How to Create an Agile Release Plan
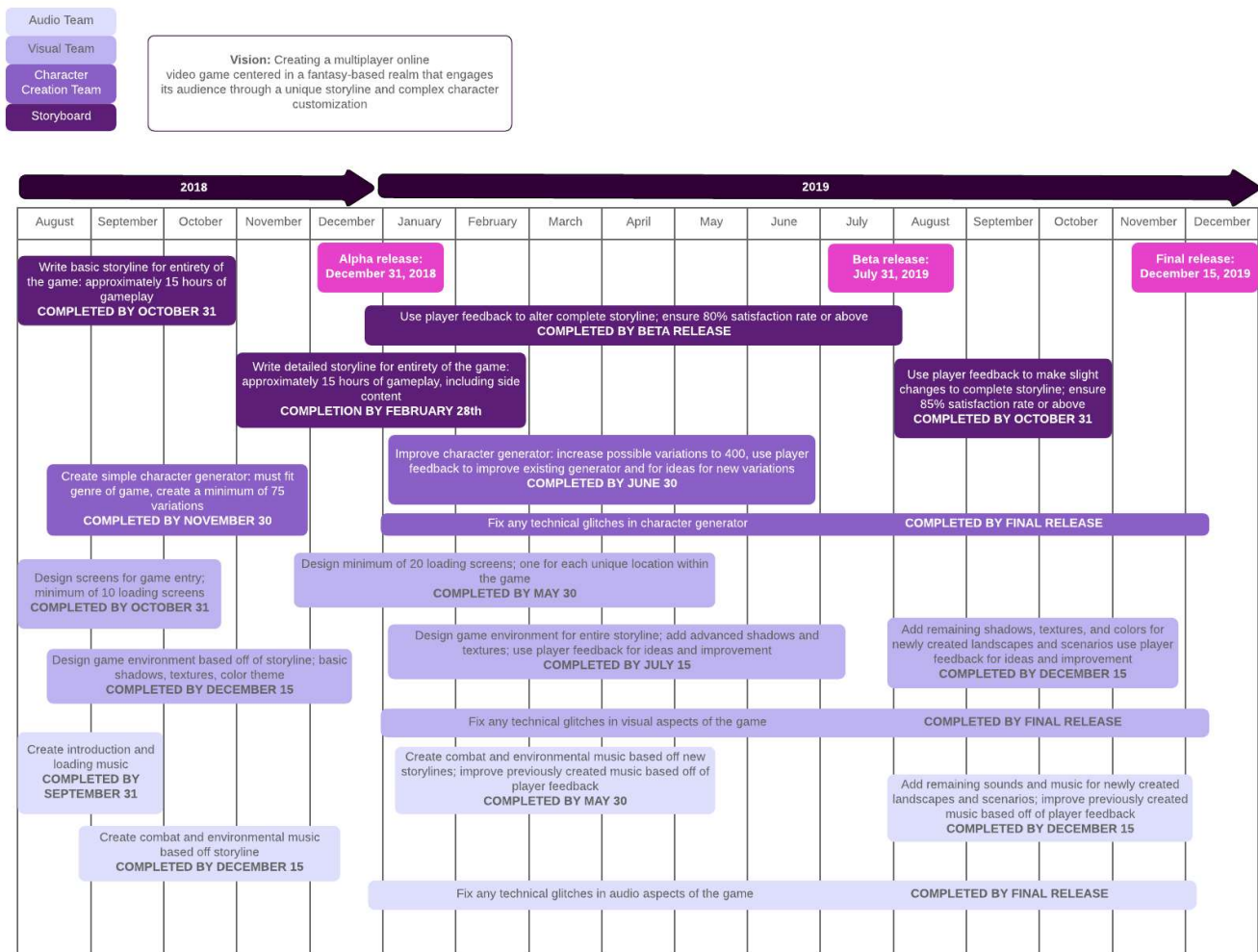
Posted By: Lucidchart Content Team

The foundation of a successful project is a well-laid plan. A release plan acts as a project's map, providing context and direction on product goals, vision, and expectations. According to a report published by PMI, the most common factor in project failure was a lack of clearly defined goals, so for product managers, nailing the planning stage is crucial.

