

# Creating visual product roadmaps: *An essential guide for product managers*

E-book | MindManager



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# Introduction

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## Introduction

As a product manager (PM), it's your role to ensure every product journey is headed in the right direction while avoiding costly missteps along the way.

PMs have one of the toughest roles in any product organization. They're tasked with leading both product creation as well as planning for future updates.

The essence of the PM role is to discover and prioritize the most meaningful feedback and input using both quantitative data and qualitative insights to develop an optimal product strategy and roadmap. You must chart a path forward that helps secure your organization's future while solving customers' most pressing problems.



Facing **challenges** such as an overload of responsibilities and limited time and staff, PMs are often tasked with making strategic decisions that impact the goals of their company, the financial security of their colleagues, and the success of their customers.

Mistakes made at the strategic planning level are thus amplified, and **the costs can be exponential**. Adding to this stress are many competing voices (e.g., feedback from customers, sales, support teams, executives, etc.), each with a different set of needs and priorities that you must attend to.

One of the most powerful ways to create a successful product strategy and roadmap is with a diagramming technique called **mind mapping**, which you can do with a solution such as MindManager®.

Mind maps provide a structured way to capture and organize ideas and information. They help you identify and understand new concepts by breaking them down into individual components or tasks.

When it comes to product roadmaps, mind mapping supports your ability to brainstorm and identify potential roadblocks, devise mitigation plans, identify solutions, and ultimately create your roadmaps.

#### **A successful product manager must:**

- **Start the product development process** grounded in their organization's overall strategy, keeping in mind any official company objectives, desired key results, and/or key performance indicators (KPIs).
- **Gather and analyze customer and product data** from internal and external sources to identify and solve critical customer problems.
- **Process and prioritize** all potential product initiatives and lay them out on a timeline.
- **Tailor custom roadmaps** for all the different stakeholder groups that must be informed throughout various stages in the process.
- **Share product roadmaps with all necessary parties**, solicit feedback, and continue to refine the plan over time.



# Product plans vs. product roadmaps

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## Product plans vs. product roadmaps

According to Clayton Christensen, Harvard Business School professor and best-selling author of *The Innovator's Dilemma*, 30,000 new consumer products are launched each year—and a shocking [95% of them fail](#).

Only [13% of products are launched on time](#), while 20% percent are cancelled, another 25% are delivered late, and 42% require more resources than originally expected.

In other words, a successful product launch is far from guaranteed. Even outstanding products must continue to innovate to be relevant in a world where products, services, and technologies evolve at an increasingly rapid rate.

Whether you're launching a new product or service or enhancing an existing one, one thing is clear: You need both a well-researched strategic **product plan** and a clear **product roadmap** to increase your likelihood of success and avoid costly pitfalls.

A **product plan** clarifies what your organization is creating, for whom, and why it's worth the investment. This plan is a shared source of truth for your vision, direction, and priorities.

A product plan is [typically developed](#) by first conducting a market review, a review of the company's financial performance, and a review of its corporate strategy. Next, the product strategy is developed or refined, and product roadmaps and release schedules are created.

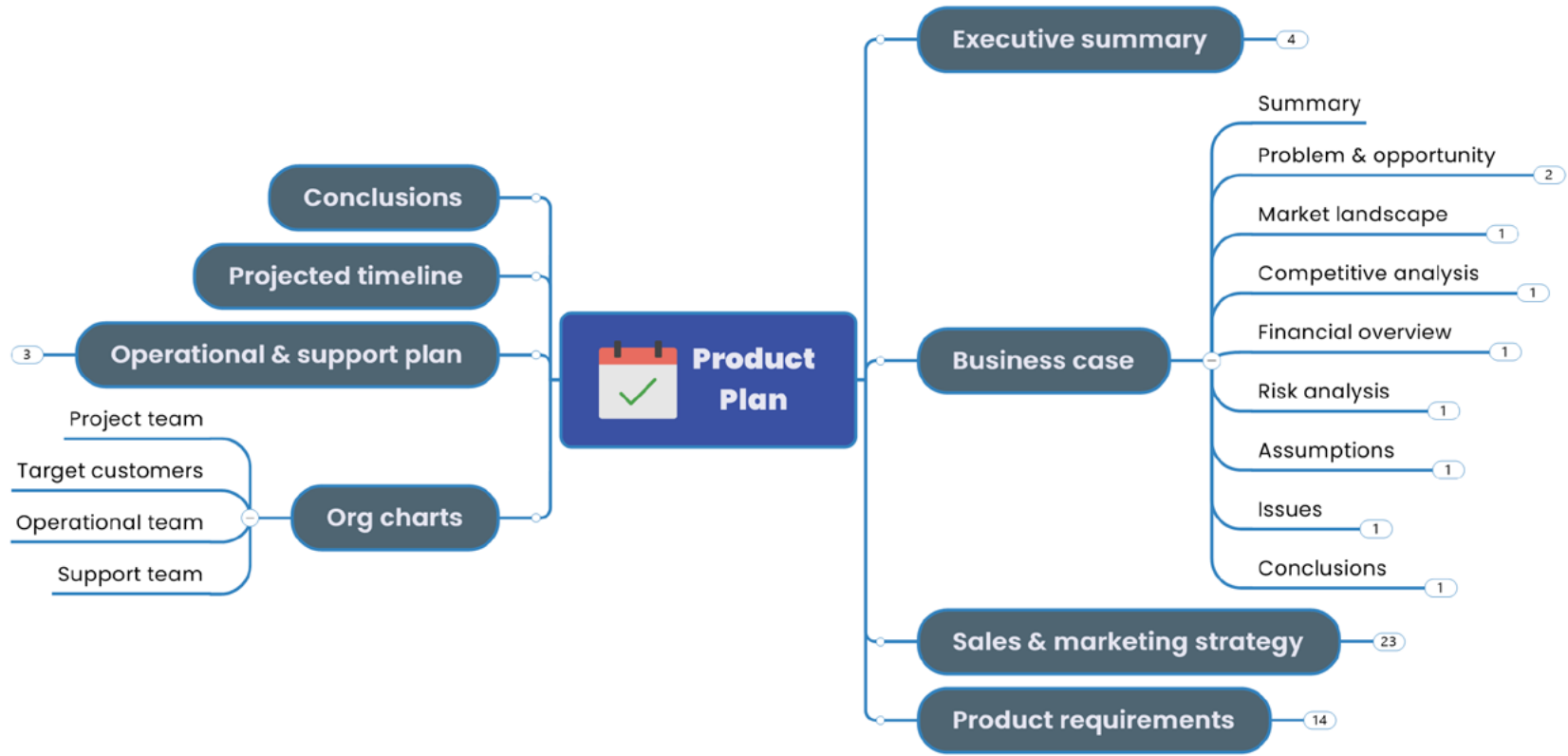




The documentation and presentation of the product plan will differ by organization, but will likely include some or all of the following elements:

- An executive summary and details about the target market, buyers, and users.
- A competitive analysis.
- The identified user/business problem.
- A business case for investing in the product.
- Financial data, including the pricing and business model, and financial projections.
- Key product objectives.
- Key product features.
- Product positioning points.
- A sales and marketing strategy.
- A projected timeline for completion.
- A list of the internal teams and schedules that will be involved.
- Sales and distribution models.
- Operational and support plans.





Example of a product plan researched and developed using a mind map

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A **product roadmap** is a visual representation of a product strategy. It answers the basic questions of what will be done, and by when.

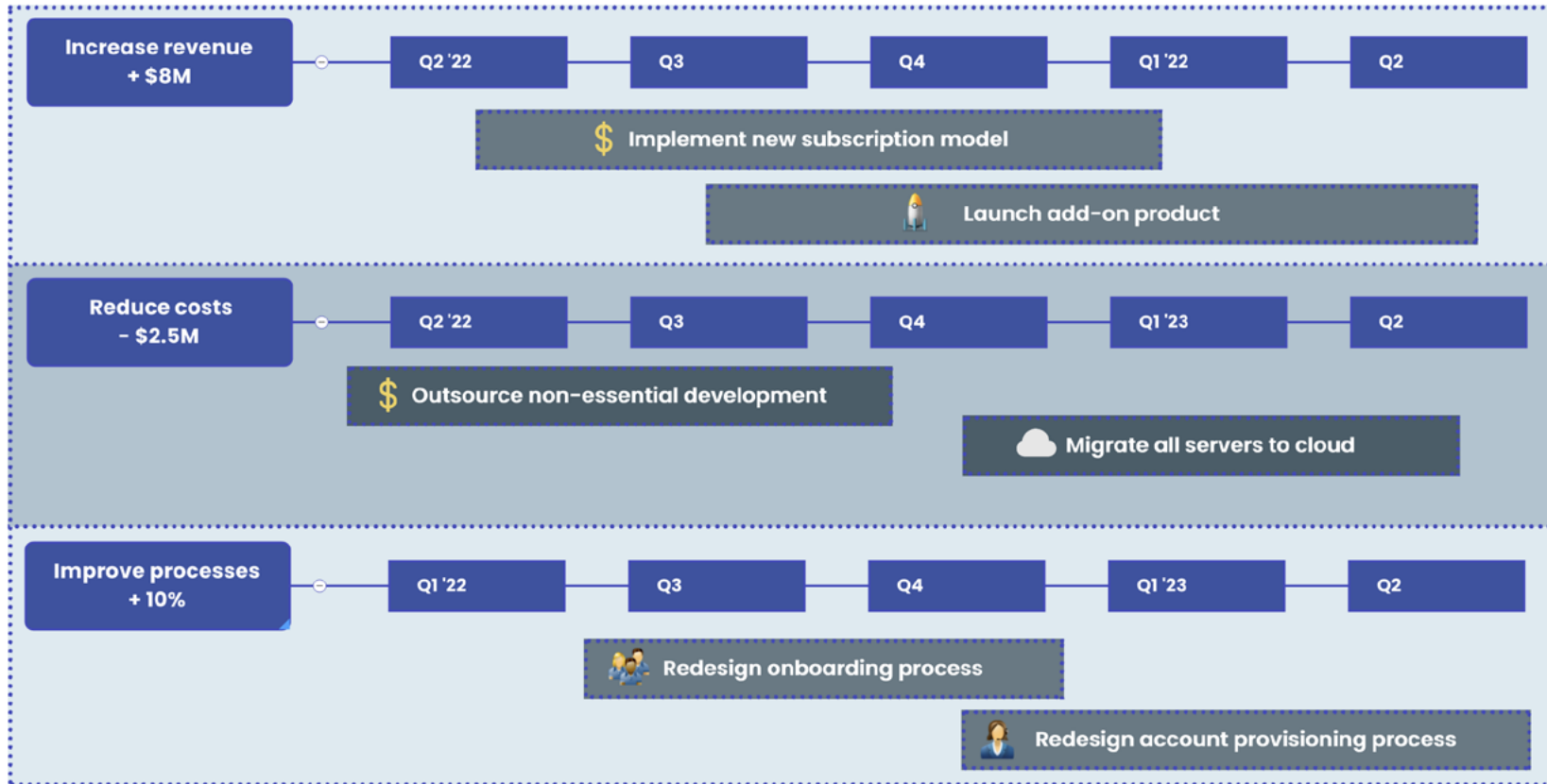
This roadmap can be more detailed—e.g., highlighting who will be involved in completing the necessary work, details about the project scope, as well as the current status of various milestones—but it shouldn't be considered a project plan.

Product roadmaps are shared internally to align teams with a clear vision of the product direction, establish priorities, and demonstrate alignment with business goals. Variations of your roadmap are also often shared externally to communicate your vision to prospects, customers, investors, analysts, and the media.

While the strategy and goals defined within your product plan should not change frequently, roadmaps are often more flexible. Product roadmaps should allow teams to make necessary adjustments in accordance with the evolving needs of your consumers, developments within your industry, and the impact of any changes to your budget or resources.



