I AM A "SINEK" AND YOU SHOULD BE TOO

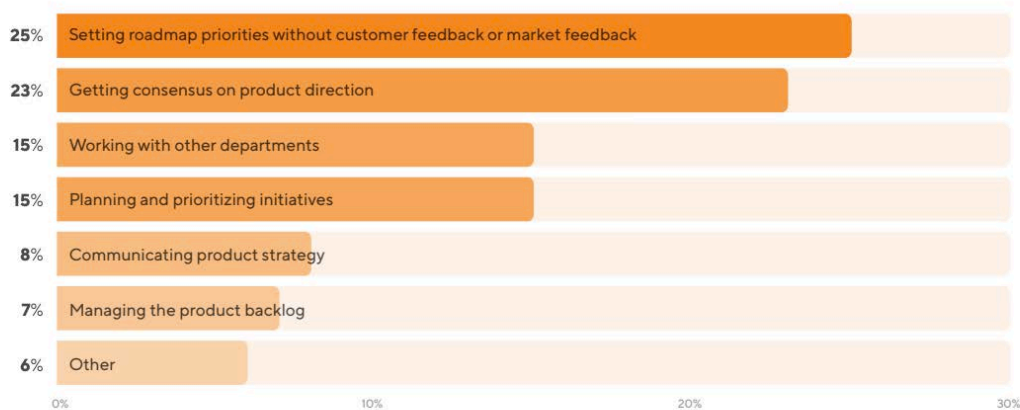## EVIDENCE BASED PRODUCT PLANNING

MICHAEL HAY

GOLDEN CIRCLE

- Simon's TED talk is quite compelling and worth a listen.

- Here's the "so what" **the power for doing anything starts with why**.

- But **most teams** immediately run to "how"!

ProductPlan's State of Product Management from 2020

Product Management Challenges

But the role is not without its challenges. The most significant product management challenge is **setting their roadmap priorities without having customer feedback (25%).** Followed closely by the challenge of getting consensus on product direction at 23% and working with other departments at 15%.
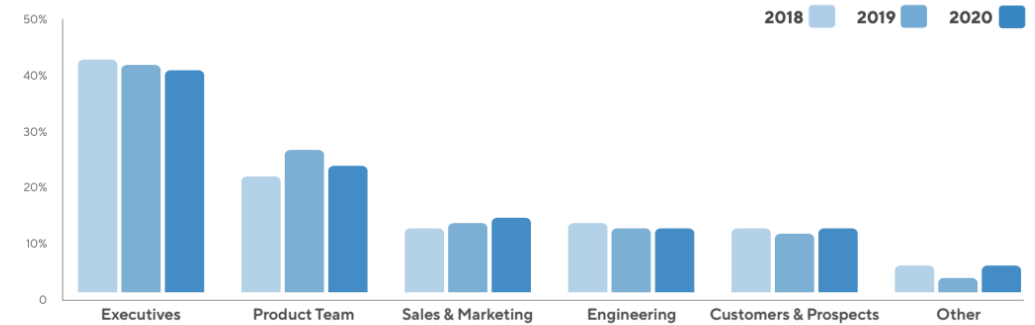
25%	Setting roadmap priorities without customer feedback or market feedback
23%	Getting consensus on product direction
15%	Working with other departments
15%	Planning and prioritizing initiatives
8%	Communicating product strategy
7%	Managing the product backlog
6%	Other

ProductPlan   Product Managers in 2020   13

Primary Roadmap Audience

Once they've prioritized product initiatives, product managers then use product roadmaps to communicate their product strategy. They primarily share their roadmaps with their **executives (40%).** A visual roadmap creates excitement around the product plan and helps executives confidently understand what's in store for the product.

However, a roadmap's audience can and should vary. After executives, the primary audience for roadmaps are the **product team (22%),** and **sales and marketing team (13%).**

This is on trend with what we've seen in the last few years.

2018   2019   2020

Executives   Product Team   Sales & Marketing   Engineering   Customers & Prospects   Other

ProductPlan   Product Managers in 2020   27

- ProductPlan produces software for Product Management teams to help them construct roadmaps.
- They run an annual survey and these two slides were from their 2020 edition.
- The sample size for 2020 was 2500 Product Managers.
- **Their report from 2021 omits this detail, but from other sources most teams (~95%) don't spend enough time discovering "why"**

If You're unable to answer these questions you've not answered "why?"

