

What is a roadmap?



In the past, roadmapping could be a lengthy and painstaking process — with teams working across separate (and often outdated) spreadsheets, text documents, and presentations. These visuals had to be manually updated and were often disconnected from daily work (and from one another).

Today, purpose-built roadmapping tools like provide a compelling alternative. With roadmapping software, you can create goals and initiatives, define what you plan to accomplish and when, then build a visual timeline — all in one tool. The entire team can quickly understand and align around your plans. The best part? Your roadmap views are automatically updated whenever you make changes to your data — giving you back your time (and sanity).

Jump ahead to learn exactly what you need to know about roadmapping:

A roadmap is a [visual representation](#) of your strategic plans. It ties together your strategy (the "why"), the work you will need to do to achieve your goals (the "what"), and a timeline for completion (the "when"). As a high-level plan for how you will accomplish your goals, a roadmap helps you picture the work that needs to be done along with a corresponding schedule.

Historically, roadmaps have been closely associated with the [product development](#) process, but their use has expanded in the last several years. Today, roadmaps are a popular strategic planning method for businesses and teams of all kinds. For example, many organizations use a variety of roadmap types in Aha! software — such as [business](#), [technology or IT](#), [project](#), and [marketing roadmaps](#).



This is an example of a strong product roadmap built in [Aha! Roadmaps](#). Plans are organized into goals, initiatives, epics, and features — with a

timeline for releases at the top.

What is roadmapping?

[Roadmapping](#) is a strategic planning approach that helps visualize what you want to accomplish and when. Use it to define the actions and resources required to transform your vision into reality. Then [share the roadmap](#) with executives, team members, and cross-functional groups — building clarity and alignment around upcoming goals and timelines.

What is the difference between a roadmap and a project plan?

A roadmap is a visualization of your [strategic initiatives](#) and the major areas of work you will pursue. A project plan is a supporting document that lays out the specifics of what you need to do to achieve those initiatives. Use a roadmap to define the [high-level goals](#) and give an overview of how you will accomplish them. Then create a corresponding project plan to capture the step-by-step actions you will take to reach each goal along the way.

What is the difference between a strategy and a roadmap?

Your strategy lays out the goals, initiatives, and big [themes of work](#) that will help you achieve both your [vision](#) and mission. Setting strategy provides focus and helps you prioritize the work that will bring you closer to meeting your goals.

A roadmap is a visual way to connect strategy to actual work and deliver against goals. It helps leaders define a workable plan their team can believe in and follow.

As roadmapping has expanded beyond its product development origins, so too have the kinds of people who use roadmaps in their daily work.

Managers across a variety of cross-functional groups use roadmapping to help their team understand what is coming next and who is responsible. Here are a few examples:

- Executives use a [business roadmap](#) to communicate company-wide goals and strategic efforts.
- IT managers create a [technology roadmap](#) to visualize improvements to existing infrastructure, architecture, and technology processes.
- Project managers rely on a [project roadmap](#) to communicate a timeline for project goals, tasks, and assignments.
- Product managers maintain a [product roadmap](#) — focused on communicating the [product vision](#) and putting plans in action.
- Marketing managers build a [marketing roadmap](#) to align groups around integrated marketing plans and all related activities.

Since roadmaps provide a high-level overview of [strategy](#), timing, and [feature](#) work, many internal (and even external) stakeholders may reference the team's roadmap to quickly understand how the activities included support the company's goals and initiatives.

[Top](#)

The components of a roadmap do not change from team to team. The details may vary, but the basics stay the same. A roadmap should answer:

1. Why are we doing this?
2. What exactly are we doing?
3. When are we doing this?

By including strategic information, time frames, and prioritized work, your

roadmap can provide the clarity needed to move ahead. Here are a few common elements:

- **Goals and initiatives:** Show the value that your work brings and how it delivers on [business objectives](#).
- **Releases and milestones:** Answer the question of when work will start and be [delivered](#) to market.
- **Epics and features:** Communicate committed work that is [prioritized](#) by overall value.
- **Dependencies:** Visualize interrelated work that might impact delivery.