### Product roadmap



*Visualize goals, initiatives, and projects with your product roadmap*



# The benefits of creating visual product roadmaps

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## The benefits of creating visual product roadmaps

Quite a lot of work is required to create a viable strategic plan and product roadmap. Planning plays a key role in whether your product will be a wild success or a total flop.

A solid product vision and plan should precede the creation of any roadmaps. This planning process isn't just about finding the right path forward and defining which opportunities you'll pursue—it's also essential to understand when to say no to work that may distract you from accomplishing key goals.

The benefits of product planning come from both identifying your overall strategy and through the communication and collaborative process that ensues when the roadmaps are shared with your stakeholders.

The following two models can help you identify and plan your product strategy:

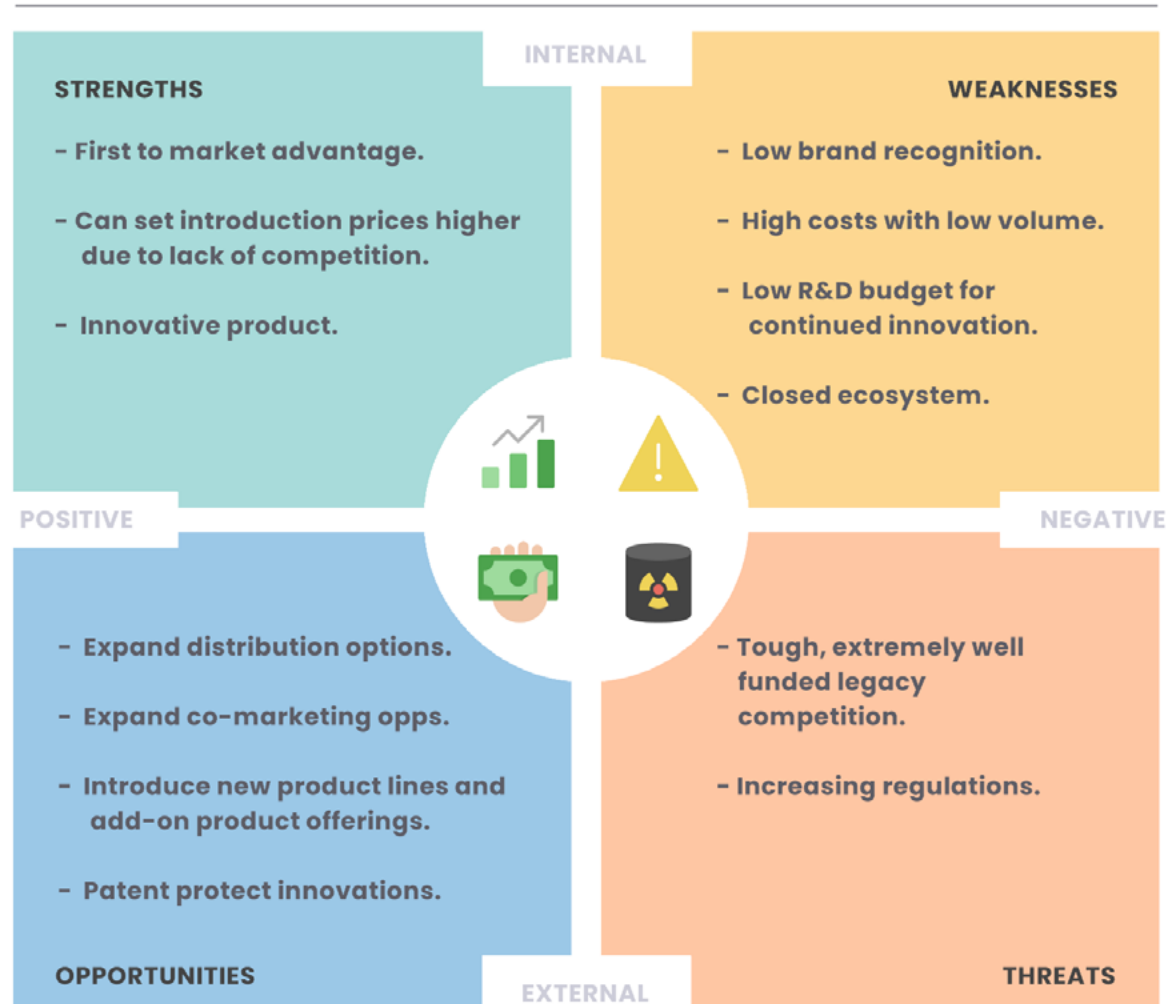
- **ASWOT analysis** can be used to assess your product's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Another way to assess the current state of your product is to map out your product offering by covering the "five Ps": product, pricing, promotions, placement, and people.



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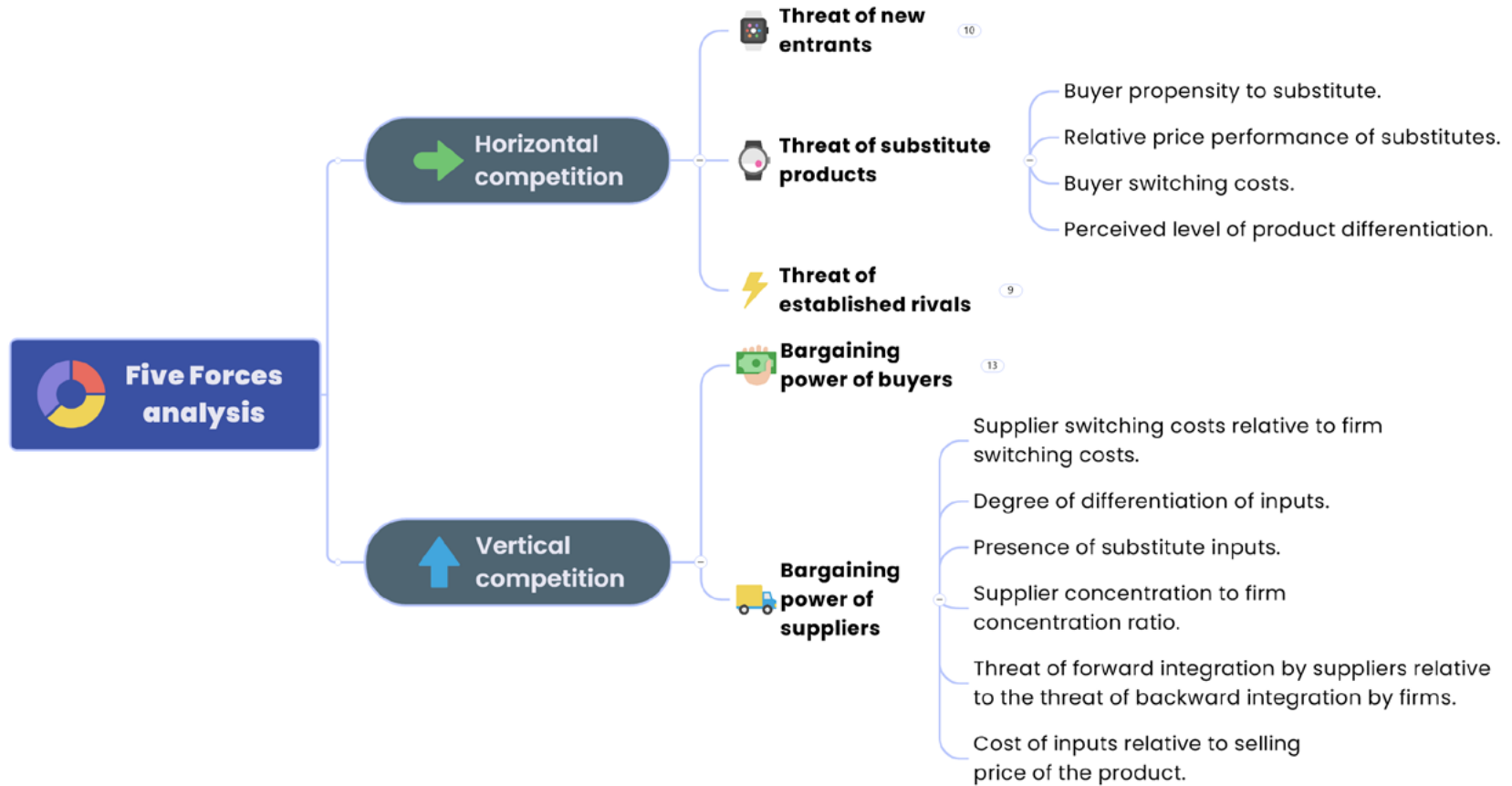
View a SWOT analysis template created in MindManager online [here](#). From there, you can download the template by clicking on File > Export > Download as MMAP. If you have MindManager installed, you can edit the template to fit your needs.

**Product SWOT analysis**



Assess your product offering with a SWOT analysis matrix diagram

- **Porter's Five Forces** is a model designed to help you identify and understand your competition, the possibility of new competitors and entrants into your industry, your relationships with suppliers and customers, and any potential products that can directly or indirectly replace your product to solve the customer problem.



Map out the competitive landscape using Porter's Five Forces mind map



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*View a Porter's Five Forces diagram created in MindManager online [here](#). From there, you can download the template by clicking on File > Export > Download as MMAP. If you have MindManager installed, you can edit the template to fit your needs.*

All information gathered using the above models should be used to inform your product strategy and roadmap(s). This is where the benefits of visual product planning really shine.

A visual approach enables you to brainstorm and envision new possibilities with stakeholders in an engaging way, and provide stakeholders with a unique, high-level overview of your product roadmap that includes both opportunities and potential issues.

Working with the right visual tools also helps you ideate freely and organize and update your product roadmap along the way.



## Benefits of using a visual approach to create product roadmaps include:

**1. Better strategic alignment.** This is achieved when product and customer goals are aligned with organizational goals, and is demonstrated when goals and their associated initiatives are included in the product roadmap.

A visual roadmap can help tie together organizational goals and customer needs while ensuring your most valuable resources are working towards strategic outcomes.

**2. Greater clarity.** Visual tools can help clarify your product vision and desired goals throughout the roadmap creation and distribution process. Additionally, team members can see and understand how each initiative and their own work contributes to the overall vision.

**3. Sharper focus.** Objective and outcome-based visual roadmaps cultivate a shared understanding of desired customer-focused and organizational outcomes. They can also help motivate teams to pay attention to and prioritize the work that matters most to the organization.

**4. Improved feedback.** Visual roadmaps can be easier to grasp and understand than a lengthy text-based product plan. Visualizations also act as a communication tool that can help advance discussions and collaboration with internal and external stakeholders.

Visual roadmaps can be leveraged to encourage constructive feedback, gain a greater understanding of customer needs, and increase the likelihood of both internal and external buy-in.





# The importance of tailoring visual roadmaps for different stakeholders

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## The importance of tailoring visual roadmaps for different stakeholders

During the road mapping process for both physical and digital products, you must prioritize which capabilities and requirements to build initially, and which ones will be delivered in subsequent versions or releases over time.

You'll use your proposed roadmap to collaborate with all involved teams to solicit feedback and make any necessary updates. But it isn't as simple as building a single roadmap—in fact, you'll likely need several.

Keep in mind that different roadmaps serve different purposes, and some of them may not fit perfectly with your particular product. That being said, let's take a look at three common product roadmap categories.

