communicate the goals for the product.

Below, I'd like to share 5 tips that PMs can use to come up with a winning product vision.

Make your Vision Agile

When you create your own vision statement, you communicate the quality of your product, lifespan and its maintenance requirements. When you have a solid handle on the purpose of your product, write up the first draft of your vision statement.

Make the vision compelling by writing about it as the product is already on the market. Help readers view the product as if it was already being used. Focus on the product's condition as if it was already complete.

Don't use general terms when authoring your vision statement.

Steve Jobs once said:
"If you are working on something exciting that you really care about, you don't have to be pushed. The vision pulls you."

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Don't use terms such as "make customers more efficient", or "helps people do more with their time". Get specific but don't use technical language that is less friendly to larger audiences. For example, here are a few statements to steer clear from:

- Utilize JavaScript as much as possible
- Make all customers active users by January
- Fix all bugs by second quarter of 2016

The Vision's Attractiveness

Steve Jobs once said: "If you are working on something exciting that you really care about, you don't have to be pushed. The vision pulls you." Find ways to motivate those around you. Let you all of you be pulled into the vision equally. This is already half the battle.

The best way to create a vision for your product that is shared with other members of your team, is to set up a workshop, where everyone is a participant. Rather than you telling and selling your vision to the team, collaborate and create something with the others. Present the product idea and ask the members of the workshop to communicate what motivation do they have for the product. Then, you can take and compare the different visions, identify any commonalities and create goals based on what you identified everyone can agree with.

Seeing Beyond the Product

Product and product vision are two separate things and it is important not to confuse the two. You need to remain clear on this difference. The product vision speaks of your motivation for creating the product and the product is the goal you hope to successfully create with that vision.

For example, if you wanted to create a computer-based game that gives children the ability to select different objects they'd like to interact with, set the theme, music and the weather. This is not the actual vision. It is more the product. In order to create a successful vision, like we said, you need to go beyond the product. Say, you might want to state your vision for the product as being one "that allows children to create their own virtual worlds through imagination."

Less is More

In creating a product vision, focus on what needs to be said. Nothing more. Nothing less. Keep it short and to the point. A product team member who has read your vision should be able to comprehend it and communicate it effectively to another team member. If you had 30 seconds to pitch your vision statement, what would you say? What would you want to focus on? Write out your vision in one sentence simply and clearly. This may take you a while, but know that when you have it down to a single solitary sentence, you will be on the road to creating a short and compelling product vision.



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Time to Think BIG

It is of paramount importance to make your product vision as broad and ambitious as possible in order to create a wider net that engages stakeholders. For this reason, you don't want it to be too narrow or very specific.

A vision for the computer game aforementioned is one that is broad enough to pull in more than you would otherwise. Thinking big empowers you to aim for more.

For example, if when all is said and done a computer game that allows children to create their own realities does not look like it will make it through the concept phase, then you may want to transport that idea to another form, such as opening up a workshop for kids to act out their ideas for their perfect world.



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CRAFTING AN AGILE PRODUCT STRATEGY

Agile Product Management is another take on traditional product management. While traditional product management is mostly static, Product Management the Agile way is constantly flowing. Change is the solitary constant. Being Agile is about following an approach that is empirical. The product requirements are always changing based on customer feedback, and the product is always in a state of evolution. This isn't just a huge time saver, but it maximizes the chances for creating a superior product.

Product Management the Agile way is constantly flowing.
Change is the solitary constant. [Click here to Tweet](#)

When creating an Agile strategy using a Roadmap, product managers are empowered to describe how their product is most likely to grow. It is about making sure the stakeholders are on the same page, and passing a budget. However, creating an effective roadmap in an agile environment can be challenging, as things are always in flux. Here are some tips to allow you to keep things in perspective and create a solid Agile product strategy.

Tell a Story

The roadmap for your product should paint a picture with words. It should tell a captivating story on the potential success of your product. It needs to be motivating. It needs to be realistic. Do not oversell. Know your audience. It is a combination of sales, customer service, marketing and development. You need to be convincing. Use real life examples, and stats when possible. Remember to always leave room in your roadmap for continual growth, as your product is evolving.

