Themed Roadmaps
5 Steps to a Themed Roadmap

Step 1   Identify key strategic intents and objectives

Step 2   Identify "returns" from these strategies

Step 3   Build your themes and populate with key deliverables

Step 4   Apply priority percentages to the themes

Step 5   Managing the Themed Roadmap
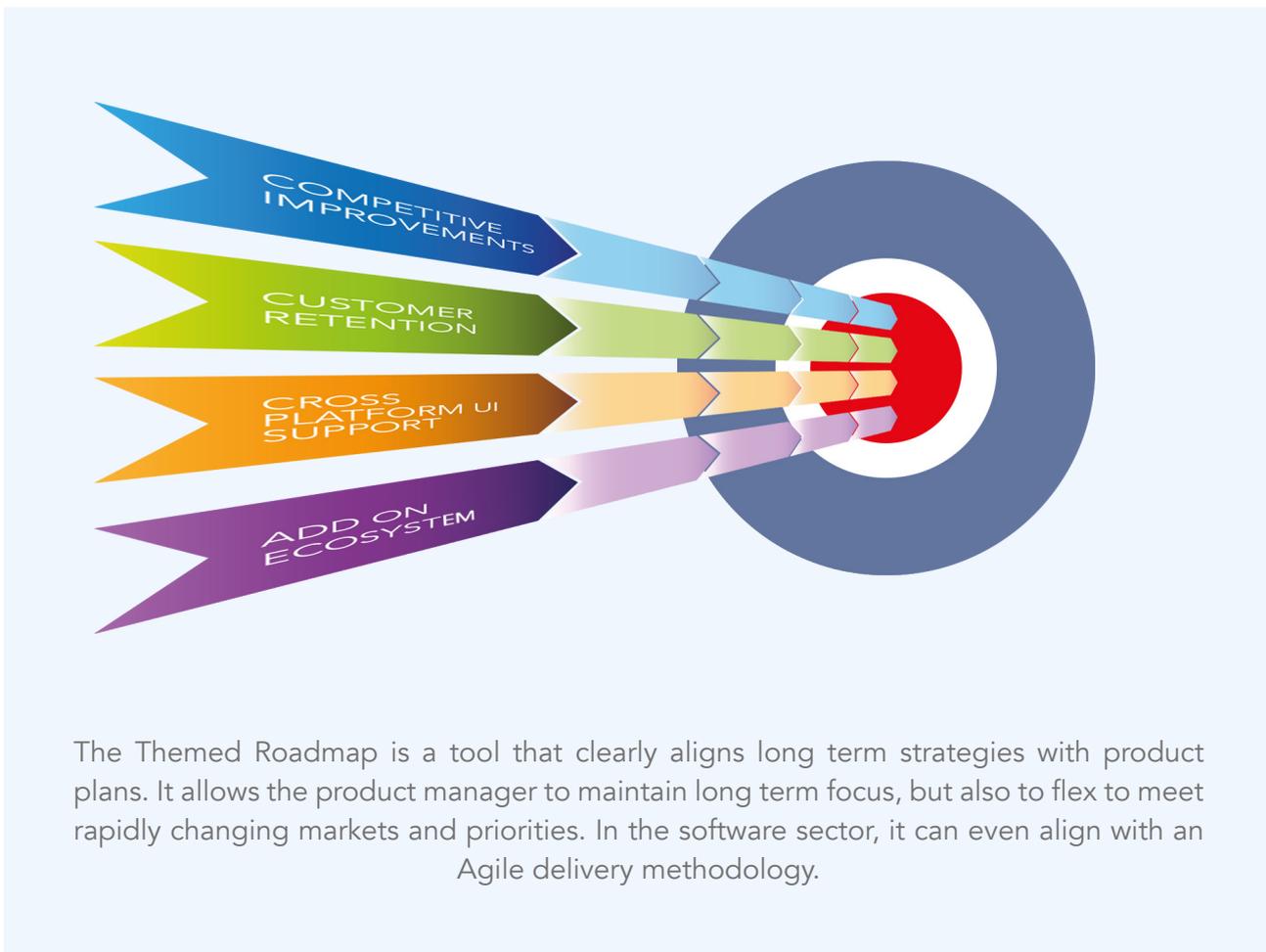
Product Management Insight

PAPER FOUR

Managing complex products or product lines in a fast-paced market environment is challenging and demanding.