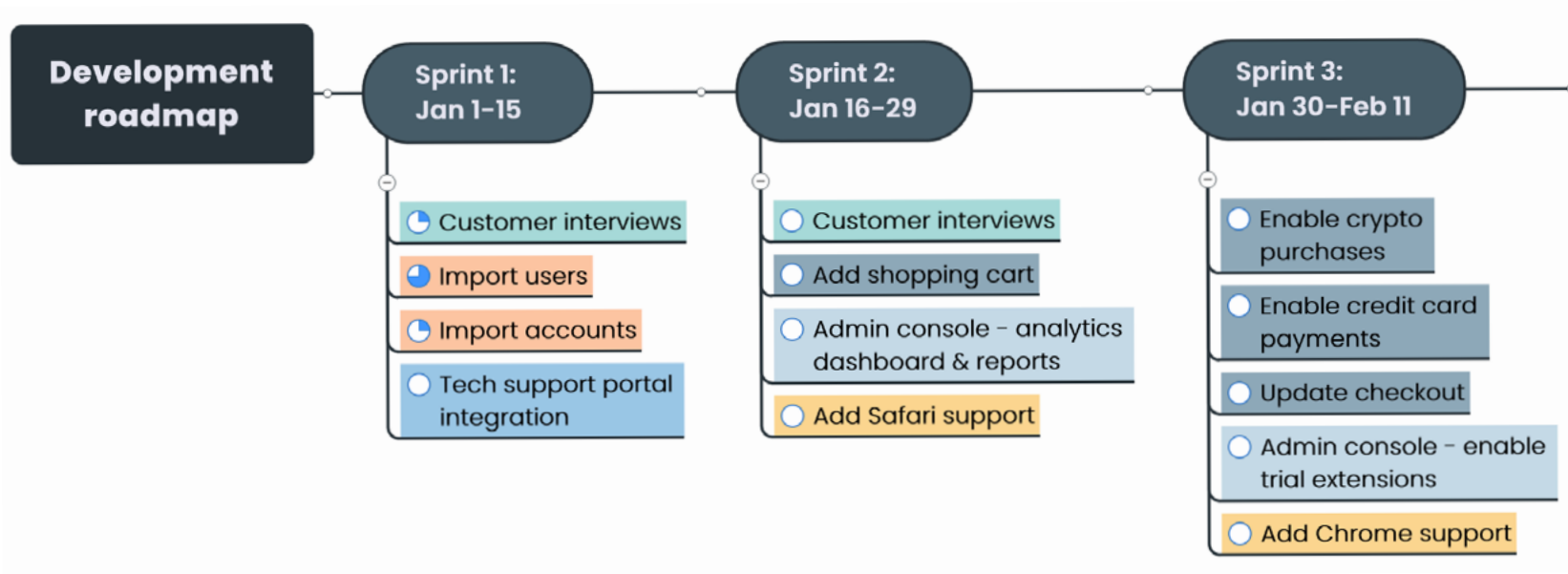
### 1. Stakeholder-driven roadmaps

To communicate the proposed path forward effectively for your different stakeholders, PMs should produce variations of their roadmap that answer different questions based on each group's needs.

**Internal development roadmaps** target your product development team. The format will vary based on how your team works (e.g., you may use Agile product planning), but key elements include what customer value should be delivered, target internal release dates, and important milestones.

Release plans typically dive deeper into details and **include elements** such as user stories, epics, initiatives, and themes:

- **Story:** A short requirement written from the end-user's perspective.
- **Epic:** A larger effort that can be broken down into smaller tasks, or stories.
- **Initiative:** A collection of epics that address a common goal.
- **Themes:** An even larger area that addresses the company's goals and strategy. Tying stories, epics, and initiatives to themes builds strategic alignment.



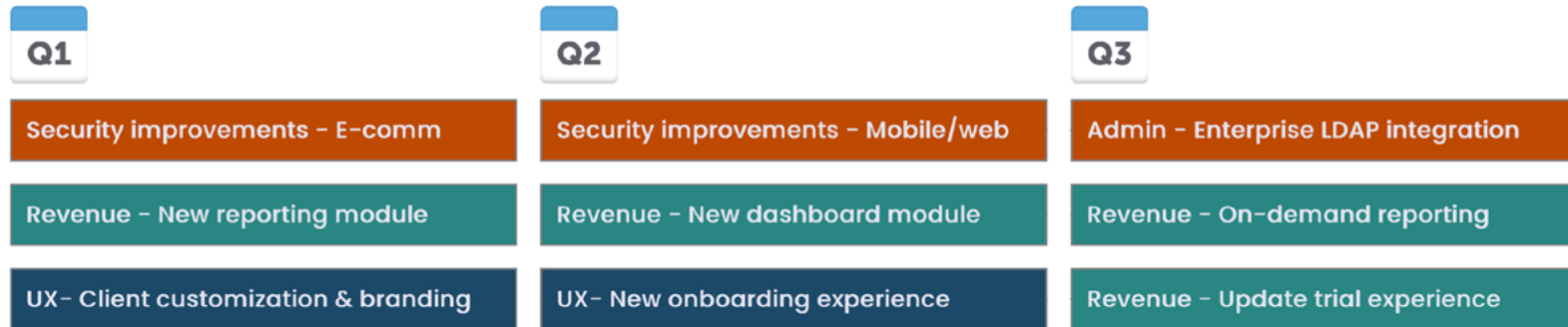
*Development roadmaps illustrate user stories, which typically roll up into epics, initiatives, and larger themes*

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View an agile development roadmap created in MindManager online [here](#). From there, you can download the template by clicking on File > Export > Download as MMAP. If you have MindManager installed, you can edit the template to fit your needs.

**Executive roadmaps** emphasize how your plan supports your organization’s strategy, goals, and key metrics. They tend to be less detail-oriented than a development roadmap, are usually organized by quarter or year, and can span up to several years to highlight the longer-term vision and evolution of the product over time.

### Executive roadmap



#### Legend

- Security /admin
- Increase revenue
- Improve user experience

*Executive roadmaps depict a higher level view of key objectives*

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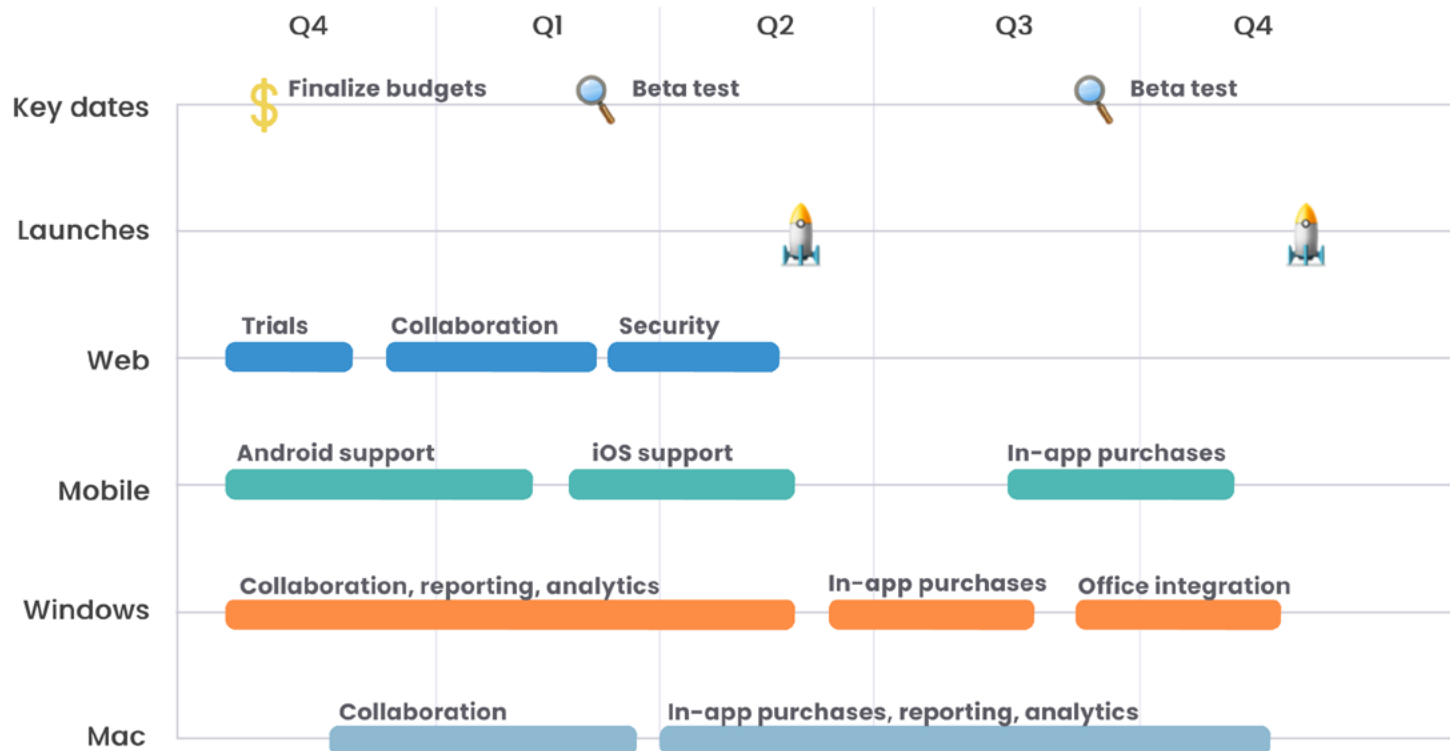
View an executive roadmap created in MindManager online [here](#). From there, you can download the template by clicking on File > Export > Download as MMAP. If you have MindManager installed, you can edit the template to fit your needs.



**Sales team and customer roadmaps** focus on driving excitement among sales representatives, existing customers, and prospects about the future direction of your business. They highlight the new value your product will provide to customers and include high-level descriptions of features and their benefits in order to advance sales conversations.

Often shared on sales calls and in customer meetings, these roadmaps avoid using hard dates and often include disclaimers to avoid setting unrealistic expectations and provide you with a buffer if you run into delays.

**Product portfolio roadmaps** go beyond a single product vision to show all planned releases across a whole portfolio of products in a single view. This broader perspective provides a strategic overview of your plan to executives or advisory boards while helping internal teams understand how their specific project relates to other concurrent and dependent initiatives.



*Product portfolio roadmaps illustrate the future of an entire product family, including any dependencies or risks across the portfolio*

**Access this template :**

View a product portfolio roadmap created in MindManager online [here](#). From there, you can download the template by clicking on File > Export > Download as MMAP. If you have MindManager installed, you can edit the template to fit your needs.



## 2. Focus-driven roadmaps

Another category of product roadmaps emphasizes a key area of focus. There are different focuses to choose from, which can vary based on your industry, the maturity of your product, and the maturity of your organization and teams.

**Strategy roadmaps** visualize the key outcomes that must be delivered over a particular time period to achieve your organization's strategic vision. They display the internal initiatives and efforts your team must invest in to achieve their goals, as well as what elements the organization must change (if necessary), and why the changes are required.

Data included in strategy roadmaps typically relates to business vision, key objectives, business and product strategies, market requirements, product or service plans, technologies, and capabilities.

**Market roadmaps** are similar to strategy roadmaps, but are focused on the broader market rather than your specific product. A market roadmap evaluates the marketplace to identify potential breakthrough opportunities.

This market assessment looks at the customer trends and key needs that drive the marketplace, as well as external influences, evolving and disruptive technologies, and the competitive landscape. The goal is to identify problems and opportunities in advance to help the organization proactively address issues and take advantage of opportunities.

**Technology roadmaps** are used to support both strategic and long-term goals while balancing shorter-term needs and requirements. They can be applied alongside a product roadmap to identify emerging technologies that can be used to upgrade your product and as well as opportunities to help scale technologies, move towards more sustainable development, and reduce operational costs.

Technology roadmaps align key product releases with upgrades of supported applications, hardware, and infrastructure to meet both short and long term business needs, taking into account both internal technology resources as well as industry and market standards.

### Product release and product feature roadmaps

illustrate when product releases and features will be launched. They help coordinate release activities across cross-functional teams, including marketing, sales, and customer support.

- **A product release roadmap** typically includes the product features that will be added, updated, or removed within each release.
- **A product feature roadmap** illustrates the timeline for when new and improved features will be delivered.

Your product roadmap should help advance conversations with customers who are likely to rely on both current and future release or feature updates. All too often, product teams only produce roadmaps for a single product release or feature, which can be a short-sighted mistake.

