

Product Launch Management

Naveen Muppa*

10494 Red Stone Dr Collierville, Tennessee, USA

Citation: Naveen Muppa. Product Launch Management. *J Artif Intell Mach Learn & Data Sci* 2022, 1(1), 246-249. DOI: doi.org/10.51219/JAIMLD/Naveen-muppa/78

Received: 02 November, 2022; **Accepted:** 18 November, 2022; **Published:** 20 November, 2022

***Corresponding author:** Naveen Muppa, 10494 Red Stone Dr Collierville, Tennessee, USA

Copyright: © 2022 Muppa N. Enhancing Supplier Relationships: Critical Factors in Procurement Supplier Selection.., This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

ABSTRACT

In The best way to describe most product launches is that they are a marathon- everyone starts with the end-goal in mind, but only through endurance, commitment and determination is that goal realized. Consider this section to be the training guide for how prepares to run a successful race and carry our clients across the finish line.

Keywords: As with any project one of the first steps to be completed is identifying and documenting the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders that will have some level of involvement in the product launch. Most product launches are divided up into individual work streams that have a single owner responsible for planning and completing 'buckets' of work (i.e. channel readiness, customer evidence). Be sure to not only identify these work stream leads, but also start to document key decision makers and influencers aligned to each work stream (hint: think about upstream and downstream impacts).

1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide prescriptive guidance and artifacts for managing a product launch that leverage the extensive knowledge and expertise has acquired through the management and oversight of the Microsoft Office 2010, Wave "14," Office 365 and Office "15" product launches. While most of the information found within this document will be slanted toward software and technology products the core principles, challenges and best practices are applicable across all industries.

2. Assembling the Work Team

As with any project one of the first steps to be completed is identifying and documenting the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders that will have some level of involvement in the product launch. Most product launches are divided up into individual work streams that have a single owner responsible for planning and completing 'buckets' of work (i.e. channel readiness, customer evidence). Be sure to not only identify

these work stream leads, but also start to document key decision makers and influencers aligned to each work stream (hint: think about upstream and downstream impacts).

One approach to populating the RACI is to have each member come to the meeting with their list of teams and individuals that they interact with on a daily basis and run through a mind mapping exercise where all information is listed on a whiteboard and then participants start to visually identify connections and assign values of high, medium, low (representing their perceived level of authority).

- Key decision makers/approvers
- Work stream owners.
- Business owners that will be impacted
- External stakeholders such as channel partners, etc. that need to be considered.

Depending on the size of the team and number of stakeholders involved it may be advisable to break the team into the "core" team and the "extended" team. Members of the core team are

typically those individuals who either a) own a work stream, or b) are a key decision maker. Members of the extended team are completing downstream work that will incorporate outputs of work stream owners. While taking this approach requires additional coordination and stakeholder management it allows you to focus on quickly addressing and solving problems in a smaller team setting without creating a false sense of panic.

- Assume that everyone has personal goals, objectives and commitments aligned to launch.
- Assume that all stakeholders will be known and identified when planning kicks off.
- Assume that the level of involvement and influence of stakeholders will remain static.
- Get firm commitments from milestone owners on specific milestones to remain focused on the success criteria to determine if they are prepared for launch.
- Establish a shared set of goals and objectives that everyone can align to their personal goals.
- Identify who will be part of the “core” team vs. “extended” team based upon their level of contribution and authority.

3. Establishing an Executive Rob

Now that the stakeholders have been identified, the team assembled, and work stream owners assigned it is time to establish a regular rhythm for engaging with management and key executives to drive transparency and visibility. The benefits of clearly articulating how and when management will be engaged not only sets explicit expectations with the team, but also sets a clear level of accountability for making timely decisions. In general, it is a best practice to meet with management a minimum of one hour every other week and to have a longer (2 hour) executive review scheduled on a monthly basis. Some shorter engagements may require more frequent meetings to take place, but always be sure to only use the time that is needed (presenting for the sake of presenting is not the best of time- for anyone).