Say No When you Need to

Just because you want stakeholders to buy in to your vision, does not mean you need to say yes to every idea for a feature or request. This would create a big mish mosh of features, and would throw the original vision in the trash. It's about saying no to everything except the most important features, the features that will satisfy your vision and make your product a success. You can't please everyone, but as a Product Manager you know your main focus should always be to please the customer, not your boss.

Making Important Timelines

When creating your product roadmap you need to ask yourself if your product launch is constrained by dates or goals. So, if you need to launch the product to beat the competition or need to have a product ready for a major tradeshow, then you need to be time efficient. You may even need to sacrifice some product features, and put out the Minimal Marketable



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Product (MMP) -- a stripped down version of your final product -- in order to make a deadline. In any case, you can always put out a more “beefed up” version of your product afterwards, especially as, with Agile, your product is always in flux.

Get the RIGHT People to BUY IN

You are wasting your time with a roadmap, unless you get the people who develop, market and sell your product to buy into the vision of your product. Involve all the key stakeholders in the creation of the roadmap, one that is realistic and screams for action. It is recommended to hold collaboration meetings/brainstorming sessions. These sessions should be focused and run about 2-4 hours. If this is not enough time, then you clearly need more time invested in research and validation.

Forward-Looking Roadmap

You need to choose a timeframe for your roadmap, one that is realistic. Choose a 12 month timeframe. It’s important to not look too far into the future as you might just lose sight of your goal. We know you’ve all been there before. This will give you enough time to align the roadmap with the company’s strategy, to present the products and how it supports the business goals, and enough time to gain the necessary budget. Having said that, don’t be afraid to make detours in your roadmap depending on changing product and market conditions. Make sure that your product evolves with the expectations of the market.

As Steve Jobs said, “people think focus means saying yes to the thing you’ve got to focus on. But that’s not what it means at all. It means saying no to the hundred other good ideas...”

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MAKING SUPERIOR PRODUCT DECISIONS

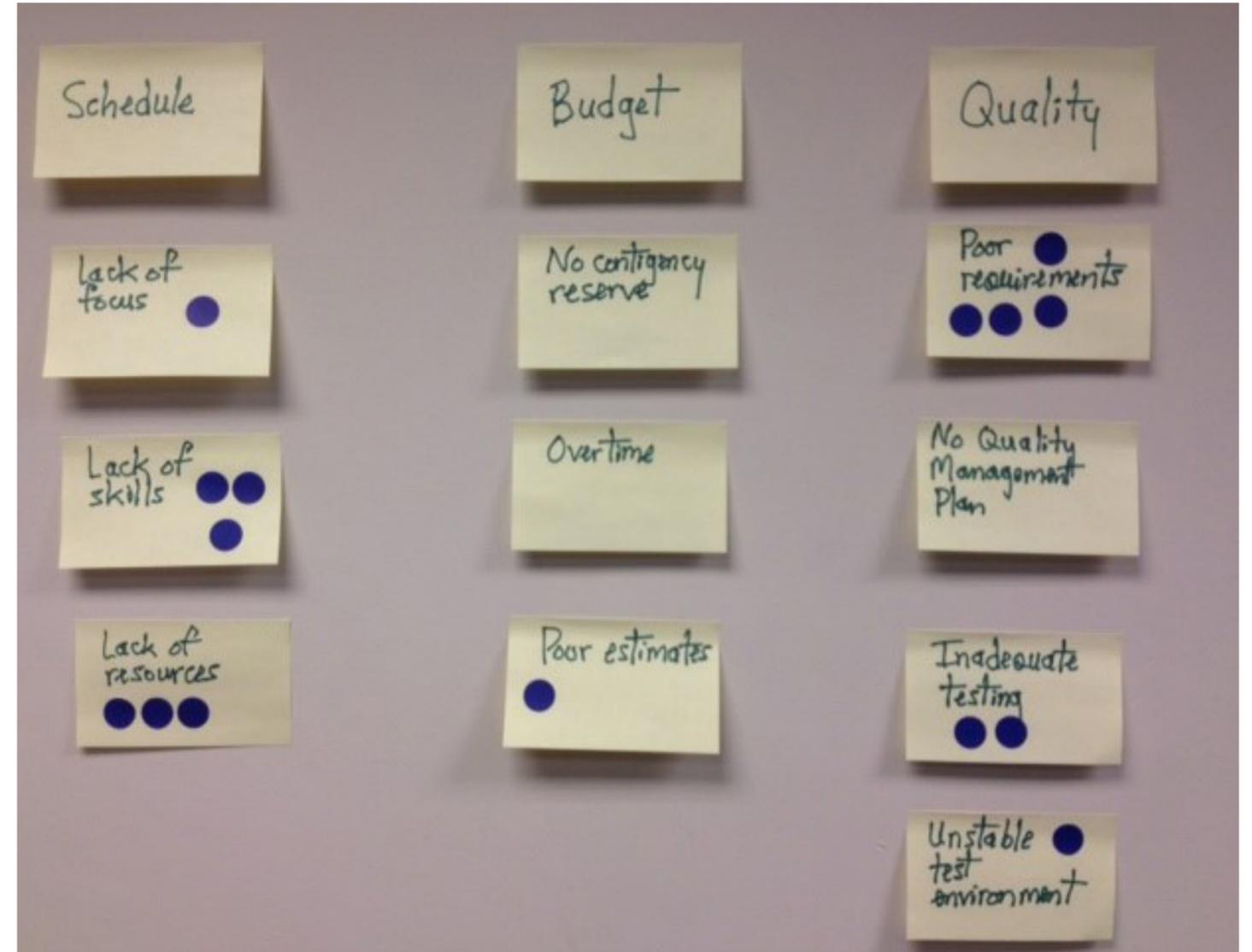
Product Managers are the mothers of invention. You need to decide on the features that will go into your product. What message will you be using to communicate the value that people will get out of your product? Who is your target market? Here are 3 steps to making Superior Product Decisions.