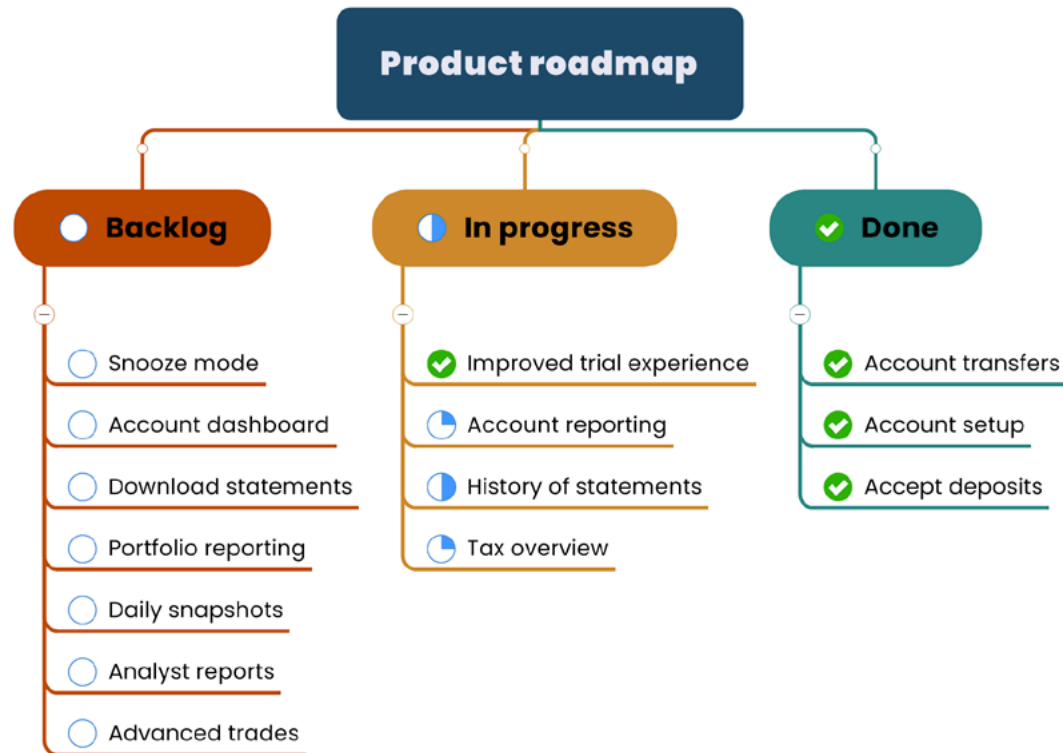
### 3. Orientation-driven roadmaps

Roadmaps can also have different orientations to serve different purposes, such as showing progress on current initiatives, themes, or desired customer and company outcomes.

Colors are often used in these roadmaps to highlight key information (e.g., milestone status) and make it faster and easier to visually scan and understand all information within the roadmap.

**Status-oriented roadmaps** highlight what tasks are currently underway, what's next, and what's planned for later. These roadmaps are often displayed as Kanban charts, which help provide clarity and simplicity.



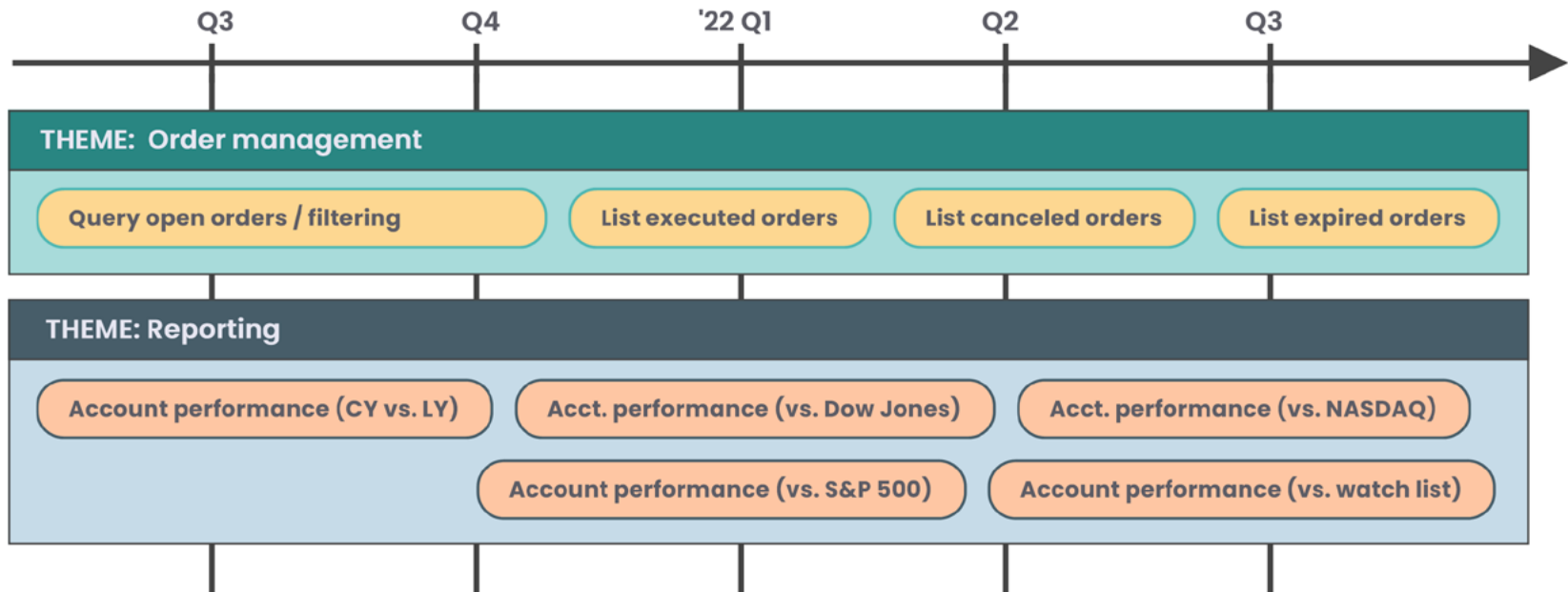


*Status-oriented roadmaps highlight task progress*

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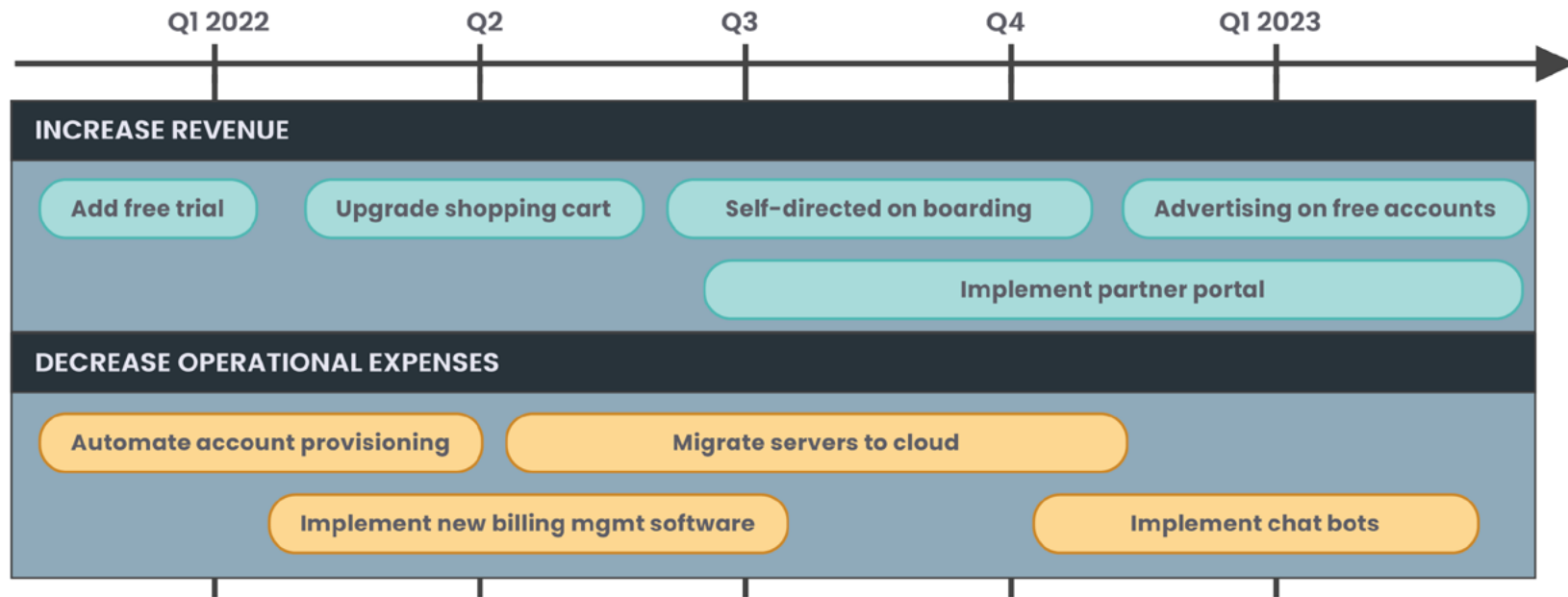
**Theme-oriented roadmaps** center around the value your product will provide to customers, rather than mentioning explicit features. Key themes should be mapped to the organization’s goals and metrics to create alignment between your work as a PM and corporate objectives.



*Theme-oriented roadmaps group work by themes to help stakeholders understand how smaller projects lead to larger improvements*

**Outcome-oriented roadmaps** pay attention to the problems and results your team is trying to solve with your product. For example, your outcome might be to increase sales conversions, improve product use and adoption, save users time when performing tasks, or provide cost savings.

Identifying the target outcomes in your roadmap rather than mentioning explicit features gives your team more freedom to figure out the best way to accomplish your goals.

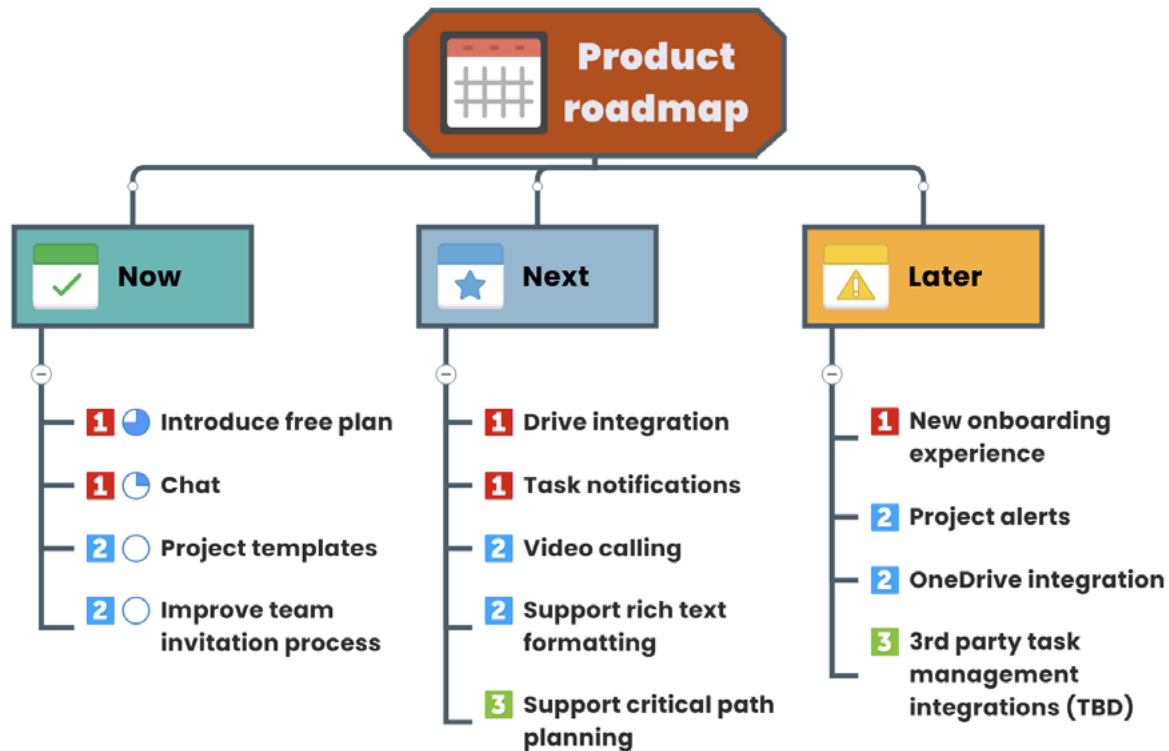


*Outcome-oriented roadmap group work by desired outcomes*

**Time-oriented roadmaps** use either explicit dates or more generic references to visualize timelines.

Time can be expressed in several ways, such as:

- **Now, Next, Later.** These roadmaps show how product development is progressing without mentioning specific releases or release dates.
- **Release 1, Release 2, Release 3.** These roadmaps avoid explicit time references while still highlighting the sequence of product releases and the proposed targeted outcomes associated with each release.
- **Q1, Q2, Q3.** These roadmaps target broad timeframes (e.g., years, quarters, or even months) to set rough expectations for when new product capabilities and outcomes will be delivered.