For any product manager, the overall challenge is to deliver a successful product to meet a well proven and quantified set of strategic needs against the pressure of many short-term demands.

A central framework that many product management teams are adopting to help with this challenge is the Themed Roadmap.

The Themed Roadmap is a tool that clearly aligns long term strategies with product plans. It allows the product manager to maintain long term focus, but also to flex to meet rapidly changing markets and priorities. In the software sector, it can even align with an Agile delivery methodology.

Step 1 – Identify key strategic intents and objectives

Product strategies will originate from a number of different market segments, market factors or stakeholder groups. They should align, where relevant, with the strategic intent of the business (Read the Insight paper on Market Maps).

PRODUCT STRATEGIES ARE DEFINED AS
High level action plans, to achieve a long-term goal relevant at any stage of a product's life cycle.

Examples are

- Improve market share
- Reduce customer churn
- Attract early adopter customers
- Reduce customer support tickets
- End of Life Product
- Build Add-On revenues to existing customer base
- Enter French and German Markets
- Address emerging threat from new competitor
- Improve Net Promoter Score for recommendation levels.
- Migrate to new database platform
- Address technical debt

Step 2 – Identify "returns" from these strategies

Product strategies are put in place for a reason. They will have objectives and those objectives must be measurable. These measurable metrics are often financial but sometimes, may have other targets such as market share, customer acquisition, re-allocating resources, customer satisfaction and so on.

Identifying metrics for each strategy is vital

• To measure progress towards their stated objectives

• To identify timelines for progress

• To inform what resource requirements are required to meet the objective and to calculate return on investments

**Adding metrics to product objectives will produce strategies like these**

• Improve market share to achieve 25% of total market revenues in 2019

• Reduce customer churn from 6% to 3% by end of 2018

• Attract 50 early adopter customers in next 12 months

• Reduce customer support tickets re product performance by 20%

Step 3 - Build your themes and populate with key deliverables

Build Themes

In the themed roadmap the themes are derived from product strategies. They may not represent a one to one relationship but may be divided into 2-3 themes within a major strategic intent or some strategies could be combined into one broader strategy.

