

STEP BY STEP GUIDE FOR CRAFTING AND ALIGNING YOUR  
PRODUCT VISION, STRATEGY AND ROADMAP

by

**Daniel  
Thulfaut**

# FROM VISION TO VERSION

STRATEGY FRAMEWORK FOR DIGITAL  
PRODUCT MANAGEMENT ROCKSTARS



# **FROM VISION TO VERSION**

# **Strategy framework for digital product management rockstars**

## **Step by step guide for crafting and aligning your product vision, strategy and roadmap**

**From Vision to Version**

© 2021 Daniel Thulfaut

Publisher label: Product Rockstars

ISBN Softcover: 978-3-3474-5770-6

ISBN Hardcover: 978-3-3474-5771-3

ISBN E-Book: 978-3-3474-5772-0

Printing and distribution on behalf of the author:

tribution GmbH, Halenreihe 40-44, 22359 Hamburg, Germany

The work, including its parts, is protected by copyright. The author is responsible for the contents. Any exploitation is prohibited without

his approval. Publication and distribution are carried out on behalf of of the author, to be reached at: tredition GmbH, department "Imprint service", Halenreie 40-44, 22359 Hamburg, Germany.

Cover design and illustrations by Daniel Thulfaut

# **Expert Insights**

I am very lucky and honored to have some of the smartest and experienced industry experts sharing their insights with you and me. The following articles are included:

## **Don't forget all the tiny human actions that are part of every grand thing**

By Claus Raasted, Director at The College of Extraordinary Experiences & Coach at McKinsey & Company

## **What Strategy Development & Poker have in Common**

By Patrick Klug, Head of Product Management Digital at Kienbaum

## **How multi-level roadmaps drive success for internet-of-things products**

By Prof. Dr. Lutz Göcke, Professor for Digital Management at University of Applied Sciences Nordhausen

## **Why it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place**

By Thomas Herzog, Product Lead at Kontist

## **I got 99 problems, but strategy ain't one**

By Thomas Gläser, Director Product at XING Events

## **What if you don't offer a quarterly roadmap, and your stakeholders will love it?**

By Felix Eichler, CTO & Co-Founder at Userlane

## **Rapid prototyping product ideas with no-code**

By Alexander Sprogis, Co-Founder at VisualMakers

# **Nobody is an island. We cannot build products alone.**

By Lisa Mo Wagner, Product Management Consultant & Coach,  
Speaker, WomenTech Ambassador

# **How to prioritize on the initiative, opportunity, and solution level**

By Malte Scholz, Co-Founder, CEO & CPO at airfocus

# Introduction

Have you ever wondered why some products or services just felt right to you? How do some companies spark constant excitement with each new release and product? Often this is attributed to the charismatic visionary that is the face of the company. Think of Steve Jobs or Elon Musk. The truth is, success is not coming from an earth-shattering vision or from being charismatic. Success in product development and product management is about connecting the dots and translating the right vision into the right product.

**3.328.** That is the number of startups that fail per day - out of 3.698 startups founded per day. That is a 90% failure rate. Since you have opened this book, three teams with great motivation, ambitions and a vision have failed and closed their business. If you are a fast reader only a 250 more will have shut their doors forever and buried their dream when finishing this book.

The good news is, bringing a great vision to life and drastically changing the odds of product success is something you can learn, and that can be repeated. In this book, I will teach you all the steps you need to connect the dots between vision and version and enable teams to build products users love and buy.

Most of the teams I work with suffer from one of two problems.



- They have a strong vision. A significant purpose and notion of the desired future. But they fail to translate this into their daily software development and into each release.
- They are outstanding in shipping features fast. Even features requested by customers recently. But they have no idea where they are headed in the long run.

Both problems will ultimately lead to product failure.

There is no foolproof recipe for product strategy. The one strategy to dominate the market. But there is a process that enables you to craft your unique strategy. A constant rhythm of product management that guides you both in daily business decisions and on your long journey towards realizing your overarching vision. I will lay out the complete process with templates and checklists and give you everything you need to be a product strategy rockstar.

This process stays valid in all maturity phases of your product. This is not the n-th book on product discovery and how to develop your minimum viable product. Product teams think they can rest once they have found product-market fit.

Honestly, that is when the hard work is actually starting. That is the moment your initial vision and marketing fluff can't carry you any further. It is the moment when good products die or become great products. The process laid out in this book will help you make a move towards a great product and keep disrupting yourself and your industry.

We begin by crafting the product vision. I will show you how to cut the management and marketing fluff and create a unique value proposition that acts as your guiding Northstar. Then we will build a battle-proof strategy that guides your team and makes sure you stay true on your chartered course. A strategy that actually helps you make decisions and anticipate market movement, competition and exploitable opportunities. The third artifact of the holy trinity is the product roadmap. I will show you how to stop wasting time on ever-changing lists of features and manage your product with outcome-based, agile roadmaps.