*Time-oriented roadmaps organize work by sequences of time, releases, or generic dates (e.g., months or quarters)*

Some organizations update their roadmaps with an explicit date for the current release after all cross-functional development and launch teams commit to one. Others choose to plan releases around a regular, more predictable timeframe, where release dates are known in advance.

For example, some agile organizations may update their software weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc. These release dates remain fixed, while the contents of the release (e.g., the specific product features and/or capabilities) are subject to change.



# 5 steps to develop your product roadmap

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## 5 steps to develop your product roadmap

Now that we've covered the importance and benefits of creating and customizing a product roadmap, let's review the five steps you should follow when developing and refining your own roadmap.

### 1. Align your organizational strategy with your strategic product plan

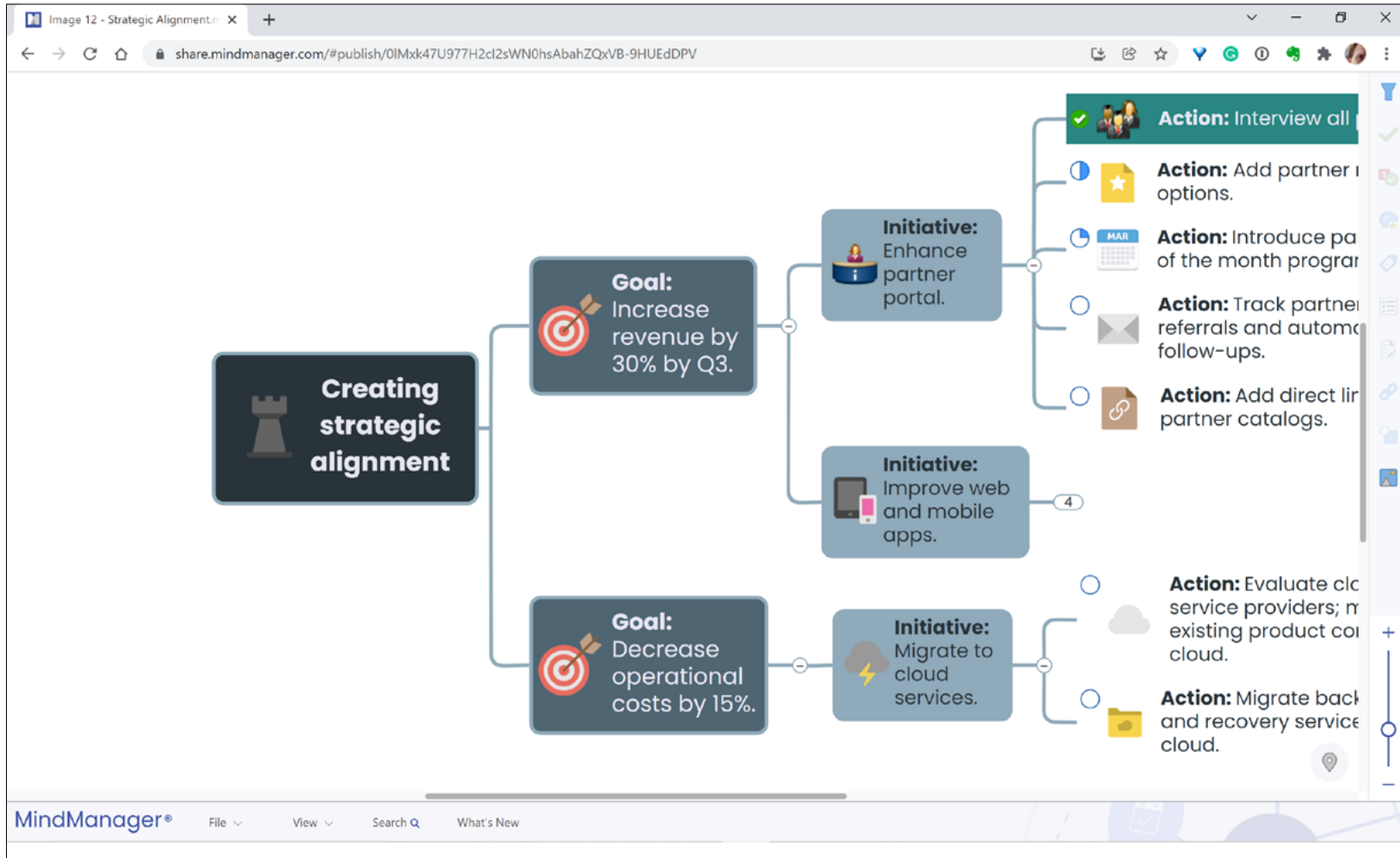
Before building your product strategy and roadmap, you first must understand your organization's vision and goals to ensure your efforts support those objectives. For example, what are the company's priorities? What are its existing commitments? What resources are available?

Armed with these answers and your product and market research, you can begin to formulate your product strategy and business model. These strategic components, along with your roadmap, will form the business case for investing (or continuing to invest) in your product.

Essentially, your product plan should cover the "who, what, when, where, why, and how" of it all. It will answer key questions, such as what business goals your product will support, which customers you intend to serve, which problems the product will solve, how you will differentiate your product in the market, etc.







*Mind mapping is an effective way to capture and illustrate the alignment of actions and initiatives with your organizational goals*

Build alignment between your company strategy and your product plans by mapping organizational goals with product initiatives and capabilities. Showing alignment will help win the support of your executive stakeholders and demonstrate how product improvements help advance your overall strategy.

Your product plan will also serve as the guide for the roadmap process as you lay out the sequence of initiatives you plan to address and the capabilities you will build over time.

Mind mapping is an effective visualization method to organize and create the product plan allowing you to dive deep into all the necessary details without ever losing sight of the big picture that you're envisioning.

Visualizations help teams internalize your organizational goals **more quickly and easily**, which empowers them to move forward.

**Consider the following stats on visual learning:**

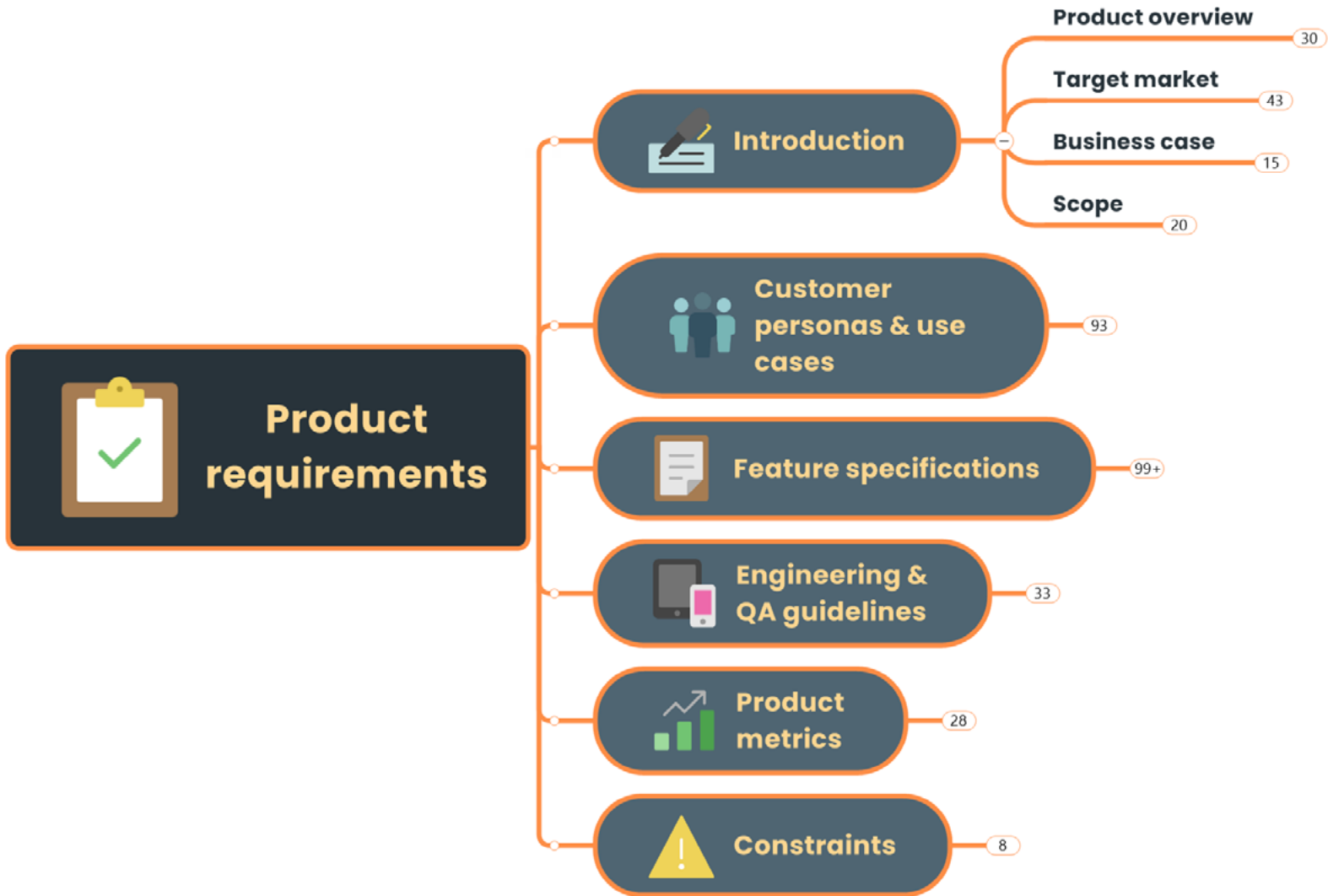
- 10% of people remember what they hear.
- 20% of people remember what they read.
- Over 80% of people remember what they see and do.
- Visual information is processed 60,000 times faster than text.

## 2. Gather customer and product requirements

Once you fully understand your business goals and have laid out a product strategy rooted in improving metrics related to those goals, it's time to gather requirements and identify which specific problems you intend to solve.

To do that, you'll need to research which problems your product must address to have the biggest impact on your business goals. There are several valuable resources you can tap into to identify, clarify, and validate your direction. Let's take a closer look at each of them.





Capture and organize product requirements in mind maps

**Engage your sales, customer, and technical support teams.** These roles are on the front lines, communicating with prospects and customers and understanding their current and evolving future issues, motivations, and needs. Employees on these teams can provide insight into why you might be losing deals, issues customers are currently facing, and the motivations behind recent wins.

**Listen and learn from your customers.** Your user community and prospects are also a valuable source. Focus groups, surveys, user forums, research studies, social media analyses, and customer and prospect interviews can all be great sources for identifying and validating customer needs.

