

Hired

A Guide to Landing Your First Job
in Product Management

Contents

1. An Introduction to Product Management

What Product Managers Are/Are Not
Why Product Management? Why Now?

2. Is Product Management Right For You?

The Technical Skills Product Managers Need
Common Transitions and How to Do Them
Preparing For the Change to Product

3. The PM Job Hunt Begins

What Kind of Product Manager Do You Want to Be?
The Difference: PM at Startups vs Large Corporations
Finding the Job That's Right for You

4. Selling Yourself as an Applicant

Building a Resume Recruiters Will Notice
Optimizing Your LinkedIn for PM Job Hunting
Red Flags to Look Out for in Job Postings

5. Side Projects

Why Start a Side Project?
How to Kickstart a Side Project
How to Showcase Your Side Project on Your Resume

6. Acing the Interview

What to Expect From the PM Interview Process
Crafting the Perfect Elevator Pitch
Typical Product Management Interview Questions (And How to Answer Them)
The Ultimate List of Product Management Interview Questions

7. Becoming a Product Manager

Salary Negotiation
Transitioning to Your New Job
The 30-60-90 Day Plan

An Introduction to Product Management

Why Product Management? Why Now?

1

The Show is About to Begin...

The curtains' part, revealing a packed stage on which sit musicians of all kinds. A man in a tuxedo sits before a cello, a woman in a black cocktail dress is poised at a piano. Around them are saxophonists, violinists, people on percussion, and every kind of wind instrument you can name (and some you can't!).

When the music begins, your eyes are drawn to another person on the stage. This person stands with their back to you. They have no instrument, and make no noise, but nothing happens without their command: This is the conductor. And it's a good place to start when understanding what a Product Manager is.

The conductor doesn't play every instrument, but they know how to play each instrument, and how the different sounds should blend together in perfect harmony. Likewise, a Product Manager doesn't need to be a highly-skilled coder, designer, engineer, marketer or financial expert... but they do need to understand what success in each of these roles looks like.

Before becoming a conductor, the person may once have been a part of it: a pianist or maybe a cellist. But this isn't always the case. Similarly, many Product Managers come from tech or engineering backgrounds, but many don't. Others come from business or management backgrounds, or stumble upon Product Management after founding their own company.

Product Managers Are...

While the professional backgrounds of Product Managers vary, there are a couple of key personality traits they tend to have in common.

Why? Exactly. A relentless curiosity is probably the key tell that someone has Product Management potential. If you were the kid who drove people crazy by asking "Why," and you are still asking it to this day, then you may already be well on your way to thriving as a PM. Whether its requests for new features, changes to the roadmap, an unexpected demand from an important stakeholder, or an interesting insight from customer research, asking why and questing to get to the bottom of things is a massive part of the Product Management role.

Already feeling like you may fit the PM profile? We feel ya! No really, we get it. We fully understand the feeling, and are here to help you get to where you want to be. Feels good, right, to be understood? That's another superpower Product Management naturals have, empathy. From stakeholders to team members, customers to competitors, you need to know on a deep and intuitive level precisely what makes people tick, and use this to lead others through influence, not authority.

Product Managers Are Not...

Just coders! Some are, of course, but many PMs don't even come from tech backgrounds (remember our orchestra? Saying all Product Managers are ex-coders would be like saying all orchestra conductors are former pianists!). Product Managers are also not Project Managers. While there is some overlap in the role, a Project Manager is someone whose job requires them to obsess over schedules and deadlines. In contrast, a Product Manager is more likely to obsess over the customer, asking questions, and solving problems. This is why both traits of empathy and curiosity are so critically important.

Empathy and asking 'why' are innate traits, but they are also skills that can be enhanced through training and practice. And if you're willing to develop those skills and use them to drive a new chapter in your career, then you may find it rewarding in more ways than one.

Product Management is the Place to Be

Evidence shows that, if the idea of a career in Product magnetizes you, then you're making a smart move. LinkedIn recently ranked Product Management as the job title with the best prospect of career advancement, with over double the average promotion rate. And it's not just in tech: Demand for Product Management is rising across all industries as legacy companies embrace digital transformation. More and more firms see the potential of Product-Led Growth as an unbeatable engine of revenue.

Here are some facts gleaned from research we conducted with Product School's community of 1.5 million Product Managers:

- \$159,000/year: The average salary of a Product Manager in San Francisco (That's 3X the average salary for other career paths)
- Over 50% of companies are either Product-Led or moving towards being Product-Led. This means more & more demand for Product Managers

- The Product Suite: More and more CEOs are from Product backgrounds, including recent CEOs of Google, Microsoft and Yahoo!

We Made Hired For You

No matter your background, Hired is your all-purpose guide to getting started in the world of Product Management. It's for you if...

- You're an engineer who wants to develop your skills for planning and strategic thinking
- You're a coder who wants to experience what it's like to lead a cross-functional team
- You're a marketer or manager who wants the satisfaction of bringing a new product into the world
- You're a student or recent graduate fascinated by the hands-on element of product creation
- You're an entrepreneur or founder looking for a structured approach to executing launches

The Future is Product!

As digital transformation, remote work, and Product-Led Growth drive unprecedented demand for Product Managers across industries and worldwide, the career possibilities in this space have never been brighter.

In Hired, we have drawn from the wisdom of many of the best Product Managers and Product Leaders working today to create a quickstart guide to landing your first Product Management job. Inside, you'll learn about acing the infamous PM interview, polishing your resume, deploying a stunning LinkedIn profile, networking with the best of the best, using a side hustle to break into PM, and so much more.