Consider the delivery of a weekly project dashboard as an effective method to keep executive stakeholders aware of milestones, risks, status, etc. and reduce time spent on topics already addressed in the dashboard.

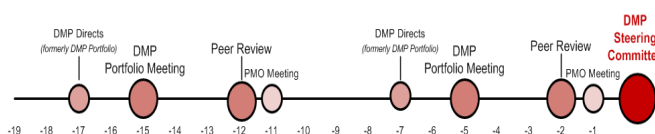


Figure 1: Example of an Executive ROB displayed in a visual “T-Minus” timeline (in days).

- Set unrealistic expectations when it comes to the amount of time that management can dedicate toward reviews.
- Assume that management is actively engaged and aware of all risks.
- Waiting to flag issues until management reviews.
- Meetings with management are NOT the forum to present status- they should be used to solve problems and to educate/inform senior leaders of the things that they need to know.
- Consider establishing a cadence that allows direct access to key decision makers without requiring full participation from management.
- Every meeting should have a set purpose, agenda, and desired outcomes pre-determined.

4. Creating the Launch Road Map

The product launch roadmap is one of the single, most powerful, tools for management, communication, education, and alignment across the entire organization. The process for developing a launch roadmap is like approach that takes when building out any project schedule, but typically requires multiple revs in both group and 1:1 meeting to finalize. Once the final (v1) roadmap has been completed it should be shared broadly with core and extended team members, management and key executives sponsors to start the process of educating stakeholders on the holistic view of launch (converting them into advocates that will in turn educate their teams).

Depending on your audience(s) you may produce multiple versions, or views, of the launch roadmap to accommodate different levels of information. One example of this could be a roadmap that is tailored for your sales team to help them understand what messages and information they can share with customers at different points in time.



Figure 2: Road map example.

Key elements of a roadmap:

- Product milestones from Engineering (when will development be completed, when is beta available, etc.)
- Work streams with major activities and planned deliverables.
- External events such as industry conferences
- Important internal dates such as blackout periods (holidays)
- Work stream KPIs and objectives (optional depending on the level of complexity)

Attempt to develop the roadmap through a series of 1:1 meeting will result in the inability to identify dependencies and potential conflicts.

Work stream owners do not see management reviewing the roadmap on a regular basis they have very little incentive to keep it updated.

Allow the roadmap to become a ‘stale’ document that becomes nothing more than a pretty eye chart.

The roadmap is the single most powerful communication tool in the arsenal- invest the time into development and maintenance.

Establish a regular cadence to review with management to serve as a forcing function for updates from work stream owners.

Use the roadmap to facilitate discussions between work stream owners to identify and understand dependencies and risks.

Time spent in meetings is time not spent on making progress. The concept of bringing the working team into a room for all of them to take turns talking about what they are working on is not the most efficient use of time and certainly not the appropriate

forum for launch status meetings (consider scheduling monthly mini-offsite sessions for the team to understand what everyone is working on). Status meetings should be optimized to focus on surfacing, understanding, and solving problems that directly impact the activities and deliverables of the work stream owners. Topics such as changing market conditions are likely better suited for meetings with management while typos in customer-facing emails should be handled directly by the work stream owner responsible for outbound relationship marketing. Appropriate topics for status meetings are schedule delays impacting other work streams, misalignment between sales and channel readiness and concerns over integrated marketing activities.

5. Keep Things on Track

Going back to the beginning of this document product launches are marathons, not sprints. They require thoughtful planning up front, but even more importantly a steady and consistent pace to reach the finish line. This typically means balancing providing the work stream owners with enough flexibility to complete their tasks and activities with as little overhead as possible while not allowing things to become the “wild west.”

Constantly revisit the roadmap and detailed project schedule to ensure that things are on-track and invest time into looking ahead to the future for what ‘could’ go wrong.

- Fail to regularly revisit and update the walking deck and roadmap.
- Being so “rigid” with processes that they become inadequate, or overly complex resulting in frustration.
- Allow work stream owners to go “rogue.”
- Take the time to recognize and celebrate key milestones.
- There is a reason for process- continue to drive it (but remain flexible enough to implement change when warranted)
- Remember the “marathon” mentality.