But just listening to your customers isn't always enough, as they won't always know how to consciously identify or state their actual needs. (Remember when the iPhone was [first introduced?](#))

You also need to understand the “why” behind customer feedback. The key to quality customer validation begins with an understanding of your audience, their background, their cognitive biases, and how your solution actually fits into their work or personal lives. In other words, answer the question, “Why do people use this product?”, and you're on the right track.

**Collaborate with your marketing and product marketing teams.** Product marketers typically identify the buyer personas and audiences for your product in order to understand, target, and market messages to the right prospects to demonstrate how and why your product is worth buying.

Review any analyses performed on the market and competition, as well as the marketing and product marketing strategies that are created. If customer and/or market expectations, needs, or challenges evolve over the course of your roadmap, your marketing team should adjust their strategy accordingly.

This team should also provide ongoing insights and observations to the product management team to ensure the product remains both competitive and relevant among prospective customers.

**Leverage customer and product data.** Capturing data from your users and products is essential for growing your business. This data includes net promoter scores (NPS), which rate how likely someone is to recommend your product or not (and why), how your product is used, user experience feedback to understand what features/capabilities are and aren't used, common use cases, etc. This data can help you prioritize new features, updates, and fixes.

Keeping your company and product strategies in mind, discuss your findings with the product team with the goal of determining what can be added, enhanced, fixed, or removed to improve the overall user experience as well as the product's ability to solve key customer pain points.

### 3. Categorize, prioritize, and schedule your initiatives

Now that you've reviewed your organization's strategy and collected feedback from all your various stakeholders and sources, the next step is to prioritize initiatives and start building your roadmap. There are three subtasks within this step:

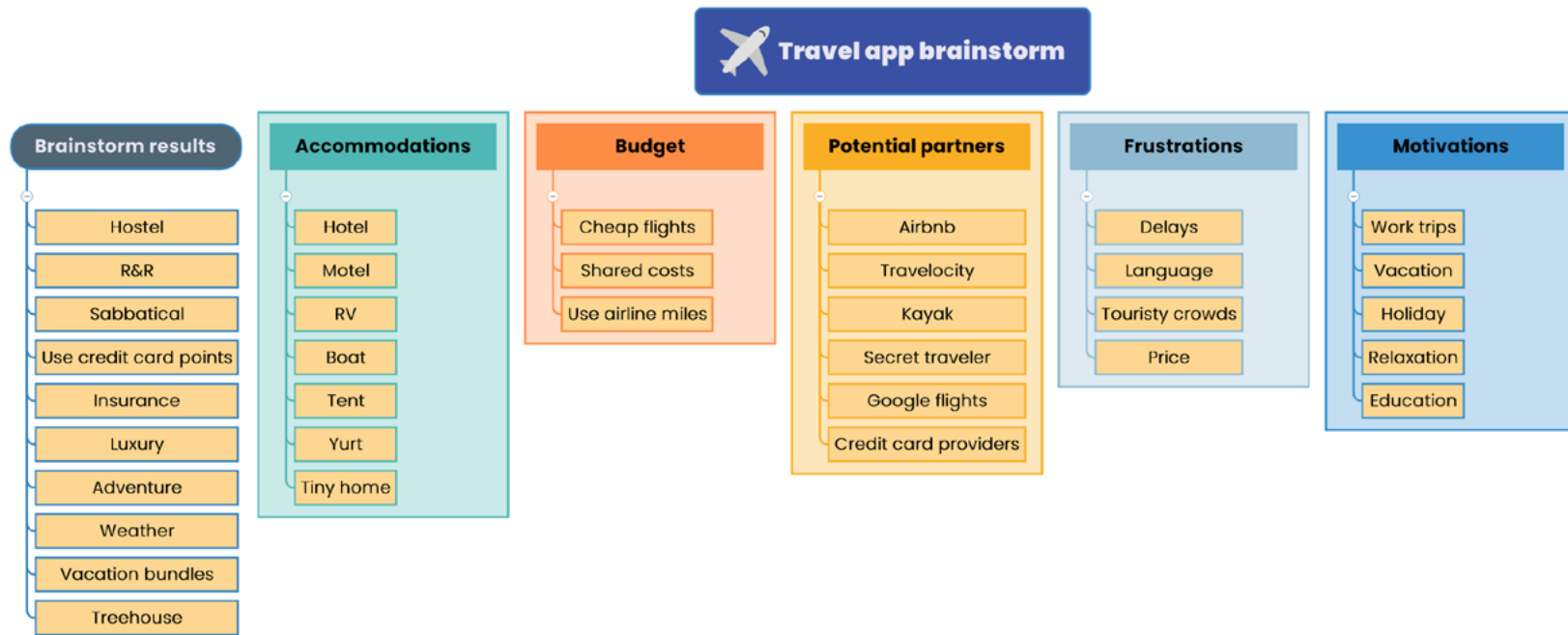
#### 1. Build your requirements list.

Compile all the requests, bugs, and ideas captured in previous conversations into a list. Make sure you understand the rationale behind each request or idea. If this is unclear, go back to the source to ensure you comprehend the real issue and need that will be addressed by the solution.

#### 2. Group requests into categories.

Use an [affinity diagram](#) to group related requests, bugs, and ideas together into categories. An affinity diagram organizes a large list of ideas into their natural relationships, and can be used to generate, organize, and consolidate information related to your product, processes, problems, and opportunities you want to address.





*Affinity diagrams group brainstorm results into meaningful categories to help make sense of a large set of ideas*

**Access this template:**

View an affinity diagram created in MindManager online [here](#). From there, you can download the template by clicking on File > Export > Download as MMAP. If you have MindManager installed, you can edit the template to fit your needs.

### 3. Prioritize your grouped categories

**and the initiatives within each.** There are many ways to prioritize potential initiatives. A common approach scores each initiative based on its strategic fit, perceived value, estimated cost, and the associated risk.

Some PMs borrow from project portfolio management processes and use weighted scorecards, such as the [RICE method](#).

This method scores an initiative's Reach, Impact, and Confidence (of your Reach and Impact scores). These three scores are multiplied, and then divided by Effort.

- **Reach** measures how many customers will use a particular feature or service.
- **Impact** measures the importance for the customer.
- **Confidence** rates how sure you are of your assessment.
- **Effort** estimates the work it would take to build and test it.

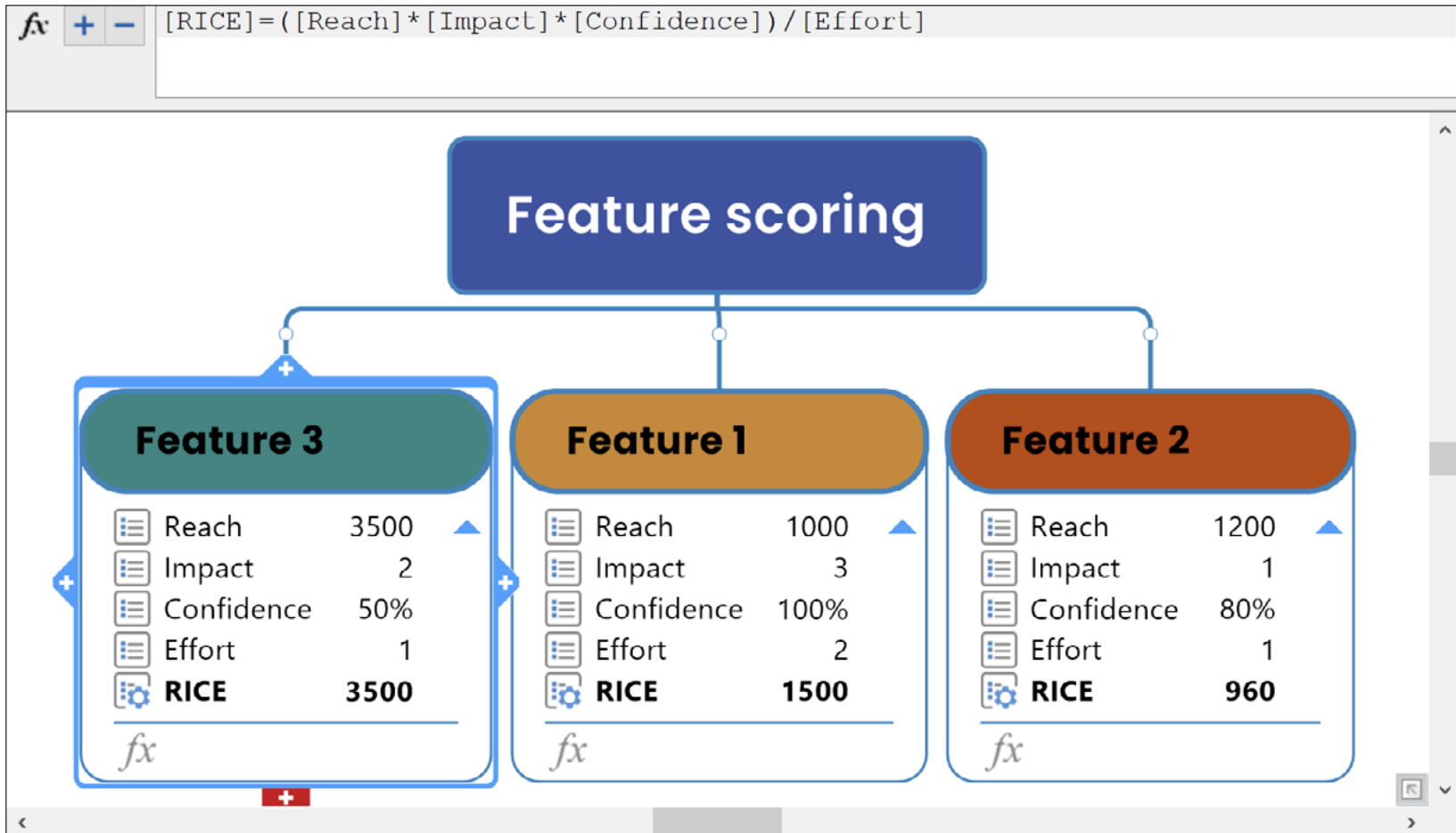
Let's take a look at an example:

- **Feature 1:** Reach (1000 customers) x Impact (3 = high impact) x Confidence (100% confident) / Effort (2 months) = **RICE score of 1,500.**

- **Feature 2:** Reach (1200 customers) x Impact (1 = low impact) x Confidence (80% confident) / Effort (1 month) = **RICE score of 960.**
- **Feature 3:** Reach (3500 customers) x Impact (2 = medium impact) x Confidence (50% confident of the scoring) / Effort (1 Month) = **RICE score of 3,500.**

In this scenario, your prioritized initiative list would start with Feature 3, then Feature 2 and finally, Feature 1. Regardless of whether you use the RICE method or a different one, the prioritization process is an invaluable way to create a rationalized set of initiatives to proceed with.