Who are your competitors for this? (Cap'Alte Principal)

I asked for this have you done anything about it? (A User)

I almost fired someone for making stuff up. (ChaosSearch Executive)

I'm new and don't know why things are on our roadmap. (Ring Centra Product Manager)

There are too many high priority requirements. (Engineering)

We cannot build for one customer, and what customer asked for this? (Hitachi Executive View)

Can you defend your roadmap? (Google Product Manager)

Does corporate really care about the customer? (Enterprise Sales Engineer)

$1.7trillion

Spent annually on R&D across the world, **85% of the results are unprofitable. A key reason for the lack of profitability: failing to deeply understand what the user wants to buy. ”** (source: It's not what you spend…)

Really the solution isn't complex, but executing it is hard!

Our **process was usually led by a Technical Product Manager, or someone acting in that role, in partnership with engineering**. What **results** are **well documented raw intelligence, user narratives, user stories and early prototypes**. These artifacts made what to do apparent for the Developer, Product Manager, Marketer, Manager, and Executive alike. It in fact **led us to many mutual understandings, but the most important was a shared sense of priority backed by well documented user needs from real customers.**

1. **Product Management and Engineering intimacy**
2. **A growing body of knowledge**
3. **A transparent design**
4. **Banking interviews for the future**

Ok so how do you accomplish this practically?

Use the Affinity Method to crowdsource 3-5 quality ideas
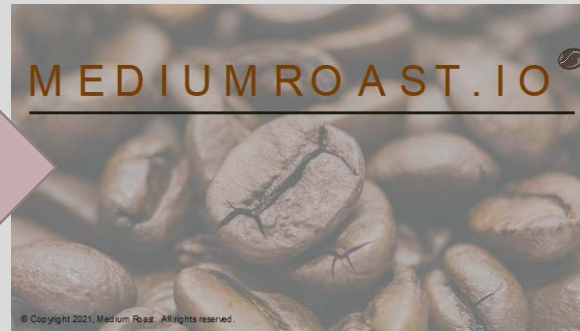
Distill the ideas into some pitch materials, rough prototypes, etc. for testing.
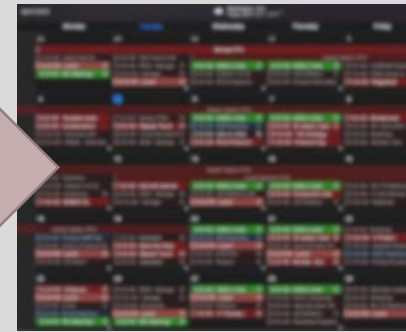
Schedule your interviews. **This is harder than you think!**

Execute your interviews and memorialize them through recordings, transcriptions and summary notes. **DO NOT SKIP THIS STEP.**

~1-2 Quarters

**This is expensive from a time perspective so how can we amortize the time cost over multiple cycles?**

Getting to what to do first

Themes	Description	Frequency/Interest	Companies	Quotes
A theme title synthesized from the description.	A description or definition of the theme as synthesized from the discovery collateral (interviews, transcriptions, competitive white papers, and so on.)	The frequency of interest could be based upon number of companies that referenced, frequency of occurrence in the collateral, etc. This is important for judging priority.	By name which companies (competitors, users or partners) signaled interest.	One to three quotes from companies that "announce" the theme.
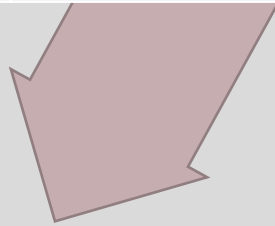
This is further broken down into "requirements" which today are sometimes called Epics, Features and Stories.

I also like to "tell the story" of the product with a narrative.
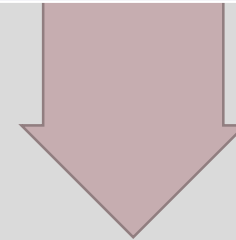
Makes your product plan defensible and transparent. Plus, answers many of the posed "tricky questions".

If this is done what results is a defensible roadmap

Bank them for the future and manage them like your core IP because they are, and can we automate some of this?

APPENDIX

Product Management and Engineering intimacy

- **What is it:** An interview team composed of a Technical PM, a Business PM, an Engineering Architect/Product Owner plus a Field Technical Representative.

- **What does it do:** Visit 15-20 customers to test specific product ideas and prototypes to capture user feedback.

- **What is the benefit:** Because the team would spend multiple weeks together on the road and in the office, they formed a strong relationship that fundamentally established trust, allowed everyone to share the same voice of the customer, and produced a safe "space" to have healthy conflict.

A growing body of knowledge

- **What is it:** A growing repository of user interview notes, recordings of interviews and their associated transcriptions.

- **What does it do:** The Designer manually reads interviews, and summarizes key themes linked to specific customers. In later phases of the design, themes would be further detailed as user narratives, stories, mockups and in some cases prototypes.

- **What is the benefit:** previous interviews afforded the Designer more inputs to base their design from. In fact, because many of the interviews were recorded, the Designer could literally hear the voice of the customer uncovering new insights.

LinkedIn Articles on Applied Design Thinking