

Worry Less About Time to Market, More About Time to Value

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Initiatives: [Product/Service Organization and Leadership](#)

Product managers are under incredible pressure to deliver new products, features and capabilities on time and in budget. Unfortunately, this focus often makes customer value and usability a secondary concern, resulting in releases that fail to make a difference for their customers.

Overview

Key Findings

- Many organizations use time to market as a key measure of product management and product performance, putting undue focus on internal outputs over external outcomes.
- Key differentiating factors such as customer experience, user experience and solution validation often are subordinate to technical delivery due to the perception of delay that they introduce to internal stakeholders.
- Product managers struggle with a lack of tools to provide quick and easy insights into the actual, valuable problems that their customers are experiencing and would value solutions for.

Recommendations

Product managers seeking to increase their leadership in relation to delivering valuable solutions to customer problems should:

- Reduce the pressures to deliver on time, under budget and in-scope from internal stakeholders by recognizing and discussing the negative impacts that overindexing on time to market has on customer value.

- Implement a new focus on time to value by focusing product management, engineering/development and service design efforts on delivering the most value to customers in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

Analysis

Traditional approaches to product management typically involve strong pressures to reduce time to market of new products, features and capabilities. The unanticipated consequence of such pressure is undue focus on technical excellence, on-time delivery and strict scope control – to the exclusion of “intangible” externalities like customer experience and customer realized value.

Modern approaches to product management have shifted to put these customer-facing aspects of product success to the front of mind, making basic time-to-market expectations far less important than the time it takes a customer to realize value from releases and service delivery.

The Hazards of Excessive Time-to-Market Focus

For many organizations, the overwhelming focus on time to market delivers frequent but disconnected capabilities. This is because teams that are measured primarily on how fast they can release new products, features and capabilities will often choose to do the easier things that can be delivered rapidly. This natural inclination causes efforts that are more complex (and possibly more valuable to the customer) to languish in the backlog, only worked on when pressured by the service or offering manager, or more likely by business stakeholders.

Even when more complicated work is taken on, the teams responsible for the design, implementation and testing of solutions and services often take the fastest path to deliver. After all, speed in delivery nearly always comes with a cost in quality or scope. This can often result in rapid accumulation of technical debt – decisions made “in the moment” to accelerate the process that are shortcuts or leverage less-than-optimal approaches.

While often done to “iterate” and with intent to return and revisit the shortcuts, in organizations where time to market is the driving factor, these attempts to revisit or derisk accumulated technical debt rarely materialize. And when they do, it’s usually because of a client or customer issue or the failure of some technical dependency, encouraging more technical debt to be incurred in resolving the prior debt. In companies too focused on time to market, technical debt becomes becomes delayed indefinitely and never actually paid off.

The last, and perhaps greatest, impact that an inordinate focus on time to market has on products and services is that “ancillary” considerations such as customer or user experience and solution validation fall to the wayside. These efforts do take time and energy away from the strict delivery of an agreed-upon solution but pose significant risks to the overall success of the product.

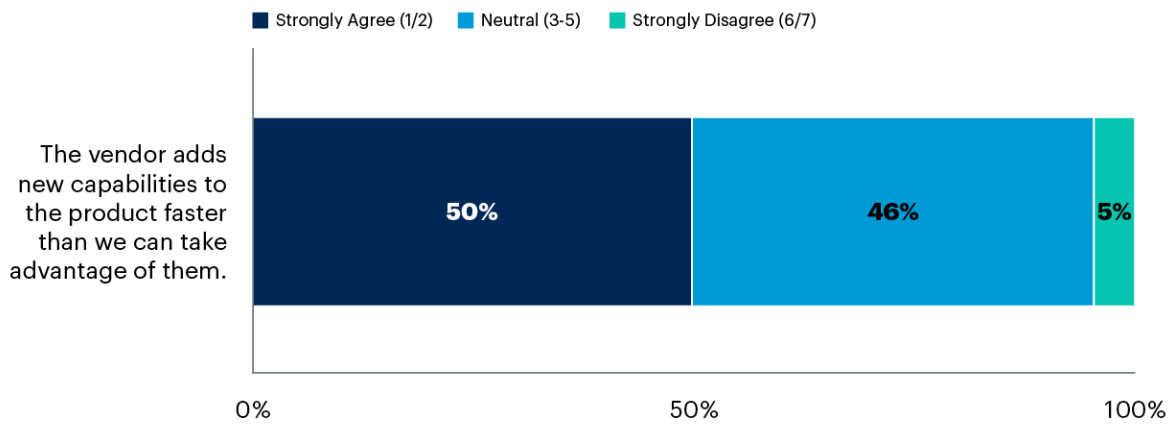
Without an appropriate validated solution, the feature or capability might be completed but might completely miss solving an actual customer problem. And without the proper investment in usability and customer experience, the solution might be difficult or impossible for the average user to realize. A ruthless dedication to accelerating time to market often means sacrificing these customer-facing aspects of the product or service in service of technical, technological delivery.