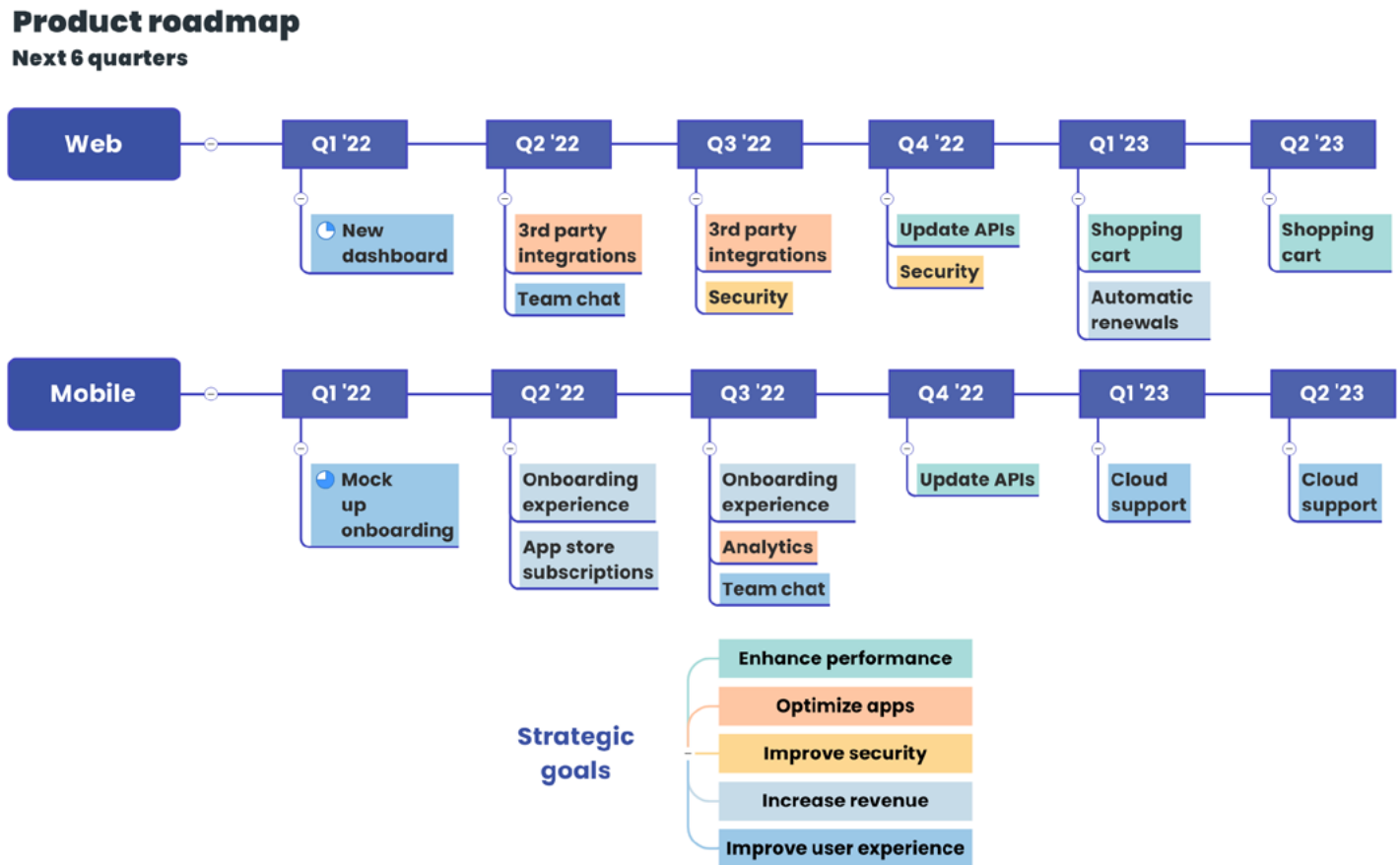




*Any topic in a MindManager diagram can include data and formulas to measure, calculate, compare and contrast the potential benefits of one feature over another*



**4. Lay out your initiatives in your roadmap's timeline.** In this step, you'll decide which prioritized projects and work to tackle and when, based on available resources.



*Use color coding in MindManager to highlight which strategic goals are impacted by different initiatives*

**5. Review your drafted roadmap.** Step back and view your product roadmap to ensure it focuses on the essential areas you originally wanted to target, and that it satisfies both your organization's internal vision and goals while addressing the needs of your customers.

Here are some example questions to validate your proposed roadmap:

- **Is it aligned?** Does the roadmap deliver on your vision and align with your strategy?
- **Is it valuable?** What customer value will the product release offer when launched?
- **Is it enticing?** Will it excite your customers (and prospects) enough to purchase it, and will it solve their problem(s)?
- **Is it competitive?** Who or what does your solution compete with? And, how is your offering superior to those solutions?
- **Is it unique?** What about your offering is unique and defensible?
- **Is it doable?** Do you have the skills and resources to build it and bring it to market?

#### 4. Tailor roadmaps for different stakeholders

As mentioned earlier, tailoring your roadmap(s) for unique stakeholders is essential for getting buy-in and support early on.

For example, the executive team is probably most interested in how your product and its updates will advance the company's strategy, while the development team likely wants to know what specific features they'll be working on.

The key is to ensure each stakeholder group gets the information they need without overwhelming "them with unnecessary details. Here are a few common stakeholder groups and the key information to include when customizing your product roadmap presentation:

##### Investors and executives

- The initiatives you plan to achieve to satisfy the company's goals.
- The high-level timing of each release.
- The financial and staff requirements and costs.
- The financial and market size of the product opportunity.

### Marketing team

- The problems that will be solved by each product initiative.
- How these problems will be solved.
- Which customers and/or prospects will be impacted by the solution.
- How your proposed solution will be differentiated in the marketplace.
- What the product's potential is for generating sales.

### Sales team

- When products and/or features will be released.
- The specific benefits and advantages of these products and/or features for customers and/or prospects.

### Development team

- Specific deadlines and milestones for releases.
- Themes, initiatives, epics, and stories. (Note: Refer to the [“Stakeholder-driven roadmaps”](#) section earlier in this document for definitions of these terms.)

## 5. Share your roadmap with key stakeholders

No matter how brilliant your product roadmap is, it's essentially worthless if your stakeholders and team members don't support it. Throughout the roadmap process, you should be meeting and collaborating with the cross-functional teams that will develop, market, launch, sell, and support your product.

This collaboration should introduce any key milestones in your roadmap to solicit feedback during the draft stages of your roadmap and secure buy-in.

When your roadmap is complete and approved by all necessary company leaders/executives/etc., it's time to send out the finalized versions to all supporting teams.



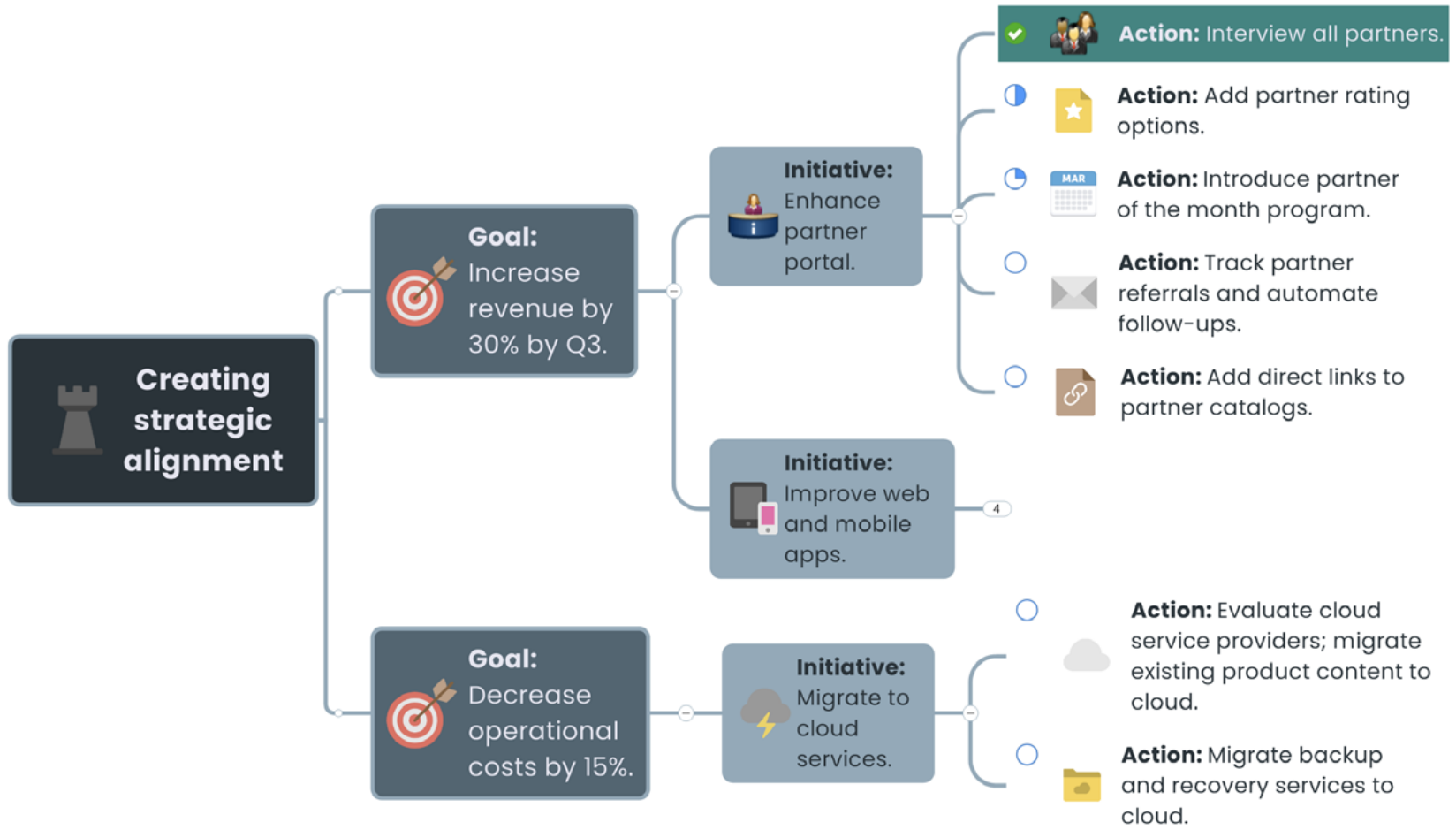
Sharing your roadmap—as well as providing periodic updates on status and any changes to it—ensures the following:

- All stakeholders are aligned with product changes and upcoming actions.
- Supporting teams are aware of the current and future plans.
- All priorities and timeframes established tie directly to key product goals.
- Company time and resources are prioritized as needed to execute your roadmap successfully.
- You maintain a clear overview of the product vision.

Roadmaps can be shared in many ways, including printouts, or during in-person or virtual meetings.

If you use a visual tool such as [MindManager](#) to create your roadmap, you have the option of sharing diagrams [via an HTML5 link](#) that can be viewed by anyone, on any browser. These published maps can be made public (for anyone with a link) or protected with a password.





*Keep your team up-to-date by sharing the latest roadmap updates via HTML5 link*



# Common product roadmap roadblocks

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## Common product roadmap roadblocks

The journey to product roadmap success is often riddled with roadblocks. Here are some common obstacles you may encounter, plus strategies for overcoming each.

### **Problem: Prioritization paralysis due to large backlogs**

One very challenging aspect of product management and developing product roadmaps is prioritization.

In the initial launches and early stages of a product's lifecycle, the product backlog might be a manageable size, but there is a tendency for the list of ideas, feature requests, and bugs to grow so large that it eventually becomes overwhelming and unmanageable.

This may cause delays and missed opportunities. Prioritize incorrectly, you could be wasting a lot of time and valuable resources.

### **Solution: Tackle and groom your backlog**

Here are [four approaches](#) for tackling and grooming a large backlog:

**1. Delete items you'll never build.** It may be challenging to do this, but it makes little sense to keep a list of lower-priority items you'll likely never have a chance to build. Save time and remove them.

**2. Remove items that won't be completed within the roadmap.** If you know you won't be able to move forward on an idea or project within the timeframe of the roadmap itself, move it to another holding place for future consideration.

**3. Periodically review and groom your product backlog.** Set a calendar reminder to review and groom the backlog (e.g., on a quarterly or even monthly basis). This helps ensure that, when it comes time to update your roadmaps, you'll spend less time reviewing and prioritizing the overall list.

**4. Only add high priority, time-sensitive items.** Be a responsible gatekeeper for your backlog of ideas. The more you add to it, the more challenging it'll be to effectively map out a plan for completion—so be discerning with what items you add.

### **Problem: Roadmap features are divorced from desired results**

Another challenge with roadmaps is they often focus only on features, instead of the reasons why those features are important in the first place. Feature-heavy roadmaps highlight what features to build (e.g., customer registration, search, filtering, or reporting), which are then mapped onto a timeline.