The future is Product Management! Keep reading to learn how to make it your future too.

2

Is Product Management Right For You?



2

Figuring Out if You've Got What It Takes

So, you've seen the glittering horizons of Product Management. You're excited, and you're ready to get on the path that'll take you to a Product career. It's natural at this point to still have some doubts. Do I have the skills for the job? Do companies even hire people like me as PMs? How do I prove myself? What if I don't have enough technical skills?

It's not uncommon for people breaking into Product to feel a lack of confidence in their skills or previous experience. Or to be confused about how they can consolidate what they know into a PM skillset, and demonstrate them to recruiters. But so many people from all kinds of backgrounds successfully transition into Product, and you can too.

Firstly, Product Management is dependent upon a diversity of skills and experience, and that experience doesn't have to come from the tech world. Someone who spent the first 3 years of their career as a retail assistant, and is used to dealing with demanding customers, will be a natural at handling difficult stakeholders. Consultants bring their business-savvy to the role, and are excellent at acting as a diplomat between leadership and team members. Teachers are natural leaders, able to corral a group towards a common goal.

Because of this diversity, every PM has their own way of getting the job done. There are countless different frameworks, methods, and approaches to Product Management. What ties PMs together is a set of core principles and attitudes:

- An obsession with how things work
- A need to understand customers
- A desire to help build things, innovate, and make an impact
- A hunger for knowledge

It's far more important to Product Leaders and hiring managers that their teams have the right attitudes above all else. Hard skills can be picked up and disciplines can be learned. But you can't teach someone to be empathetic, a good communicator, or a forward thinker. That has to start with you, and if you're already there, you've got what it takes to be a great Product Manager!

"Hard skills can be picked up and disciplines can be learned."

Product Managers and Technical Skills: What's the Deal?

One of the largest perceived barriers to jobs in the tech industry is the technical skill gap. Engineers don't have to worry about that, but the tech industry feels like a daunting place to get into for people who have no idea how to code and don't fully understand how 'techy' things work.

But saying that the tech industry only hires people with technical skills is like saying Vogue only hires models. Vogue also needs writers, editors, photographers...and Product Managers! Every company has a lot going on behind the scenes, and it takes all kinds of roles to make them happen.

That said, some jobs in Product Management do require a higher understanding of tech. Technical Product Manager roles, PMs building AI/ML products, and others may require a CS degree, or years of experience in tech. So, where does this leave aspiring Product Managers with no tech skills? Let's break down some of the confusion...

If you have a CS degree, Engineering experience, or are very comfortable with your technical skill set, feel free to skip ahead to page X.

The Truth about Product Managers and Technical Skills

Q. What is meant by 'technical skills'?

A. Technical requirements for different products vary greatly. But when the PM community discusses tech skills required for the job, generally speaking, we mean coding/programming languages (HTML, Python, Java, SQL, etc), and an understanding of ML and AI algorithms.

Q. Do some Product Manager roles have technical requirements?

A. Yes. Some roles will require a CS degree, or demonstrable knowledge of the tech skills needed for the job.

Q. Do Product Managers need to code?

A. An understanding is helpful, but your job isn't Software Developer. Technical Product Managers will be expected to know code, of course.

Q. What is a Technical Product Manager?

A. Product Manager who specifically focuses on the technical side of a product, and will work more closely with an engineering team. To get hired as a Technical Product Manager, you may need to attend a Coding Interview.

Q. What is a Full Stack Product Manager?

A. Product Manager who has a little of everything needed to bring a product idea to life. (Marketing, Sales, Tech, Design, Business, Data, and Leadership.) Not to be confused with Full Stack Developers, who have all of the technical skills to bring a product to life.

Q. What technical knowledge do all Product Managers need?

A. You need to understand enough about the technology you're working with to be able to talk about it. You need to know enough about the product to be able to communicate with the engineers, and set reasonable expectations with leadership in terms of timelines and tech debt. Understanding this will help you prioritize the backlog, which is crucial for success.

Q. What do most employers look for in new hires when it comes to technical understanding?

A. Those that don't require a CS degree or hard technical skills in their Product Managers look for passion and a curiosity for technology. In Product, we often say 'fall in love with the problem, not the solution.' People who are passionate about their customers' problems, and believe that they can solve them with technology, are the perfect Product Managers.

Q. How do I demonstrate my interest in technology?

A. Getting familiar with the goings-on in the tech industry is a good start. Educate yourself on the major trends, what the most influential companies are up to, and what some of the most talked about issues are, especially in your niche. This will give you something to talk about in interviews and help you to feel a little less lost.

All Paths Lead to Product: Common Transitions and Transferable Skills

While Product Management is its own discipline, it sits at the intersection of Marketing, Technology, Business, and Design. Theoretically, anyone with experience in these disciplines already has the foundations of being a great Product Manager.

Let's take a look at some of the most common career transitions into Product Management:



Engineering

Engineers who made the move into Product commonly say that while they loved getting elbow-deep in the code, they became more interested in the strategic side of things. Many engineers-turned-PMs found themselves wanting to dig into the 'why' behind the things they were building, wanted to grow into more of a leadership role, and/or wanted to broaden their development experience.

Engineers have the advantage of already working in tech, and are very attractive applicants for Technical Product Manager roles. According to Bryan Wan, a Product Leader at Microsoft, one of the advantages to a Product team of having a former Engineer as their Product Manager, is that they make good advocates.

