

Executive Summary

1. Products that use software and other technologies are often in a continual state of planning and development.
2. People who manage digital products must be aware of constantly evolving customer preferences and market activity.
3. For digital products, there may be a fuzzy boundary between product planning and product development. However, the astute product manager should consider this approach to ensure that the most important updates are staged for further development.

Whether a product is digital from the start or is a physical product with added digital technology (software, artificial intelligence, etc.), it's important to pay attention to *product planning and prioritization*.

Product planning and prioritization implies that there is too much to do, and corporate resources are scarce. Products with digital elements tend to operate in faster moving markets where customer needs and market activity may take unexpected turns. In this case, speed matters. Therefore, product managers and their teams should be able to assess what's needed and validate with customers as rapidly and frequently as possible. This could include sharing designs and prototypes with a target customer, then reassessing the value proposition. It's also important to be able to verify strategic fit (checking the business logic behind the product idea to see if its possible development will further the goals of the business). From this, product managers should be able to more effectively prioritize features and stage for development (vetting the list of product features that can be potentially packaged into possible releases).

In assessing what features or capabilities to design into the product, the product manager needs to ensure that each is examined in terms of value to customer and the ability to achieve competitive advantage. Other areas that may be important to the company's goals include ongoing optimization and updating designs, enhancing the user experience, improving system performance and capacity, maintaining systems and interfaces, and gaining market share.

Release planning should cover bugs to fix, user experience or other feature adjustments for a quick release to a current product, items that are more complex and may require integration for a current or new product, features that need to be stored up for a major release of a company's product portfolio, capabilities that deliver competitive advantage for a new or enhanced product, and features that add value for which customers will pay.