The resultant collection of themes can then be stacked into a themed roadmap such as this illustration.
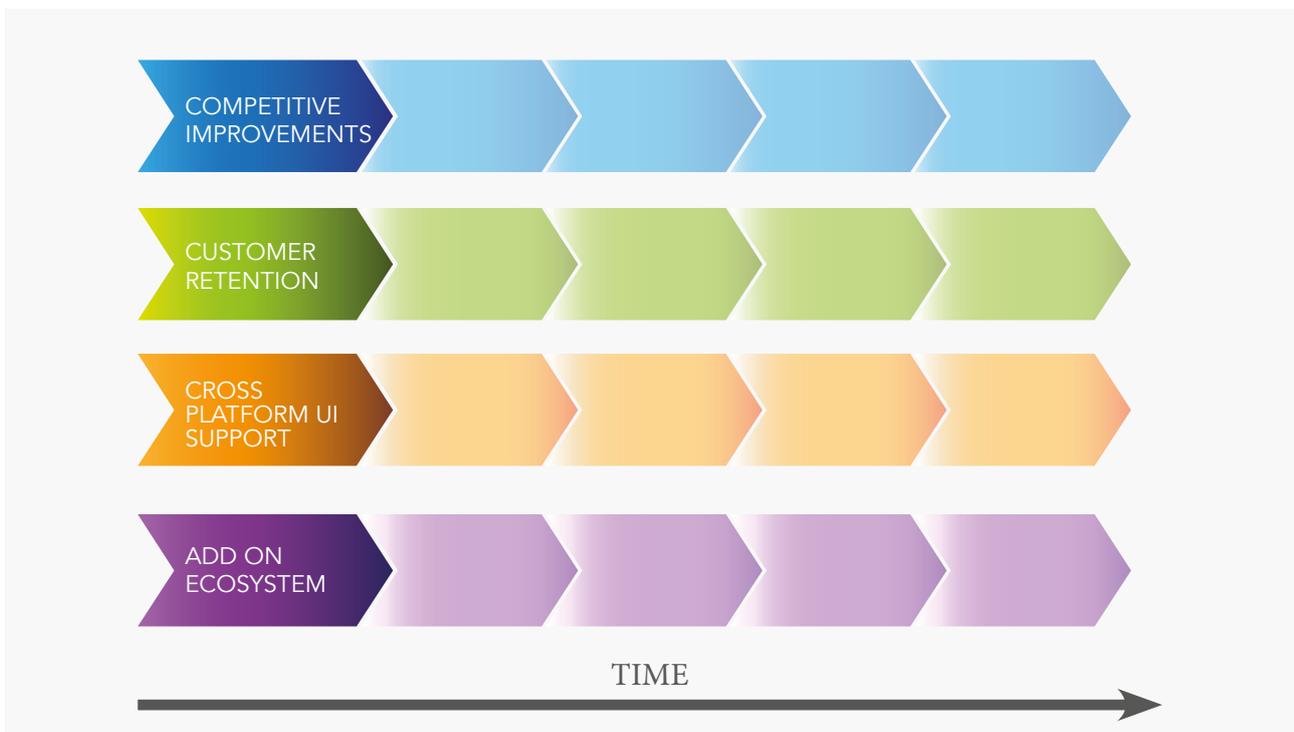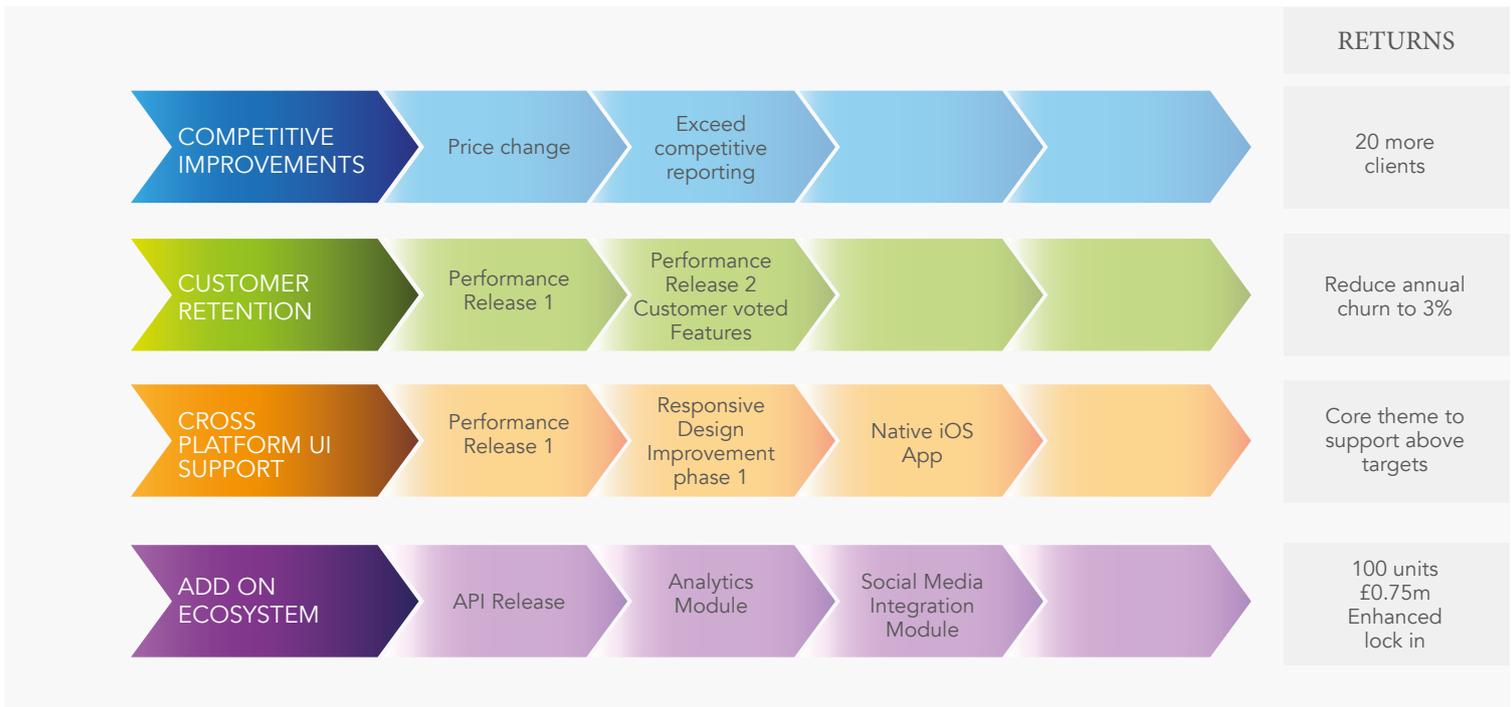