"I did full-stack web dev in the past, so when I got into PM it was easier for me to assess complexity and cost when teeing up a project. The most important things I try to do working with engineering is understanding technical limitations, things that are high cost/not easy, calling out technical debt. This way you can save your engineers a lot of time by representing them in meetings and holding the front for new asks."

Bryan Wan,
Product Leader at Microsoft

Marketing

Marketing is another discipline that translates very well to Product Management, but many Marketers feel that their lack of coding skills holds them back. But Marketers have a lot to offer.

Product Management requires a lot of the same skills as Marketing, and you can use this to your advantage when job hunting. First, you need to have a deep understanding of and empathy for the customer. You have to know how, when, and where to talk to them and understand the psychology behind their

actions. As a Product Manager, you are the customer's advocate, making sure that all decisions are customer-driven.

Marketers and Product Managers also have data in common, and both know that all you have are opinions without data. Marketers know the importance of looking at the right metrics to measure success, not just the vanity metrics. They're also natural born communicators, which is key to cross-functional collaboration.

Growth Marketers make great Growth Product Managers, using their expert knowledge of customer behavior and growth metrics to drive the product forward.

"Product Growth is using product thinking for growth aspects without spending much on sales and marketing. How do you use aspects of the product to gain growth? It is a niche skill-set on top of being a good PM."

Anand Arivukkarasu,
Senior Product Manager at Facebook 

Design

What would a product be without Design? Ugly, unusable, and confusing. A Product Manager with a background in Design would never let that happen.

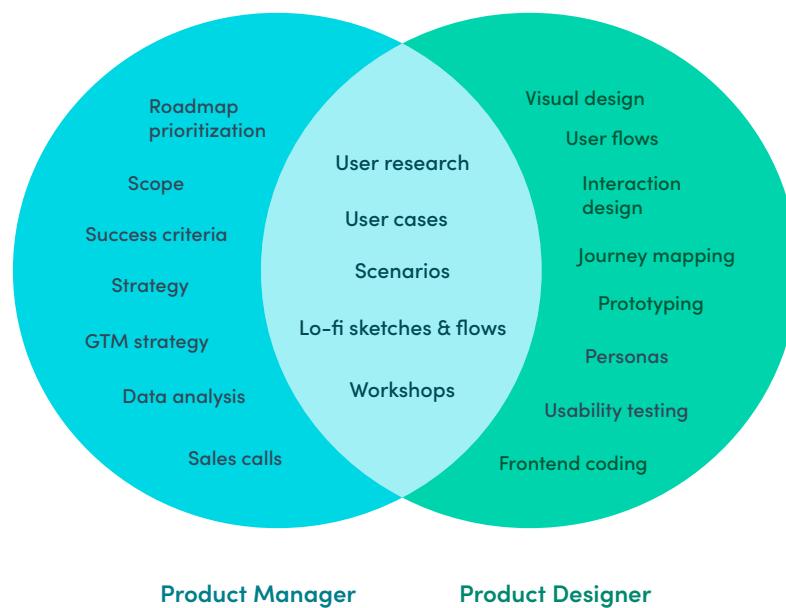
Since more and more companies have started adopting Design Thinking early on in development, and understanding the importance of Design for building great products, Designers have become increasingly attractive for Product Management roles.

Most Designers-turned-PMs got into the role for many of the same reasons as Engineers-turned-PMs. A desire to move into leadership, wanting to get closer to the tech, and looking for a new challenge are all common motivators. Some Designers may also want to break into PM in order to give Design more of a seat at the table in their organizations.

Designers already possess many of the skills needed to become a great Product Manager. Like Marketers, they understand the psychology behind customer behavior, but from a more visual perspective. Designers can quickly whip up a wireframe to explain the vision that's in their head, and are the most adept at solving problems with adoption and onboarding. User research is another typical task for a Product Manager, something that a Designer will have no trouble sinking their teeth into when required.

Consultancy

Making the move to PM empowers Consultants who feel like their roles have boxed them in, involved in the development of digital products without having creative control over how they're built and why. It's a surprisingly common transition, partially because the skillsets of Consultants lend themselves to Product Management very smoothly.



Rafael Medeia Pinto, a Product School alum and CEO of Leadsystems, made the transition from Consultant to Product Manager by highlighting his core Consultant skills:

"Agility, both in execution and learning on the go. Product Managers have to learn constantly as customers constantly demand more features, and the competition moves very fast. So you need to be on the edge. If you decide to resist innovation in your products your products could become obsolete very fast. In consulting it was necessary to diagnose the business to start delivering value as soon as possible, given that most work plans are generally very demanding in terms of timing."

Rafael Medeia Pinto,
Product School alum and
CEO of Leadsystems



Customer obsession, I brought with me a customer centric approach to constantly align with clients when conceptualizing and implementing business solutions. That's the best. Sometimes the client doesn't have the capacity to understand what they need, so both consultants and Product Managers need to be ready to make recommendations. You have to think about what's going to happen.

Frugality and prioritization, building on the go with whatever resource you have is a consulting skill, because you will never have the complete information to make the perfect decisions at the right time. In product it's the same, so we always gotta work with what we have and constantly prioritize what should be executed. Time is money, and focusing on the wrong things can be very costly."

...and Everything in Between!

Successful Product Managers can come from anywhere, and from all kinds of backgrounds.