A roadmap is a promise of what you will deliver, not how you will deliver it. This forces you to be judicious about what you choose to commit to. When each work item clearly aligns with your overall objectives, you can be confident that you are investing your time wisely. Only include the initiatives and tasks that are most important for achieving your goals.

Folks on any type of team can benefit from building and referencing a roadmap. Here's how:

Accountability	Company leaders, teammates , and customers are counting on you. Share what you will deliver and when so everyone can follow through on the plan.
Alignment	You cannot achieve anything meaningful in a vacuum. Use your roadmap to align different teams, portfolios , or areas of the business so that everyone understands the vision and objectives.
Clarity	What are you working towards and why? By clarifying strategic goals and then linking work to that strategy , you ensure that the team is focused on the activities that bring you closer to your goals.
Communication	Transparency is key. Share your plans to show direction, visualize timing, anticipate challenges, and drive conversations with teammates.

Coordination	Large or complex projects require collaboration between multiple groups within an organization. A roadmap can help you track dependencies and identify bottlenecks to ensure that you deliver on time.
---------------------	--

Related:

- [Your roadmap is a promise \(do you keep it?\)](#)
- [Vision vs. strategy vs. roadmap](#)
- [Initiatives vs. epics vs. features](#)

How do roadmaps benefit a business?

Roadmaps help you visualize and act on a strategic plan, showing the "why" behind the work. Your roadmap helps:

- Clarify business strategy
- Communicate company-wide goals and initiatives to internal teams
- Link department goals to business goals
- Share time-bound plans (monthly, quarterly, annual, etc.) with external groups such as advisory boards and partners
- Track organizational performance and report on KPIs

Despite the growing popularity of roadmaps, there are still many points of confusion about what a roadmap actually is and what it is not. Here are some of the most prevalent misconceptions about roadmaps:

"A roadmap is a to-do list."

Some people think of a roadmap as a list of upcoming tasks or (in the context of product development teams) a [backlog](#). While you can use a

roadmap to guide [prioritization decisions](#) and inform what to work on next, a roadmap is a distinct document. Keeping your roadmap separate from other planning materials such as backlogs or customer requests helps you maintain your strategic focus.

"Roadmaps should not change."

It is true that a roadmap is a commitment — it captures what you are working towards over the next quarter, six months, year, or longer. But since you typically create a roadmap at the beginning of your planning process, priorities may shift. Adjust dates and details when necessary.

"Roadmaps replace Gantt charts."

Some teams that follow [agile software methodology](#) may think of a Gantt chart as a waterfall artifact. The reality is that roadmaps and Gantt charts can be valuable (and often complementary). In a roadmap tool like [Aha! Roadmaps](#), you can enter data once — from high-level strategy to more detailed work. Then you can customize your view to display both a [strategic roadmap](#) and a detailed [Gantt chart](#) that captures phases of work, tasks, [milestones](#), and dependencies.

Related:

- [Product roadmaps vs. Gantt charts](#)
- [Gantt charts and kanban boards — what are they good for?](#)
- [Gantt chart templates](#)

"A roadmap will slow agile teams down."

[Some agile folks think](#) that a roadmap with dates will slow them down from continuously iterating and delivering. In fact, roadmaps can make you more efficient. A roadmap aligns everyone on the team around the goals and

plans, providing a clear direction and a way to quickly view priorities. The roadmap is your foundation — it is the "why" behind the "how."

"A roadmap must have exact dates."

If roadmaps are visual timelines, then including exact dates is a must, right? Not quite. While some teams commit to delivering on specific days, others choose to plan in broader time frames — weeks, months, or quarters. A time-based roadmap gives you checkpoints to make sure the work you have committed to is progressing.

Related: [Product roadmaps vs. release plans](#)

There is not a "correct" way that a roadmap should look. How you build your roadmap depends on the information you are communicating — the level of detail you want to show and the [audience](#) you are sharing information with. For example, some roadmaps convey high-level info such as key initiatives, while others drill down on the details of activities in a specific timeline.