From our research on product approaches, we know that more leading companies take a customer-centric approach, and more laggard companies adopt a technology-driven approach (see [Product Management Annual Survey 2022, Part 2: Reporting Structure, Role and Responsibilities Evolution](#)). We also know that half of buyers state that vendors add new capabilities faster than the companies using the solution can take advantage of them, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. New Vendor Capabilities Versus Customer Use

New Vendor Capabilities Versus Customer Use

Level of Agreement With Particular Statements



n = 843 all respondents, excluding "don't know"

Q: Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.

Source: 2020 Gartner Customer Preference Survey

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Gartner 2020 Customer Preference Survey

The Benefits of Time-to-Value Focus

Customers only care about time to market when delays impact their business. Speed to market with new features and capabilities can actually **hinder** a customer's ability to derive value from the solution. If they're delaying adoption of new solutions, they're missing out on the overall value the product provides. This, in turn, reduces the lifetime value of the customer to the business.

The longer it takes for a customer to realize the value of a feature or a capability, the longer it takes for the business to recoup the time and money invested in creating it.

Thus, focusing on time to value is far more important: Releasing capabilities that do not deliver value wastes time, effort and energy on delivering something that has no impact on the customer and thus on the business. The longer it takes for a customer to realize the value of a feature or capability, the longer it takes for the business to recoup the time and money invested in creating it. Ultimately, customer adoption of features and capabilities is far more important than whether they were built as quickly as possible to meet arbitrary internal expectations.

Switching focus to time to value changes the fundamental goal of product and service design. Instead of taking the shortest path from conception to delivery, teams are **encouraged** to take time to confirm their assumptions, test their hypotheses, and iterate toward a solution. This naturally results in more time spent in discovery and validation as well as more effort in optimizing the customer and user experience and instituting tracing or tracking to confirm value delivery.

Product managers can maximize the benefit to both the customer and the business by investing enough time to ensure the problem being solved is valuable to both the buyer and the user and that the solution is the most accessible, usable and valuable. This can be done directly by the product teams themselves or through internal proxies such as implementation teams, customer success teams or even account management teams.

The most important components of this approach are understanding the expected client value **during** the sales process and following that up with measures or metrics to measure success **after** the sales process. To begin with, these will likely be individualized on a per-client basis, but as more information is collected and metrics are reviewed with clients, product managers can make assumptions about future efforts based on the commonalities that emerge.

Conclusion

To begin changing focus now, product or services managers can do now to begin changing focus are:

- Evangelize the position that technical estimates of delivery are not reliable until a project or product is well underway (see [Your Engineering Estimates Are Wrong – But They Are Not Useless](#)).
- Interview customers, prospects and other market participants to determine how *they* determine the value of a product or service and reflect this in your product definitions and planning.
- Leverage relationships with existing customer-facing roles like account management, sales and customer success to discover and document customer expectations regarding value delivery.

Evidence

The 2020 Gartner Customer Preference Survey was conducted to advise TSP product managers on how to make better decisions about collecting customer feedback, sharing product roadmaps, releasing new versions and establishing pricing models. The research was conducted online from October 2020 through December 2020, among 844 respondents from Australia (n = 47, 6%), Canada (n = 49, 6%), France (n = 116, 14%), Germany (n = 114, 14%), Hong Kong (n = 8, 1%), India (n = 125, 15%), Singapore (n = 39, 5%), the U.K. (n = 134, 16%) and the U.S. (n = 212, 25%). Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding. Interpret small base sizes (n < 30) with caution.

To enable the comparing and contrasting of key trends, the following quotas were established on key organizational and respondent characteristics:

- Qualifying organizations operate in high-tech industries and non-high-tech industries (education provider, energy, financial services, government, health payer, healthcare, technology product or services, telecom, insurance, manufacturing, media, natural resources, retail, services, transportation, utilities, or wholesale) with annual revenue for fiscal year 2019 of more than \$50 million or equivalent.
- Qualified participants have the title of manager or above. Participants are key influencers, members and/or leaders of a group, or solely responsible for renewal decisions related to technology products or services within their companies.

Technology products or services that we have qualified for this survey are application software/SaaS, infrastructure software/PaaS, data center systems, IaaS, IoT, networking equipment, communications equipment. Minimum licensing and support spend for the primary vendor has been qualified at \$25,000 and above.

The survey was developed collaboratively by a team of Gartner analysts and was reviewed, tested, and administered by Gartner's Research Data, Analysis and Tools (RDAT) team.

Recommended by the Author

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