For example, Nina Foroutan, Product School Instructor and Director of Product at Forbes, started out as a journalist at Hearst. She combined her passion for journalism and her curiosity for technology, and garnered an impressive decade of experience in Product.

"I have a bachelor's degree in journalism and I got my master's in business. And so that kind of connection gave me the pathway to go into product in media. So it's kind of like the business side of things and then the content side of things...So I think it is difficult in a way that there's no cut and dry path. But the silver lining is that there is no cut and dry path. So you can make it your own. You can define whatever product management means to you. And you don't have to be great at every part of product management. If you're not great at the analytics part, but you're amazing at the user design part and the user thinking part, you're still going to be valuable in an organization. And that's the beauty of Product."

Nina Foroutan,
Product School Instructor and
Director of Product at Forbes

If you have domain knowledge, the core values, and the hunger to learn all things PM, then you're already a Product Manager! You just have to land the job.

How to Make the Transition to PM

If you've already gained a few years of experience in a different career path, you have a couple of options for how to make the transition:

1. Moving Into Product at Your Current Company

If you're fortunate enough to be working at a company with Product Managers, trying to transition laterally is the most recommended route to Product. This is because the company already knows you, they've already seen everything you're capable of, and it'll be easier for you to adapt to the role than an entirely new hire.

Start small by just talking to the existing PMs at your company about what they do. Get to know what their day-to-day looks like, and understand where the gaps in your knowledge are. Talk to your direct manager about the potential of making the transition, or at least taking on a few PM responsibilities based on your skillset to test the waters. Companies usually don't expect you to stay in one role for the rest of your life. Their priority is to keep employee retention high, and not lose talented teammates that bring value. So, don't be afraid to start the conversation.

2. Moving Into PM at A New Company

If you're working at a company that doesn't make digital products or enough in-house tech to warrant the need for Product Managers, you need to make a more drastic career change. Breaking into PM at a completely new company is a bit trickier than making a lateral move, but it's possible!

Josh Pincus, a Product Manager at Minted, says that the one key to breaking into Product is to go for jobs in areas that interest you or that you already have expertise in.

"I'd definitely start with looking at PM roles in industries you have knowledge in. Maybe you really love working in fashion, and so you could make a great PM at a fashion e-commerce company, and even be a more attractive choice than someone with no background in fashion with a few years PM experience, for example."

Josh Pincus,
Product Manager at Minted 

With the right resume, LinkedIn, and networking skills, nothing is stopping you from making a great first impression at a new company. We'll cover everything you need to know in Chapters 3 and 4.



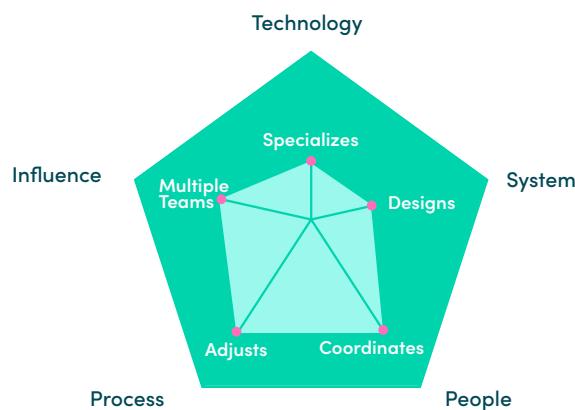
Preparing for Change

While each background comes with its own challenges, as a general rule, you should prepare for:

Going from depth to breadth. Unlike other roles where others expect you to know one thing in great detail, as a PM you'll have a more general knowledge of many things. Maybe you're amazing with data, leadership, and design, but you don't know that much about marketing. Get ready to hone your knowledge in areas you've not touched before. The ideal Product Manager has a T-shaped skill-set, meaning that you have a general overview of every aspect of development, and deep expertise in one particular area.

Letting go of what you love. PMs make tough calls. As a former designer, you may have to choose functionality over design for V1, etc. While your experience in a particular discipline can be your greatest strength, you can't afford to play favorites as a team leader. If you have a background in Engineering, try not to spend so much time with your Engineers that you end up neglecting your other stakeholders.

Gaining technical knowledge. If you're transitioning to PM from a non-technical background, like marketing or sales, keep an open mind and be prepared to learn some new tech skills. Even if you've transitioned from Engineering to Product, you can expect to be working with something new, or at least in a new work environment where your teammate's approach to problem-solving might be different from what you're used to!



Letting your teams do their thing. There are few managers harder to work with than micromanagers. While your team will no doubt value your experience in their area of expertise, you have to leave it just that: their area of expertise. You're not there to code for your Engineers, or design for your Designers. While of course you can roll your sleeves up and help out when asked, be careful not to overstep.

Leading a team. While you've undoubtedly been part of a team before, perhaps this would be your first time leading a team. The best way to prepare is to hone the soft skills needed to become a great leader. Throughout your career in Product, you'll have the opportunity to lean into the leadership side of the job, becoming more of a people manager. Learning how to nurture and mentor your teams can be a rewarding part of the role. Either way, all Product Managers are leaders, so get comfortable influencing without authority and being held accountable.

Working with stakeholders. You may have heard this word whispered in the darkest corners of the office, but this is your reality as a PM. In your new role, you'll be the go-to person whenever anyone, both inside and outside of your immediate teams, has questions about the Product. The CEO will be coming to you asking for timelines and success metrics, Marketing will want to know details, Sales will be coming to you with requests, customers and clients will be making demands.