While every milestone represents a significant achievement on the road to launch the day of launch (DOL) by nature will garner the highest level of importance and involvement from senior management. The moment in time not only represents the availability of a new product, new revenue, and new opportunities for the company, but also is the culmination of several weeks/ months/quarters (and possibly years) of dedication and hard work. Because of the actual and perceived importance planning for the day of launch should have begun with the first launch kickoff meeting and continued to evolve throughout the duration of the project.

It is highly likely that the day of launch will incorporate some kind of external-facing event where company executive and senior leadership will announce the availability of the product, how excited they are and what this means to the future of the company. Because of this advanced planning becomes even more important as the team will likely need to build mock demo environments, train leadership on how to respond to questions from the press, host customers and put on some form of a celebratory event. While the activities just described may be at the extreme end of the spectrum for some companies, they are all things that should be considered and discussed from day one.

Remember that in the minds of executive and senior leadership the day of launch can make, or break, the success of a product (in most cases this is simply untrue) so always err on the side of over-planning, over-communicating, and over-delivering.

Assume that plans made six months earlier have not, or will not, change.

Expect that there are clear roles and responsibilities that everyone will adhere to

Assume that executives will not change things up until the last minute.

Day of launch planning should start with the kickoff meeting and be revisited regularly throughout the project.

Plans should account for down-to-the-minute details from speeches to press coverage and demos.

Planning for the day of launch is like planning for a wedding- be prepared for absolute chaos.

It is important to note that while product launches can vary in both size and complexity that approaches them like all other program management engagements that incorporate the fundamentals of the A6 methodology. By doing so not only does continue to deliver a consistent client experience, but also leverages all the benefits to be realized through reusable templates and artifacts.

However, recognize that product launches tend to require additional key deliverables and specific treatments to existing A6 templates. These differences have been noted in the diagram (below) and are explicitly called out for each key deliverable outlined below. It should be noted that the list of deliverables is not meant to be comprehensive of all product launches, but instead represents the list of key components that every successful launch should look to incorporate (in addition to their specific needs).

6. Planning for the Big Day

Like all projects and programs, a product launch does not differ in the fact that you will have both internal and external stakeholders who will need to be educated on what you are doing, when you are doing it and how it may impact their work. The audience for your walking deck will tend to be very broad so should address high-level strategy AND work stream details. A comprehensive product launch walking deck should strive to incorporate the following components:

- Overall guiding principles, objectives, milestones, and initiatives/activities
- Executive Rob
- Roadmap
- Scorecard
- Details for each individual work stream
- Appendix containing.
- Content delivery schedule
- Stakeholder R&R
- Additional resources (where to go for more information)

7. Conclusion

A valuable project launch roadmap does exactly what the name reflects- it’s clearly outlines all of the significant milestones and activities that the team is driving toward launch. At the heart of the roadmap are the engineering milestones that should serve as the anchors for all other activities to be aligned around. The roadmap serves as the single ‘master’ schedule for communicating out to the broader set of stakeholders and serves

as an excellent visual tool for understanding and identifying potential cross-work stream dependencies. Like the walking deck this roadmap is a living document that should be updated on a regular basis and revisited by management throughout the planning and execution phases.

8. Benefits

- Creates a single set of measurable “critical for success” factors to drive activities.
- Provides a single view for company executives and management to view progress.
- Provides a single view for extended stakeholders to view progress.
- Provides a single document that all stakeholders (internal and external) can reference to understand the high-level objectives, milestones, deliverables, and work streams for launch.
- Creates a forcing function for work stream owners to provide updated information when changes to the original plan of record are approved (in conjunction with the launch roadmap)
- Sets expectations out of the gate with stakeholders on how content will be delivered.
- Drives a predictable pattern in how, when, and where new product launch content will be delivered to stakeholders (both internal and external)
- Drives broad awareness, excitement, and education.
- Provides vehicle to communicate key actions and go dos.
- Serves as single, consolidated, point of launch-related information.