Key Deliverables

Product Managers can then use themes to group feature enhancements and start to schedule across time into upgrade releases, or improved products, or new add-on products.

The purpose of the theme is to maintain focus on the long term strategy and to be the "stream" within which improvements can be incrementally added to achieve the overall objective.

A typical themed roadmap with objectives / return on investments added, would therefore look similar to this example with the gaps between the chevrons representing potential new models or upgrades. Importantly each new model or upgrade will have improvements within each theme so that each strategy shows progress.

				RETURNS
COMPETITIVE IMPROVEMENTS	Price change	Exceed competitive reporting		20 more clients
CUSTOMER RETENTION	Performance Release 1	Performance Release 2 Customer voted Features		Reduce annual churn to 3%
CROSS PLATFORM UI SUPPORT	Performance Release 1	Responsive Design Improvement phase 1	Native iOS App	Core theme to support above targets
ADD ON ECOSYSTEM	API Release	Analytics Module	Social Media Integration Module	100 units £0.75m Enhanced lock in

Step 4 – Apply priority percentages to the themes

The next step is assess what effort, resources & costs should be applied to each theme. This will be informed by the metrics that each strategy is to be measured by, time scales and the associated effort required to deliver the product, as discussed with all those involved in its development and/or production.

As resources are always finite, then a percentage of resources to be applied to each of them is often a good way to manage each theme.

For example, with a software product, if improving customer retention was a long term strategy, then a relatively small team to deliver continual improvements, using 20% of all resources may be appropriate.

This percentage could sustain within the theme across multiple releases, but could be flexed if necessary, although if it continues to be a strategic intent, it should never reduce to 0%.

Step 5 – Managing the Themed Roadmap

The principle behind a themed roadmap is to manage the direction for a complex product along multiple strategies. The strategies are likely to persist over a number of product models or releases but their importance might vary as will the resources required to potentially generate a good return on investment. With this in mind, the following approaches can be used in managing the roadmap

- As part of business as usual, product management will be continuously monitoring and assessing every aspect of the market and all stakeholders needs. Over time these will change and the importance of each strategy may vary. In this case the percentage applied to each themes could vary as you go forward.

- If a strategy continues to be valid then do not remove it from the roadmap. Always maintain a small percentage of resource so that a few improvements can be made with each new model or release.

- If you need a new strategy and theme, then always ask the question why? Validate the requirements and get agreement on measurable objectives and timelines. Every new strategy requires a very good justification

Use the themed roadmap for all discussion on product strategies. It keeps focus on the key strategies and maintains buy in from all stakeholders.

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