Make no mistake, creating and managing a rockstar digital product is hard work and only a few product managers put in the effort to get it right. So take this book as your blueprint and personal consultant. You will receive clear advice on what to do, how to structure your thoughts and how to communicate them to your team, your customers and other stakeholders.

These tools have been battle-proofed by companies like Amazon, Google, Microsoft and most of the startups you actually heard of. Think of them as a best-of-mixtape of product management practices put together in a unique, coherent package and process.

Personally, I can look back on over 15 years of software development and product management and have made all the mistakes you can make along the journey. But I made sure to never make the same mistake twice and to learn from them. I have worked with startups, SMEs and some of the biggest corporates of the world - ranging across almost all industries.

As of writing, I am heading the innovation lab at Interactive Pioneers, an award-winning German agency with more than a thousand customer projects under the belt. I help clients form their vague idea or problem into a valuable product vision and guide them through all the stages and artifacts presented in this book.

People usually describe me as „as pragmatic as they get“ and „not the most diplomatic“. I suppose that is true. It has been so much easier to write the upcoming chapters and pour my knowledge and experience into written words than marketing them in this introduction.

This pragmatism runs through everything I do - from innovation consulting and my podcast to my marriage and parenting (much to my wife's chagrin from time to time ...). So if you are looking for concise, tangible advice and knowledge, look no further.

I am happy to be part of your journey as a product manager, and I would be thrilled to make a difference for you, your team, your company and your product. I sincerely hope to spare you from a lot of the mistakes I made and give you the opportunity to fast-track your career to a point where you can take all my findings and strategies and develop them even further.

# About this book

There is one feedback that many junior product managers get pretty often: „You need to be more strategic!“. But what does that actually mean? And what is the product manager supposed to do with this feedback?

I have heard this feedback quite a lot during my career - and quite frankly still hear it from time to time. Management is always looking for candidates with strong strategic thinking.

Let's think for a minute about the opposite. To be less strategic primarily means to be stronger in short-term operative work. Similar to when learning to drive a car. In the beginning, you focus on what is directly in front of your vehicle and your near surroundings. Once you get more experienced, you will ingest this information more subconsciously, and your view will expand further towards the horizon. Finally, you focus on the overall picture a few hundred meters further down the road, and try to anticipate when other vehicles will slow down or probably turn. This narrow focus is totally understandable and part of the journey.

But quite often, this is not what management actually means when it demands more strategic thinking. Strategy is often seen as the opposite of process and methodology. Product managers with strong

process focus are automatically regarded as less strategic. Managers and executives are looking for the silver bullet. The golden ticket. Someone that magically knows the answer to what the future of the product should be. The visionary genius who provides the shortcut to everything.

That person does not exist.

Good strategy and strategic thinking are always hard work, regardless of genius and talent. So would you rather hire someone who got lucky a few times with his gut feeling or someone who knows the process of strategy development by heart and can recreate success again and again?

This book sets out to provide this strategy process and everything that you need to create incredible product strategies - again and again, and again.

## **Who should read it?**

Obviously, this book is intended and written for product managers. If you are just starting out in product management the proposed blueprint of a strategy process will hopefully save you some of the above mentioned feedback of not being strategic enough. In addition, I included perspectives of other experts and also my own practical experience. This book could very well kickstart your career and help you skip a few years.

If you are a more experienced and senior product manager, this strategy framework will bring a new perspective to what you are already doing and will allow you to clear your current process from practices that are not really creating value. In addition, it will spark some fascinating and necessary discussions about the vision and strategy of your product. Think of this book as your personal coach, asking the uncomfortable questions about your product and your work.

And if you are currently CPO or VP Product in a larger organization, this book will hopefully help you communicate and teach what strategic product management is all about. Use it to double-check your own beliefs and mental models.

### Development teams

If you are a designer, business analyst, or software developer, this book could be equally valuable to you as well. In the end, you are the driving force that actually builds the product and pours hour upon hour each day into it. If you have been in this industry for some time, you probably know how frustrating it can be to work on something you don't believe in. To work on a product that you know does not fit the user problem. You know that most roadmaps are designed by management based on quick ideas the CEO had in the shower and fancy technology trends popping up every once in a while.

The laid-out product strategy framework can give you the background to articulate these issues to your product manager and

management. Then, hopefully you can turn things around - for both yourself and your organization.

### Non-product people

Many people are only indirectly involved in product development and product management but are still affected by it. This book is for you if you are working in software sales, customer success management, support, consulting or similar areas! It is your chance to get a solid background in product management without learning all the concepts of daily operative work or disciplines like user experience design. This book provides the bigger picture and connects all the dots. Think of it as your compass and map to navigate the product process and talk to product management at an eye level.

In most organizations, you are more involved in user communication and have your finger more on the market's pulse than the product manager. And after the next release, you get to support and sell it. So make sure you understand this process and keep your product managers accountable for how they are moving towards the product vision.

### Senior management

When your organization grows, management won't have time or expertise to read every user story, release notes and test every software increment themselves. Senior management is about purpose, communication and alignment. I, therefore, urge every member of the leadership board and senior management to