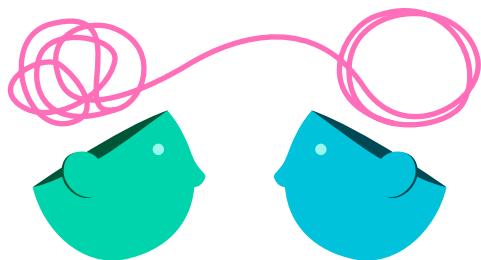
"Product Managers are leaders, so get comfortable influencing without authority and being held accountable."

Final Thoughts: Is Product Management Right for You?

You've gone out of your way to read a book on how to get a job in Product Management, so we'd say...yes! Product Management is a craft, a discipline, and a community as well as a job. It can fit anyone who has the right attitude and motivation, and anyone willing to put in the work to find their place in it is welcome.

Having the courage to embark on a new career path is the hard part. Now comes the fun*...the job hunt.

*No, it's not fun. But with our help, it can be easier!



3

The PM Job Hunt Begins

Finding the Jobs That Are Worth Applying To

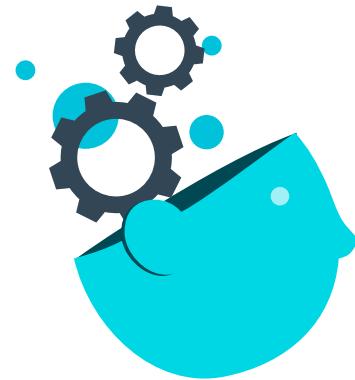


3

What Kind of Product Manager Do You Want to Be?

It's so hard to pinpoint the 'different types of Product Manager' because really, every Product Manager is different. Everyone brings their own experiences and personalities to the craft, and everyone does it their own way.

So, before you start job hunting, you have to ask yourself what kind of Product Manager you want to be.



Product Managers are mission-driven, so start there, and figure out which problems you're the most passionate about. Ask yourself, if you could change the world in one big way, what would that be? Then identify companies that have the same goals as you.

Ask yourself why you want to become a Product Manager. If you've worked with Product Managers in the past, think about their best qualities, and what you'd like to inherit from them. Were they brilliant at communication and breaking down big challenges into small steps? Did they build trust easily? Product Managers learn best from the best, so identify your heroes and let them be your shining example.

Then comes the question of what kind of organization you want to work for. Are you looking to be someone who works on products that impact millions, or do you want to get scrappy and build something from the ground up in a startup?

The Difference: Product Management at Large Corporations vs a Startup

While not every company fits into the boxes of 'Large Corporation' or 'Small Startup', the size of the company you work for is definitely something to consider when hunting for your dream job. So, let's look at different benefits and challenges of working on the opposite ends of the spectrum; a startup of 1-100 employees, and large corporations (FAANG, etc).

Startups: Fast, Dirty, and Fun!

Startups are seen as fun, fast, glamorous, and exciting. When you hear ‘startup’ you might conjure up the image of a small group of 20-30 somethings in a cool coworking space in downtown San Francisco. The office dog is snoozing in the corner, the free beers are chilling in the fridge, and the TechCrunch Disrupt award is sitting on a shelf. Pop culture really wants us to believe that this is what startup life looks like.

Startups are very much ‘what’s hot’ right now, but that doesn’t mean they’re the right fit for everyone. While they come with some great benefits, they come with unique challenges.

As a Product Manager in a startup, the main challenge that you’ll face is a lack of resources. Early-stage businesses don’t have the money, manpower, or infrastructure that an established company has at its disposal. This lack of resources can be problematic for everyone in a startup setting, but especially for PMs.

For example, imagine that you are a PM in a fast-paced startup and you have a large list of tasks to complete in order to deal with stakeholders. Someone raises to your attention that there is an issue with the design of your product. Due to the lack of people hours available to you, you have to stop working on your stakeholder tasks, and personally carry out the work that a company would normally assign to a full-time designer.

There are other things to consider in a startup when it comes to missing team members. As well as not having all of the Product Development teammates that you’d like, everything slows down when other departments are understaffed. You might find yourself waiting for what feels like forever to get your new tool request approved, because the one person handling the entire finance department is overwhelmed with work.

However, there’s a lot to love about life in a startup.

A lack of process means that sometimes you get to invent the processes, design the workflows, frameworks, and tech stacks that make the most sense for your teams. If something is not working, you change it up.

In a startup, you get a complete 360 education in building a business. Getting to watch something new being built from the ground up feels like a ride on a rocket ship. You’ll find yourself learning things you never imagined, and it’s a great opportunity to grow as a professional.

Alfred Sim, a former Product Leader at Microsoft, has spoken about the highs and lows of Product Management at a startup vs a large corporation.

“Early-stage businesses don’t have the money, manpower, or infrastructure that an established company has at its disposal. This can be problematic for everyone in a startup setting, but especially for PMs.”

"I definitely enjoy the speed and focus of a startup. It's incredible to see how laser-focused and agile a team of people working on one common goal can be, especially when comparing that against a massive company that contains so many different products.

I'd say one interesting challenge I've noticed (albeit not 100% product-related) is the pace of hiring – we're growing super quickly and it feels like we're constantly bringing people on board. 6 months from now this will be a much larger company and keeping the company culture consistent will be a much larger challenge."