Voting by the Dot

This strategy works great when you have a bunch of well-defined ideas and must decide which set of ideas to move forward with. Say, for example that your team is working on the design of a new product. It's a mobile app that allows shoppers to find the best deals on groceries based on their diet and past purchasing history. Each team member has sketched out on paper what the app's user interface and user experience would look like. With a lot of options, how do you decide?

You grant each member a few votes. Start with between three and five. You use dots to symbolize the votes. The next step in the process is deciding what to vote on. Any member can decide how many of their votes they want to put on any specific sketch or a segment of the sketch (e.g. Tom's sign up screen or Mike's sliding menu). This is a

great way to weed out ideas you'd like to move forward with. Now, ask the members of your team to cast their votes on the sketches. If a member really likes something, they may want to give it all their votes.



Voting by the Dot is a great strategy for when you have a bunch of well-defined ideas and must decide which set of ideas to move forward with. [Click here to Tweet](#)



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Realistic Roadmapping = Quick Decisions

You need to make your roadmap visible to key execs and realistic. This is your bread and butter document, your most effective way of communicating strategy for your product. Do not set dates that can't be achieved. Don't get bogged down in the details. Make it equally understandable to all.

Using Rapid Feedback

This decision making technique works best when your goal is to process many ideas with people who are not familiar with them.

For example, your team could be working on a mobile app that tracks walking distance and has recently launched the MVP version. You want to collect input from the stakeholders and Subject Matter Experts as to the direction you are proposing for the product, including data centric and technical aspects of the product.

The first step using this technique is to name a facilitator, someone who will lead and make sure everyone stays on track.

Next, jot down a description of every idea that you'd like to gather feedback on. The idea here is to describe the idea in less than a minute. Using a format that answers some key questions is a good way to do this.

- What is the product?
- Who is the target market?
- What problem does it solve?

When you are sitting with your stakeholders, let them know how the technique works. Then, start describing your ideas. Set a time so those around you know when the time has expired.

Next, set the time for 2 minutes and have your stakeholders ask any questions to clarify your idea.

Now, spend 3 minutes listening to the participants chime in with their amendments to the idea. The key here is to encourage positive feedback that only builds on the idea and make it more solid. The key in this exercise is to take the ideas and makes them better. Within 60 minutes you will have a bunch of ideas that started out scaled down and are now better. Now, go out and develop them with your user base.

Rapid Feedback is a decision making technique that works best when your goal is to process many ideas with people who are not familiar with them. [Click here to Tweet](#)



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In conclusion

I hope we provided you with some insight into the different methods for creating a captivating product vision, product strategy and what needs to be done to empower PMs to make those difficult decisions easier.

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