

Executive Summary

1. Whether you're launching a new product or releasing a minor update, going to market is one of the most visible and most important activities associated with the product's business.
2. For a new product, the launch is not a one-time event. It is a series of activities carried out over a period of time, culminating in a final announcement to the market.
3. For ongoing releases, it's imperative to provide value-added capabilities to improve the user experience or deliver competitive advantage for a customer.

Launching or releasing a product or an enhancement has one objective: to successfully get the product into the market so that revenue will begin flowing into the company as quickly as possible. The product manager (in larger companies, a launch project leader or launch manager) and cross-functional team are responsible for developing a launch plan, which identifies outcomes, responsibilities, interdependencies, timing, and budgets. A helpful method for tracking the final steps leading to the launch in order to deliver it on time is counting backward. This involves looking at work activity planning for specific launch goals from the perspective of the end point, or proposed product release date, and moving back in time, setting up a schedule from finish to start.

Launch execution can be divided into three phases: arrange, activate, and announce. All arrangements are made in the arrange, or early, phase. The activate, or middle, phase initiates the tangible work required to integrate and operationalize the product in the business. The announce, or later, phase involves the culmination of all work activities such that the product can be announced to the market.

Important launch activities include confirming the market window (the best time to launch a product); reviewing market and beta tests—or conducting them if necessary; conducting pre-release/early adopter reviews; establishing product availability ratings (the speed at which a complex product moves to the market); providing adequate sales training; negotiating sales goals and compensation; ensuring readiness of marketing collateral, website, and promotional programs; leveraging digital marketing; arranging coverage by industry or market analysts; making sure distribution channels are able to sell and deliver the product; ensuring readiness of operational systems; and preparing for the internal launch.