The best roadmaps show a timeline view of the duration of work items such as goals, themes of work, and activities. Despite variations in appearance, the most compelling roadmaps do share a few attributes. No matter what your roadmap looks like, always strive to make it easy to understand. It should be accurate, up-to-date, actionable, and relevant for the intended audience.

Here are nine examples of roadmaps for product, product marketing, and IT teams — all built using Aha! Roadmaps, which is [purpose-built roadmap software](#):

Business roadmap

A [business roadmap](#) shows the most important strategic efforts across the company. These are typically created by executives and then shared with

functional teams to inform their own roadmaps. Business roadmaps usually sync with an organization's strategic planning process, whether that is quarterly or biannual.



Each initiative ties to a business goal and success metric. Progress bars show how close the team is to achieving the goals.

Strategic roadmap

A [strategic roadmap](#) visualizes high-level goals and initiatives. In this example, you can see specific [releases](#) in purple and related goals as colorful flags. The timeline at the top gives a sense of when the team plans to deliver the work.



Releases on this strategic roadmap can unfurl to show specific features and related dependencies.

Portfolio roadmap

A [portfolio roadmap](#) shows planned releases across multiple groups or offerings. The blue and green bars below represent the two different products (Fredwin Cycling and Fredwin Running). The dots signify dates for different release milestones at the corporate level across both products.



The colored release bars on this portfolio roadmap are shaded to show progress as it happens.

Features roadmap

A [features roadmap](#) shows all work in flight for a given time period. You

might see vertical columns or swimlanes to indicate different releases. Note that each [release](#) corresponds to a quarter in the year, so it is easy to see when you plan to deliver.



The status of each feature is shown visually (with the percent complete bars) and textually ("Define," "Ready to develop," and "Shipped.")

Agile roadmap

An [agile roadmap](#) shows major themes of work in a general timeline. Those themes could be product goals or epics, which are groups of related features. The date range will depend on how an agile development team works, but it is not common to see an agile roadmap expand beyond a quarter at a time. The flexibility of agile workflows makes it easier to keep the roadmap contained to just a few [sprints](#) or iterations.



Each of the five columns shows a high-level epic that the development team is working on — along with key details such as corresponding goals and statuses.

Go-to-market roadmap

A [go-to-market roadmap](#) gives a complete picture of everything that must be done to accomplish a successful [launch](#). The roadmap below includes cross-functional tasks and activities — from drafting a [creative brief](#) to conducting sales and support training. You can track dependencies (the black arrows) and milestones (the red and yellow dots) to make sure that everyone delivers on time.



This example of a go-to-market roadmap was built by a product marketing team.

Marketing roadmap

A [marketing roadmap](#) shows marketing goals and related activities that support overall business objectives. Depending on the complexity of the organization, you might have a marketing roadmap that separates work by function (such as [digital marketing](#) and [content marketing](#)) or that visualizes major campaigns linked to specific products.



This roadmap shows how the strategic marketing initiatives map to the overall goals, along with a timeline for completion.

IT projects roadmap

An [IT projects roadmap](#) combines strategy, releases, and features into one timeline view. You can see how each release and feature supports the broader IT goals of aggregating business data, internal mobilization, and improving business process automation.



This is an example of an IT projects roadmap for the Fredwin IT group.

Technology roadmap

A [technology roadmap](#) is a visualization of your strategic IT plans. Examples of focus areas that might go on a technology roadmap include updating infrastructure and platforms or managing a data transformation. A good technology roadmap usually includes goals and initiatives, new system capabilities, release plans, milestones, resources, training, risk factors, and status reports.

This visualization shows all the work the team must do to roll out new integrations — across architecture, services, infrastructure, and DevOps. The window displays more information about the "new data center setup" release.

How to choose a roadmap tool

While you can create roadmap views in spreadsheet or presentation software, there are several downsides to this approach. It can take hours to manually create even a simple roadmap in a tool that was not designed for roadmapping. You also have to update your roadmap each time you make progress or plans change. And it is difficult to share your roadmaps and collaborate with teammates.