These feature lists provide little to no insight into the bigger picture, essentially hiding the rationale from your team while dictating what they must build, and may appear disconnected from your product and organization's strategy.

This approach may work for some development teams, such as those with mature products in mature markets. Focusing on features alone, however, will likely fail to excite and get buy-in from the executive team, board, investors, and even the development team for newer products and those in evolving markets.

### **Solution: Map features to goals**

Focus on solving actual customer problems (rather than just stating features to develop) to make it easier and more engaging to build, market, and sell your product.

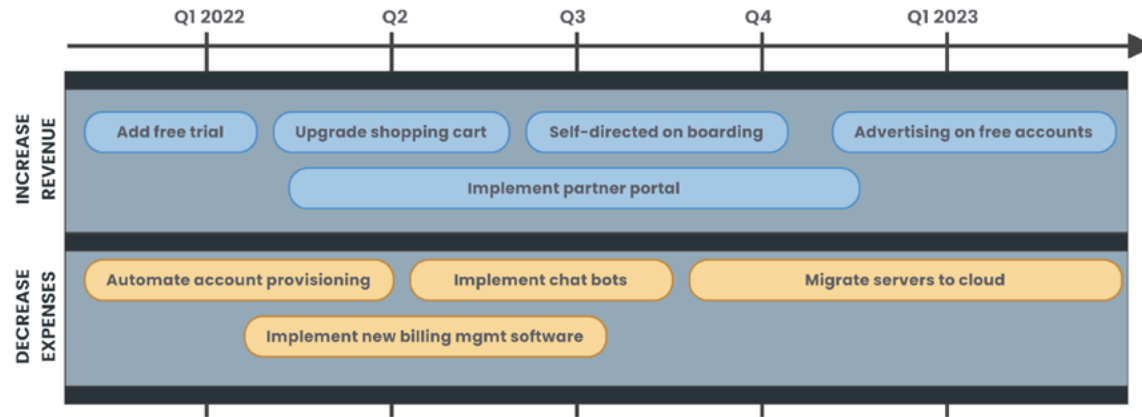
The main thing customers want to know is, "What's in it for me?" and, "How will your product solve my challenges?" All too often, organizations focus on the output when customers really want meaningful outcomes.

Results-oriented roadmaps focus primarily on the product goals and benefits, and features are updated to achieve these goals. This helps internal team members understand the rationale for updating specific features.

For example, your goals might be to simplify the customer sign-up process, automate all client report generation, and provide real-time transaction status to customers. These desired customer outcomes may also roll-up into internal goals, such as increasing revenue, decreasing operational costs, and converting more trials to purchases.

A [swim lane](#) roadmap, where goals comprise each swim lane, is one way to illustrate how features are tied to product or company goals.





*Dividing your roadmap into swim lanes can make it easier to understand*

**Problem: Overfocused on tactics, light on strategic planning**

While most of your effort as a PM will be devoted towards developing your product and putting out the inevitable fires that arise, it's extremely important to carve out time for strategic planning.

Short-term priorities are *not* a roadmap. Without a broader view of the direction you're headed in, it's possible that your current efforts and immediate priorities won't align with the organization's long-term strategy.

**Solution: Schedule regular time for strategic planning**

Since it's highly unlikely that your strategic goals will be achieved in a single release, it's essential to consistently look to the future to determine (and illustrate) how your product will evolve and advance over a multi-release roadmap. Block out time monthly or quarterly to dive deep into your ongoing strategic and roadmap planning processes.

By focusing on the big picture, you'll be better able to position products for the inevitable changes in evolving markets, take proactive steps to differentiate yourself from competitive threats, and understand when it's appropriate to say no to certain tasks for the sake of long-term success.



# Best practices for creating a visual product roadmap

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## Best practices for creating a visual product roadmap

Effective product roadmaps present a simple, realistic visual representation of your product vision and how it's tied to your company's goals. It should be both persuasive and easy to understand.

Standard linear applications such as documents, slides, and spreadsheets are often used to create and present roadmaps. However, there are many software applications that can make it easier for you to create and share visually compelling product roadmaps.

As mentioned earlier, [mind mapping software](#) is one such example. Mind maps provide a structured way to capture and organize ideas and information and visualize them in a variety of ways, e.g., timelines, tree diagrams, org charts, and of course, mind maps.

Mind maps help people comprehend complex concepts by breaking them down into smaller parts, making them ideal to develop new ideas or better understand existing information. Mind maps can be especially ideal for roadmap creation, as they enable you to quickly capture and organize ideas into an interactive timeline.

Icons can be used to identify the status and priority of certain tasks and milestones, while elements such as tags, links, notes, attachments, and more allow you to quickly capture any additional data related to the projects you're mapping.

[MindManager](#) is a visual productivity and collaboration tool that uses mind mapping to help bring clarity and structure to projects and tasks by enabling users to create interactive diagrams, including product roadmaps.



This solution offers dozens of customizable templates, including:

- Mind maps
- Timelines
- Tree diagrams
- Affinity diagrams
- Matrix diagrams
- Process flow diagrams
- Org charts
- Concept maps
- Venn diagrams
- Swim lane diagrams
- Kanban charts
- Gantt charts
- And more!

With MindManager, organizing your diagrams is fast and simple thanks to powerful filtering and easy drag-and-drop capabilities that allow you to organize your ideas into initiatives, and initiatives into releases.

Multiple data views and presentation modes make it **easy to collaborate** and capture real-time feedback in presentations, which can result in greater stakeholder alignment throughout the process.

Creating visual product roadmaps in MindManager offers the following benefits:

**Visualize the big picture plus relevant supporting details and relationships.** Key features like filtering and focusing on branches lets you drill deep into detailed tasks or processes. You (or anyone else with access to the map) can show, hide, or even fade details to highlight key areas you're working on. You can also zoom out to see the big picture, zoom in to drill into the details, and connect any related ideas with lines between them to visually highlight key dependencies.

**Gather and organize product requirements.**

Capture all product requirements in a mind map using capabilities such as notes and branches. You can organize requirements into themes, epics, and user stories all within a product requirements diagram, and map out “before” and “after” process flows to demonstrate how your solution solves a certain customer issue.

**Collect, analyze, and assess both qualitative and quantitative data.** Gain new perspectives and insights into any potential future product development by marrying ideas and research with quantitative analysis using embedded spreadsheets, properties, and [formulas](#).

Every item on your roadmap can also have its own customizable set of properties to capture and track the data that's most important to it. [Links to external documents](#), intranets, and websites can be added to any item on your roadmap or within an item's notes.

**Visualize and understand relationships between ideas.** Draw relationship lines, task or project dependencies, or add links and attachments to connect any project or idea with related projects or additional information.

**Improve critical and creative problem solving.** Visualization can make it easier to spot missing information as well as connections that would be otherwise difficult to see to help you identify solutions more quickly. You can leverage MindManager's interactive visualization features to create decision trees, brainstorm solutions, and then organize these solutions into affinity diagrams, for example.

**Collect feedback and encourage greater collaboration.** Simply add branches, comments, or notes within projects while presenting your roadmap to your stakeholders to document feedback in real-time and gather any new ideas that may influence the future direction of the product and the team.

Unlike other presentation tools, where it's challenging to both present and take notes, MindManager enables users to [co-edit roadmaps simultaneously](#) in real-time to easily solicit feedback from both internal and external stakeholders.

**Visualize your roadmap from different perspectives.** Ensure you meet the needs of your organization, customers, and key stakeholders by viewing product roadmaps by category, e.g., status, priority, team, and more.

## How to use MindManager to create visual product roadmaps

With MindManager, you can choose from a library of diagrams and templates to create the perfect product roadmap. Let's take a closer look at how PMs can use this solution to build out roadmaps for any product or release.

### Customize roadmaps for different audiences

You can use MindManager's filters and slides to transform a single roadmap into multiple roadmaps, or create different variations for different audiences.

Product development roadmaps are usually the most specific, while external roadmaps (e.g., those shared with customers, analysts, investors, and the media) usually highlight releases in broad timeframes to avoid setting specific delivery expectations.





*Kanban-style internal development roadmap*

Different audience needs require you to carefully consider what timeframes you should include on your roadmaps. With MindManager, you can include legends and any additional contextual and supporting details so audiences can fully understand the content without someone to walk them through your vision. Roadmaps can be shared in several ways:

- **With other MindManager users.** Anyone who has the solution installed can take advantage of [cross-platform co-editing](#) in real-time, which helps enable collaboration, particularly among teams working remotely or in different physical locations.
- **Via HTML5 link.** This helpful feature enables anyone who does not have MindManager installed to view your roadmap by simply pasting the link you provide into their browser and viewing it like a webpage.
- **Via the MindManager for Microsoft Teams app.** Create and/or edit maps directly within Microsoft Teams to enable greater productivity during product brainstorming sessions or update meetings.

## Build in flexibility

Whenever you publish a roadmap, whether internally or externally, you're setting expectations of your vision for the product. Internally it's important to remind employees that the roadmap doesn't represent a contract or project plan, but is instead a vision of how you plan to build and update the product, and which may change over time, for any number of reasons.

On public roadmaps, such as those you send to clients, it's best to include a disclaimer such as "Subject to change" to ensure you have the flexibility to adjust plans as needed without subjecting your company to backlash.

With MindManager, you can easily drag and drop sections of a roadmap to create different iterations. Applying filters enables you to focus on different areas by hiding or showing specific elements on your roadmaps. You can also take screenshots of certain parts of your product roadmap to leverage in other tools, such as a PowerPoint presentation, document, or email.



## Engage your stakeholders regularly

Product roadmaps are created with the intention to be shared with internal development teams and all those who have a key role in the product's success. Gathering constructive feedback from team members is essential for enabling you to make updates if changes occur, or if you have to push back timelines due to delays.

MindManager enables you can expand any topic in a roadmap to add or show additional details, or quickly add notes or comments to any project so you can easily add any information that arises during stakeholder meetings or feedback sessions.

All maps are automatically saved in real-time, ensuring all important edits and updates are captured. The ability to provide anytime access to the latest version of your roadmap helps your team stay on the same page and prevents any misunderstandings that could arise from outdated versions or previous iterations.





# Conclusion

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## Conclusion

When planned and executed well, your product roadmap process should result in greater alignment within your organization by clearly illustrating what your ultimate product goals are and the steps you need to take to get there.

Once your team is aligned on product strategy, creating a product roadmap is simply the process of understanding all the opportunities available and potential roadblocks to avoid, prioritizing and sequencing initiatives into releases and product updates, and showcasing your vision in a clear, compelling, and centralized manner.

Use powerful visualization tools like MindManager to create highly effective product roadmaps while simplifying and accelerating the entire product management process, positioning PMs for the greatest chance of success.

Product managers can leverage MindManager to take notes, conduct research, develop strategies, build roadmaps, brainstorm new ideas, and solve pressing problems. The solution can also be used to organize ideas more effectively, build plans faster and easier, and highlight the big picture—all while providing access to necessary details to communicate effectively and keep teams aligned so you can make progress on your product vision.



**[Discover how you can use MindManager to create more efficient and successful product roadmaps.](#)**



# Bonus resources: MindManager templates for download!

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## Bonus resources: MindManager templates for download!

To help you with your visual product roadmap journey, we've created eight unique templates in MindManager for you to leverage.

You can view these templates online using the links below. From there, you can download a template by clicking on File > Export > Download as MMAP. If you have MindManager installed, you can then edit the template however you like to meet your needs.

1. [Affinity diagram](#)
2. [Agile development roadmap](#)
3. [Executive roadmap](#)
4. [Porter's Five Forces](#)
5. [Portfolio roadmap](#)
6. [Product plan](#)
7. [Status-oriented roadmap](#)
8. [SWOT analysis](#)



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