But too often, product managers and their teams get bogged down in clunky software, time-consuming meetings, and disparate data collections, resulting in miscommunication, wasted time, and inefficient resource allocation.

Under these circumstances, it's obvious how so many projects lack focus and clarity. At best, these ingredients create a recipe for frustration and headaches; at worst, product releases may come in over budget, over time, and underperformed.

So how can product managers make release plans to set their team up for success? We'll walk you through the elements of a successful product release map.

Lucidchart helps product managers create dynamic, practical agile release plans that keep everyone on the same page from start to launch. Get started now.

Audio Team
Visual Team
Character Creation Team
Storyboard

Vision: Creating a multiplayer online video game centered in a fantasy-based realm that engages its audience through a unique storyline and complex character customization

2018					2019												
August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	

Alpha release: December 31, 2018

Beta release: July 31, 2019

Final release: December 15, 2019

Write basic storyline for entirety of the game: approximately 15 hours of gameplay
COMPLETED BY OCTOBER 31

Use player feedback to alter complete storyline; ensure 80% satisfaction rate or above
COMPLETED BY BETA RELEASE

Write detailed storyline for entirety of the game: approximately 15 hours of gameplay, including side content
COMPLETION BY FEBRUARY 28th

Use player feedback to make slight changes to complete storyline; ensure 85% satisfaction rate or above
COMPLETED BY OCTOBER 31

Create simple character generator: must fit genre of game, create a minimum of 75 variations
COMPLETED BY NOVEMBER 30

Improve character generator: increase possible variations to 400, use player feedback to improve existing generator and for ideas for new variations
COMPLETED BY JUNE 30

Fix any technical glitches in character generator   **COMPLETED BY FINAL RELEASE**

Design screens for game entry; minimum of 10 loading screens
COMPLETED BY OCTOBER 31

Design minimum of 20 loading screens; one for each unique location within the game
COMPLETED BY MAY 30

Design game environment based off of storyline; basic shadows, textures, color theme
COMPLETED BY DECEMBER 15

Design game environment for entire storyline; add advanced shadows and textures; use player feedback for ideas and improvement
COMPLETED BY JULY 15

Add remaining shadows, textures, and colors for newly created landscapes and scenarios use player feedback for ideas and improvement
COMPLETED BY DECEMBER 15

Fix any technical glitches in visual aspects of the game   **COMPLETED BY FINAL RELEASE**

Create introduction and loading music
COMPLETED BY SEPTEMBER 31

Create combat and environmental music based off new storylines; improve previously created music based off of player feedback
COMPLETED BY MAY 30

Add remaining sounds and music for newly created landscapes and scenarios; improve previously created music based off of player feedback
COMPLETED BY DECEMBER 15

Create combat and environmental music based off storyline
COMPLETED BY DECEMBER 15

Fix any technical glitches in audio aspects of the game   **COMPLETED BY FINAL RELEASE**

Agile Release Plan Example (Click on image to modify online)

What is agile release planning?

Agile release planning is an approach to product management that takes into account the intangible and flexible nature of software development—as part of this approach, teams plan iterative sprints across incremental releases.

In other words, instead of trying to develop every proposed feature in one large, regimented project, agile planning breaks down the development process into stages called releases. In this context, releases are essentially periods of time set apart to work

on a limited scope of the overall project. An agile release plan maps out how and when features (or functionality) will be released and delivered to users.

By scheduling a project into agile releases, product managers can better manage project constraints and adapt to evolving needs or challenges that arise through the development stage while regularly producing product deliverables for the end user.