This is why many teams use purpose-built roadmap software like [Aha! Roadmaps](#). Instead of constantly updating your roadmap or worrying about version control, you can quickly create, customize, and share beautiful views of your strategic plans. You can [build a roadmap](#) and link it to the detailed work. Enter your information once, and your roadmap will update automatically — so everyone can see how they are making progress towards the goals in real time.

Ready to get started? [Try Aha! Roadmaps now.](#)

When evaluating whether a [roadmap tool](#) is right for you, consider the type of project you are working on and the specific needs of your company and teammates. Smaller teams or less mature organizations may want to start with [populated templates](#) before graduating to more advanced roadmapping software.

Whatever you are working on, the tool you choose should let you link your work to the strategy, create different types of views, adjust as plans change,

and share your roadmap easily with others. Be aware that some tools treat strategy as an afterthought, focusing more on project planning or time tracking. Unfortunately, these tools are unlikely to help you make a real impact — having clear goals to work towards is key to successful strategic planning.

Roadmapping for product managers

Building an effective product roadmap may sound like a massive effort. But it serves as a foundation for everything the team will focus on. Roadmaps make it possible for product managers to:

- Visualize how [product strategy](#) ties to company goals
- Break product goals and initiatives into [features](#) and [requirements](#)
- Share plans with leadership, cross-functional teammates, and [customers](#)
- Prioritize new features and enhancements
- [Report](#) on the progress the product team has made

How do you create a product roadmap?

[Product managers](#) use roadmaps to coordinate a cross-functional product team around a common goal, such as the launch of a new product or a major release. Product roadmaps are particularly useful for communicating high-level product plans to company leadership, partners, and [customers](#).

There are five basic steps to building a [product roadmap](#):

1. Define product strategy Outline your product vision, goals, and initiatives. You may want to do more in-depth research such as creating [personas](#), writing [product positioning](#), and doing [competitive analysis](#) to

inform your strategy and provide deeper context.

2. Review and evaluate potential features You likely already have a list of ideas that could bring [value](#) to your product. These could be your own concepts, suggestions from teammates, or feedback from customers. You can use a variety of models to [weigh the value](#) of potential features, such as a [product value scorecard](#), then add the strongest ones to your backlog.

3. Prioritize and define requirements Break the efforts that best support the strategy down into smaller chunks of work. Some teams employ [user story mapping](#) to stay focused on delivering customer value. A user story map shows the journey of a user's interactions with the product. You can evaluate which steps have the most benefit for the user, prioritize what should be built next, and define detailed requirements for engineering.

4. Organize into releases Now it is time to group your ranked list of features into themes or major initiatives and decide when you will [release](#) new functionality to customers. You may work cross-functionally with an engineering manager or [scrum leader](#) to make these decisions.

5. Choose your roadmap view Most product roadmaps show major releases over a specific time frame and link those to goals and initiatives. You can adjust the type of information and level of detail you want to share based on your audience and [roadmap tool](#). For example, you may want to include specific features or cross-functional dependencies that will impact your plan.

Product roadmap templates

Roadmaps are incredibly useful for product teams but can be challenging to build from scratch — or manually update. At Aha! we offer several roadmap templates to get you started:

- Our [free downloadable roadmaps](#) provide you with documents that can

be used to get started quickly in PowerPoint, Excel, or Word.

- Try our [whiteboard](#) functionality in [Aha! Notebooks](#) — with several easy-to-use roadmapping whiteboard templates.
- For more robust roadmaps that include release plans and feature requirements, Aha! Roadmaps has several [built-in templates](#) available.

Still working in spreadsheets? Take a huge leap forward — [sign up for a free trial](#) of Aha! Roadmaps.

Additional roadmapping resources

- [Introduction to product roadmaps](#)
- [Roadmap best practices: How to build a brilliant roadmap](#)
- [Examples of excellent product roadmaps](#)
- [16 product roadmap templates](#)
- [How do product roadmap tools work?](#)
- [How do product managers build the right roadmap?](#)