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A day in the life of a product manager

SO WHAT WOULD YOU SAY

YOU DO HERE?

What do devs think a PM does?

PMs have the whole product in their heads and know how things should work.

PMs specify requirements, guide design, and provide timelines.

PMs make sure that devs are doing the right thing and don't mess everything up.

PMs change features: during design, during implementation, and after implementation.

I reply to emails, then go to meetings, then cry. Sometimes it's tears of joy.
--a PM

PMs keep devs in line.

PMs interact more with customers than devs do. They help define important features and prioritize work.

PMs make sure the product is in line with what the market requires.

PMs tell customers why we aren't fixing their bug.

According to one dev

“Being a PM is like being in a room where periodically management and others will come into the room and give you tasks to complete. But the real test is actually to figure out how to escape the room”



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What is a PM's job, anyway?

PMs ensure that we build the **right product** and that it's **successful** in the market.

Ensuring we build the right product

Product Management Framing

- **What** is the product
 - And what it is not?
- **Who** is the product for
 - And *not* for?
- **Why** is the product important
 - To customers *and* to the company

Engineering Execution

- **How** are we going to build it
- **When** will it be done
- **Where** will the code live
 - Lots of discussions about branches
:)

Building the right product is a partnership

Imagine a road trip

- The PM decides the destination
- The dev figures out how to get there

The PM does not advise on the best route, what rest stops they should take, or whether freeways are preferable to surface streets!

Build the right product

- Do customer development
- Do market research
- Do competitive analysis
- Write high-level specs & feature design
- Work with designers
- Work with other teams in the company
- Triage bugs
- Ensure compliance
- Define billing model

Build the right product: what's not in the list

- Implementation design
- Project management
- Assigning work to devs

“I don’t need PMs to tell me to fix my bugs”

Julia Liuson, Microsoft CVP

Make sure product is successful

- Determine best release strategy (timeline, feature set)
- Define product pitch and value prop
- Work with marketing
- Work with evangelism
- Work with PR
- Work with technical writers
- Adjust billing model
- Define new offerings (e.g., new SKU)

Make sure product is successful (continued)

- Meet with analysts
- Present at conferences
- Write blog posts
- Engage with customers and community
- Enable the sales team

Good PMs have (at least one) superpower

- Technical depth
- Make the complex simple
- Create order out of chaos
- Drive consensus
- Stay on top of things
- Keep team from getting distracted
- Protect team
- Storytelling
- Evangelism
- Drive change across a large organization
- Inspire others
- Business acumen

Bad product management can make a product fail



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What PMs love most about their jobs

I love being the glue that brings great minds together.

Going into a customer meeting, and finding out that we've made their lives just a little easier.

There's a lot of variety in the work. I'm doing something different every day.

I get to work at a high level and define the product direction; great devs make it work well.

– Donna

I love working with bright people to make products that our customers like so much that they are willing to pay for them.

Influence without authority. This means building relationships with developers and other teams to create the right outcome.

Takeaways

- An engineering team alone can't build a successful product
- You need marketing, sales, evangelism, developer advocates, and so on
- PMs are the interface between engineering and these other roles
- PMs understand both the product and the market