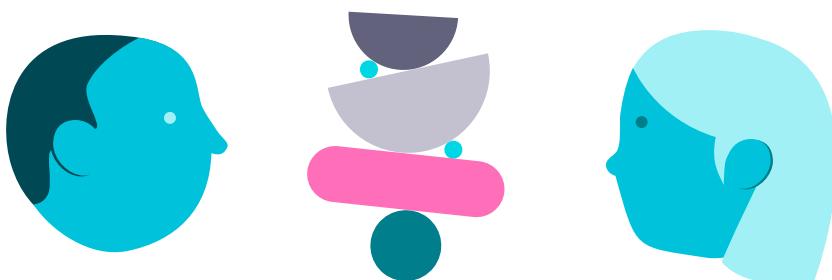
Laura Marino, SVP at Lever, also reminds us that life in a startup will vary depending on what stage it's in.

"A startup has three stages. Early Stage – when an organization is constantly searching for the right business model. Generally, in this stage, the company will do everything and anything it takes to get the company off the ground."

Teenage Stage. Having already gone through the liquidity model, they already are established to an extent and have a more fixed business model. The main focus here is to execute on a proven business model. Sometimes there's an awkward 'teenage stage' business model. They have the market fit, but they have to scale up their customers and events to be cash positive. There is no clear-cut indication to differentiate the early to the teenage stage.

Adult-Stage. A stable and matured stage with defined business goals and responding product strategies."

Life in a startup is fast-paced at any stage, with more limited resources, but you never know how far those limited resources and the people by your side can take you. So, while startup life has its problems, it's little surprise that so many tech professionals are drawn to them.



Corporations: Paperwork and Prestige

If you want to become a Product Manager at a large company, be prepared to deal with some serious internal politics. Now that there are more players in the game, competing visions are a guarantee.

As a PM in this scenario, you are tasked with becoming an expert in managing personalities. Since your colleagues are likely to have unique work methods, you as their PM need to create an almost personalized way of collaborating with each one of them.

Even when you do build this middle ground with all of your employees, organizing them for optimal effectiveness is a whole other challenge. Even if you understand everyone's point of view, considering all of these factors and working some of them into a cohesive plan of action requires experience and talent.

If startup life can be equated to 'building the plane while it's flying', life as a PM in a large corporation can feel like boarding an enormous Boeing 777X without being allowed to choose your seat. Or who you sit next to. Or where you're really going. Without the freedom experienced by PMs in startups, it can sometimes feel like you're doing things 'because that's the way they've always been done.' But at least you know the plane isn't about to fall out of the sky!

Innovation at large, well-established companies can be slow. You can't just implement new ideas at the drop of a hat. They have to be assessed, approved, assessed again, go through another round of approvals, and then finally...you'll be allowed to make a PowerPoint presentation about why your new idea is a good idea.

So, what is it about these enormous corporations that attracts the top talent in the tech world?

Bounty hunters often say 'follow the money' when they're trying to hunt down a target. If a bounty hunter were trying to hunt down a Product Manager they might say 'follow the impact.' Many Product People who work at FAANG companies say that the most exciting part of their job is working on products that will ship to millions of people. The work they value is the work that positively impacts the greatest number of people.

So, while you may have to go through a lot of paperwork, red tape, and politics to get the job done, the reward of improving or launching a household name product that improves the lives of millions makes it all worthwhile.

From a career development perspective, having a big name brand on your resume/LinkedIn is certainly a door opener to new opportunities. There are many differences between working in PM at a brand new startup, and at a decade's

old corporation. There are also differences between working at a 7-year startup in a stage of rapid growth, and for a brand new product at Apple.

If you're specifically looking to join a larger corporation, don't isolate your search to companies that are strictly 'tech' companies. Any large company has its in-house tech to keep its operations running, and many hire Product Managers. For example, Luca Dell'Orta, Head of IT Innovation at Nestlé IT describes what goes on behind the scenes to delight customers with the next tasty treat.

"It being Nestlé, we delight our consumers with the next KitKat or the next cup of Nespresso, but there is a lot of tech behind it. Today pretty much every company is something of a software company. There is a lot of tech to support our supply chain, our factories, our logistics, our HR systems, our finance systems, and then our consumer facing systems like websites, mobile applications...we run one of the biggest SAP landscapes in the world."

Everyone has their own preferences, and there's no definitive answer to 'which is better?' Throughout your career in Product, you'll have the chance to experience all the many shades of tech. So, instead of focusing on which side of the camp you want to settle into for the rest of your life, think about what excites you the most right now.

"It being Nestlé, we delight our consumers with the next KitKat or the next cup of Nespresso, but there is a lot of tech behind it. Today pretty much every company is something of a software company."

Mid-Size Growing Pains

Companies going through rapid growth are exciting to be part of, as you get to watch your teams swell in size as you explore exciting new ventures and revenue streams. You've suddenly got a bit more budget to spend on better tools and smoother infrastructure, and the company starts to fully settle into its culture.

But as the organization matures it has to go from being a child, through to the awkward teenage stage, and finally into adulthood. That's not an easy thing to do! You'll see the org chart shift with new roles coming and going, with teams being restructured over and over again.

