

What is product discovery?

Product discovery is the process of figuring out exactly what people need so you can build a [product they love](#). It involves identifying a worthwhile problem to solve, determining the best solution, and adjusting to meet the evolving needs of customers and the business — making it some of the most exciting and dynamic product work out there.

Companies often invest in product discovery before building a new product or major new functionality or when [prioritizing features](#) for an existing offering. Entrepreneurs and product builders usually guide the product discovery process, working alongside the broader cross-functional product team. Some common product discovery activities include creating [customer personas](#), analyzing customer feedback, and [user story mapping](#). The goal of these exercises is to help the product team empathize with customers and determine which features to build next in order to create a more lovable [user experience](#).

Although some organizations focus on product discovery only at the beginning of the product development cycle, it really requires your attention during the entire [product development process](#) — from strategizing and ideating to launching and beyond. As markets and customers evolve, you should constantly iterate on your product so you can continue delivering value long after releasing your initial offering.

Build lovable products with Aha! software — [sign up for a free trial](#).

Whether you are starting a business or working as a [product manager](#), doing product discovery right requires the relevant knowledge, skills, and desire to build the greatest offering you possibly can. If you are eager to learn more about product discovery or are simply looking for ideas to improve your existing process, this guide will cover everything you need to know — from the perspective of a [product builder](#). Find out what the process entails, why

it is essential, and tips for refining your own product discovery process.

Why is product discovery important?

Product discovery is challenging and complex work. You aim to understand what potential customers need and how to build a solution. This takes a boundless [empathy for your customers](#) and a deep grasp of what they are struggling with. As a successful product builder, you must move beyond a surface understanding of who users are — internalizing their problems and anticipating their needs as if they were your own.

A robust product discovery process gives the product team a structured way to approach product development — bringing much-needed clarity and focus to what you are trying to achieve. Product discovery can help you move past initial assumptions about what current users or prospects need. By using data and adopting a customer-centric approach to product building, you can validate your assumptions and confirm that a problem actually exists before building a solution for it. The goal is to gain a [holistic understanding](#) of what customers need and how your product delivers value, so you can maximize the impact of your work.

Whether your company calls it "product discovery" or something else, deeply understanding customers' needs and how to solve them is vital for any product team. Broadly speaking, product discovery can help teams:

- **Empathize** — identify with users and adopt a customer-centric mindset towards product development.
- **Innovate** — come up with [new ideas](#) for delivering more lovable products.
- **Prioritize** — determine and invest in the features that will lead to the greatest customer happiness.
- **Reduce risk** — invest in building the right products that customers truly

need and minimize wasted team effort.

What does the product discovery process entail?

Some companies have a defined product discovery framework and others take a more flexible approach. You might experiment with different techniques or activities to stimulate thinking, gather [relevant data](#), or increase empathy for the people who will be using your product.

The exact stages of product discovery will vary at different organizations, but the process typically entails gaining an understanding of what customers need and then validating that understanding. Keep in mind that the phases are not meant to be linear. For example, after evaluating an idea for a [potential feature](#), you might find that your assumptions were incorrect, so you return to the research and ideate stages to refine. Here is an overview of what the process might look like:



The phases of product discovery encompass better understanding customer needs, then testing to validate your assumptions.

No matter what product discovery looks like at your company, close collaboration between product management, [product marketing](#), designers, and developers is key to building and delivering a product that resonates with customers. Everyone in the organization has valuable insights to share about customer needs, product performance, and areas for improvement. Of course, this includes customers themselves. When you speak directly to customers and engage them with meaningful questions, you can move beyond a shallow understanding of personas to really know and internalize peoples' struggles.

Product teams rely on different frameworks during product discovery to research user needs, validate and refine ideas, and figure out the best way to solve customers' problems. An [opportunity canvas](#) is one example — it helps

you identify opportunities for new solutions and articulate the potential impact. With this [Aha! Notebooks](#) template, you can take a collaborative approach. Try this opportunity canvas on a whiteboard with your team.