Elements of a product release map

Despite its name, agile release planning is highly structured. Each step is carefully outlined and measured to create high-level project calendars for teams to follow.

Release maps will vary slightly between organizations, but the general elements will include:

- The proposed release(s) for the project
- Plans for each release
- Subsequent iterations for the release(s)
- Plans for each iteration
- Feature development within an iteration
- Individual tasks necessary to deliver a feature

This level of planning, combined with an iterative schedule to account for the dynamic nature of software, is what makes agile product development so valuable.

The iterative release schedule gives teams the space to make course corrections without derailing the entire project, while the detailed roadmap and focus on the planning stage ensure everyone is on the same page.

How to create an agile release plan

To create a successful product release plan, you'll follow four basic steps.

Step 1: Define your vision

One of the most important steps in the planning process is defining the vision for your product. The vision will guide subsequent decisions on which features to prioritize, where to focus effort and resources, and how to adapt if the project requires adjustment during development.

You may need to consult with executives or other high-level stakeholders to ensure your vision aligns with both the market and the organization's overall objectives.

Step 2: Rank the product backlog

Next, you will need to review your product backlog and rank the features. Use the product vision as well as input from stakeholders to determine product priorities and map out user stories. User stories are user-centered descriptions of the proposed functionality (or feature).

During this step, the product manager should outline a basic release plan or roadmap that includes the release goal, release target date, and the ranked user stories.

Step 3: Hold a release planning meeting

Once the overall product vision and release map are outlined, it's time to gather all stakeholders together in a release planning meeting to review the proposed plan, add to or edit the plan as needed, and align on the product deliverables.

This step ensures everyone is on the same page regarding strategy and collaboration before diving into the project.

A basic agenda will include the following actions.

Review roadmap

The first item on the meeting agenda is to review the vision and roadmap to confirm that everyone understands the overall goal for the product.

Review architecture

Next, stakeholders should review the architecture and technical details for the release. This is the time to discuss any new information that could affect the release plan estimates and scope, including dependencies, assumptions, or gaps.

Review velocity and iteration schedule

Present the estimated velocity—typically based on previous projects or iterations—along with the proposed iteration schedule.

Each user story is assigned points based on how much effort or work is required to complete associated tasks. The product manager calculates the velocity by adding all user story points within a sprint (or release). The result is a reasonable estimate of how quickly the team could complete that iteration. From there, you can outline an iteration schedule based on the scrum team's velocity.

The iteration schedule essentially outlines how much work will be included in a particular release (i.e., the release scope) and how the work will be distributed across the team. Review key milestones and events and confirm the schedule as a group.

Establish the "Definition of Done" for the release

As a group, review and decide on the "Definition of Done" for any given release. In other words, what are the acceptance criteria across all user stories in the release?

When all conditions are met, the team can confirm a release is completed. The "Definition of Done" usually means the team has completed every task outlined under a user story and documented the work for the product owner to review.

Step 4: Finalize and share product release calendar

Following the planning meeting, finalize details, make any last adjustments, and then share the product release calendar with all stakeholders. Everyone should have ongoing access to the release plan for reference and updates. The release plan will help the team

stay focused on the right tasks at the right time.

Using Lucidchart to create a successful release roadmap

Because release plans have such a significant impact on the future success of a project, it is important to create clear timelines and process flows that all stakeholders can access.

That's where Lucidchart comes in.

Lucidchart helps product owners and managers craft informative and clear release plans for more efficient and effective development. Intuitive functionality and product release plan templates make it easy to build diagrams so you can focus on planning and delivery. The collaborative platform lets managers, team members, and other stakeholders view plans and project details in real time, so nothing gets lost in the shuffle.

You can also share plans with stakeholders directly in the platforms and apps your team uses daily. Lucidchart integrates with industry-leading apps like Confluence, Jira Software, G Suite, Microsoft Office, and Slack so you can keep all your documents and project details in one place and avoid costly communication breakdowns.

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