4

Selling Yourself As An Applicant

How to Craft an All-Star Resume + LinkedIn Profile

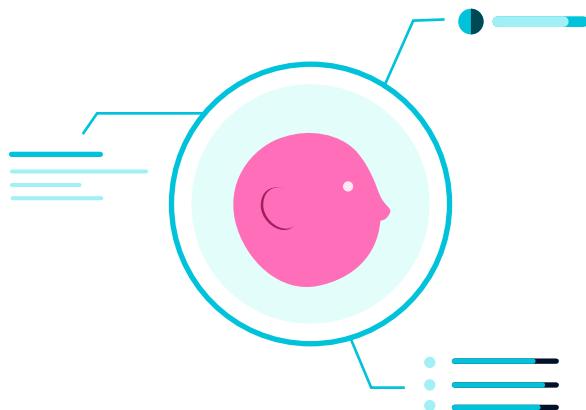
4

Building a Resume Recruiters Will Notice

Your resume is your first point of contact with a potential employer. For a desirable position at a big-name company, they'll see anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand resumes. Yours must prove that you are ready for a product management job.

How can you build a dedicated Product Manager resume? Not just by presenting valuable experiences, but also by applying Product Manager skills when writing your resume.

Apply these tips even if you don't have any official Product Management experience. Align your previous experience and transferable skills with the roles you're applying for, even if you didn't do them under the title of PM.



Recruiter Search Optimization

According to experienced recruiters and hiring managers, you only have a few seconds to capture their interest or be put aside. Think of them as Google's crawler looking for relevance in your resume.

It's important that you find out what keywords they're looking for in a PM resume. This way, you can find and optimize your content accordingly. Scan the job description for major keywords like 'data-driven' and 'JIRA', for example.

Look at the job responsibilities, and describe how your experience matches them. For example, if your dream job requires that you 'support the Product

Design team by conducting user research, your experience should say that you 'Worked with the Product Design team by conducting user research.'

This does mean that you'll have to tailor your resume for every job you apply for, but it's worth it!

Show That You're Data-Driven

As a Product Manager, you will need to make decisions based on data. You can display your capabilities by quantifying the accomplishments that you decide to put in your PM resume. Additionally, this will help the reader understand the impact of your accomplishments.

For example, don't just put that you worked on a new feature for an existing product, include how that feature performed compared with your estimates. That'll show that you were data-driven in your targets, and how well you met them.

Numbers are easy for recruiters to scan and understand, and will be a real boost for your Product Management resume.

Be Lean

Avoid packing out your resume with too many buzzwords. Rather than making you sound impressive, recruiters can see right through that. They don't need to know that you think of yourself as 'dynamic' or 'full-stack', and don't care that your last job was 'energizing'. They want to know what you're capable of.

The design of the resume is also incredibly important. If it looks like a mess, they'll question your judgment and the level of care you take over your work. There's a sweet spot to be found in between the bland and the excessive when it comes to the design of your resume. Stick to no more than two fonts, and if you choose to inject a bit of color try to keep it professional.

A great Product Management skill is being able to say what others need paragraphs for in a few words. Be as succinct as possible – no more than two sides of A4 paper. One is even better. The resume is just a snapshot of who you are. Think of it as presenting someone with a menu rather than an autobiography.

Optimizing Your LinkedIn Profile for PM Job Hunting

Recruiter Search Optimization (Again!)

If you thought Recruiter Search Optimization was important for your resume, double that for your LinkedIn profile. If you apply to a job through LinkedIn, and the recruiter has to comb through your profile to figure out whether you're worth their time, you won't get very far with them.

If you need to hide your Product Management job hunt from your current employer, you need to be smart, and highlight your relevant skills without making it obvious that you're looking for a new job. Identify the skills and experiences that are the most commonly asked for, and make sure the ones that apply to you are on your profile.

One thing you can do is build out the Recommendations section of your profile. Ask colleagues who you trust, previous coworkers, or fellow students to leave you a recommendation, and offer to do the same in return.

Adjust Your Tone

With resumes, you have the luxury of tailoring them to each type of job that you're applying for. But you've only got one LinkedIn profile, which makes code-switching hard to do. Look at the way the majority of the companies you're applying to communicate with candidates. If you're going for fun startups, you can afford to have more levity on your profile. If that's not the vibe of your prospective employer, dial it back.

It's not about hiding your personality, or pretending to be something you're not. It's about demonstrating to recruiters how your personality matches the jobs you want. Your LinkedIn profile is a great addition to your CV because it shows how you interact with people, and it's easier to communicate who you are as a person. Be aware of this when liking and commenting on posts.

Demonstrate Your Education

If you're not confident that your hard skills and demonstrable experience are strong enough to land you the job on their own, complement that with education. This could be as simple as taking the short modules available on LinkedIn to fill specific gaps, which demonstrates your desire to learn. These could also be in certain software that you've not had the chance to use before. Download a free trial of standard Product Management tools (for wireframing, remote collaboration, data management etc) and get familiar with them.

Education is a great thing, and can complement gaps in your experience, but try to avoid turning your LinkedIn profile into an endless list of short courses and certifications. This is confusing to digest for recruiters, and makes your profile look messy. It's better to take fewer, more meaningful courses, than taking fifty just because you can.

For maximum impact, consider taking a full Product Management Certification. Not only do they help you consolidate your knowledge and gain confidence in your PM capabilities, but they demonstrate your commitment to Product to recruiters.

Product Management Certifications are rapidly growing in popularity, and so they're becoming increasingly recognizable to recruiters and hiring managers. When you're trying to make a good first impression in only a few seconds, having a certification on your resume is a shorthand way of saying, 'I'm serious about my career in Product Management, and I have all of the core skills that you're looking for.'

Network the Right Way

It can be tempting to slide into the DMs of top Product People at the companies you're applying to. But that can come off as aggressive. You want to make yourself known to people before trying to get anything out of them. Try interacting with them in the comments of their LinkedIn posts, and gauge how open they are to conversation. (That doesn't mean commenting on every single thing... it's better to avoid coming off as crazy.)

If you've had some good back-and-forth with them, then you could potentially take the conversation to their DMs. Remember to be respectful and professional. Try to keep the conversation going, and don't immediately jump in with 'CAN YOU RECOMMEND ME FOR THIS JOB?'

Try to reach out to people that you have something in common with, rather than rabidly messaging everyone and anyone. Perhaps they made the same transition you're trying to make, or have a similar professional background.

Do What Product Managers Do Best: Iterate

We've all heard that famous quote; 'Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results.' Although curiously it wasn't Albert

Einstein who said it, it's very true for Product Managers and those seeking Product Management jobs.

If you find that you've been sending out your resume, applying left, right and center, connecting with professionals in your industry...and you're not seeing results, it's time to do things differently.

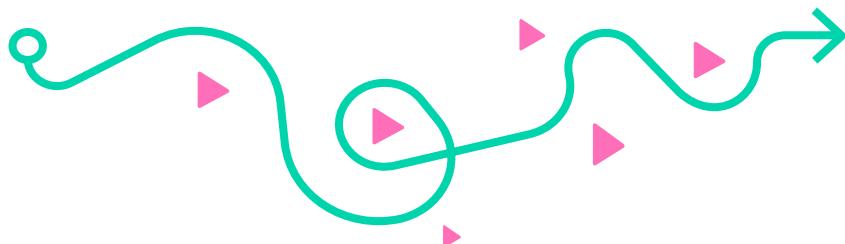
We mentioned the need to apply Product Management skills to your job hunt, and iteration is a Product Manager's bread and butter. Look at what might not be working in your job hunting process. Perhaps you need to ask someone to look over your resume for areas of improvement, or you need to reassess the kind of jobs you're applying for.

Bear in mind that all good things take time. It can take a few months of applying before you get invited to interview, so don't rush to overhaul your entire LinkedIn because you're not a Product Manager after a week of hunting. The keys to hunting for any job are patience and persistence.

Red Flags to Look Out for in Product Management Job Postings

When you're job hunting, it's just as important to know which jobs to avoid as it is to find good ones worth applying to. Applying for the wrong job is a waste of your precious time, and interviewing for the wrong company can feel demoralizing. In the worst-case scenario you may even end up taking the job, a choice you may come to sorely regret.

Familiarize yourself with these easy-to-spot red flags, that inadvertently reveal quite a lot about the job, the company, or the people behind it.



► It's a Project Management job, not Product Management

This red flag stems from a fundamental misunderstanding of Product Management. In the grand scheme of things, Product Management and Project Management are fairly similar (and it's a shame that they're both known as PMs). But there are some very important differences between the two roles.

If you see a job posting for a so-called Product Management role, but the responsibilities are all focused on making sure things are done on time and within budget - and there's no mention of usual Product responsibilities - it's not the job for you.

Real Product Management job postings will be asking for cross-functional collaboration skills, user research, roadmapping, owning the backlog, working closely with engineers, and an understanding of tech. If those things are missing, the company is looking for a Project Manager, and they just don't know it.

► The responsibilities are vague

If the responsibilities listed in the job description are very vague, getting hired for that role will probably result in either of the following:

1. You'll have little work to do
2. You'll have too much work to do...and none of it will be impactful

If you get hired for a vague job role, the company won't have a clear picture of what they expect you to do. You might find yourself sitting around, twiddling your thumbs and wondering what you're supposed to be getting on with.

Or, you'll become the catch-all for the tasks that no one else wants to do. Product Management sits at the intersection of business, design, and technology. But that doesn't mean that a Product Manager is the odd-jobs person who picks up the slack in all of these areas! Sure, you can roll up your sleeves and help out when needed, if you have the expertise. But a Product Manager has their own job to do. And a company should know exactly what that is before they hire one.

► Suspiciously high 'earning potential'

Applicants are usually appreciative of companies being upfront about the salary range for their open positions, but pay close attention to what they advertise.

It's normal for salaries to be decided based on a new hire's level of experience and expertise. But if a company is advertising between \$60,000 and \$160,000

for a Junior Product Manager role, think very carefully before applying. It's highly unlikely that anyone actually earns the higher end of the salary range, and a company that uses dishonesty to attract talent from Day 1 is probably going to be a pain to work for!

And if they are telling the truth, there's likely no standardized process for deciding salaries. You might find yourself earning significantly less than your coworkers who do exactly the same job as you, all because your powers of negotiation weren't as strong in the interview stage.

► You have to really work for your interview

It's normal in the tech industry, when you reach a certain level or are vying for a role at a popular company, some kind of take-home task can be expected as part of the process. But there is a limit to how much you should expect to do for free.

Most legitimate take-home tasks shouldn't take more than a few hours, with the option of spending as much time on them as you feel like. If a take-home task is going to take you a minimum of a whole weekend, the company is taking advantage of your knowledge or expertise.

It's not unheard of for companies to ask applicants to complete a task related to their product, and then implement their ideas without ever hiring them!

It's typical to see take-home tasks, especially at larger firms, when you get through to the later stages of the interview process. But be wary of companies that ask you for homework before you've even had a face-to-face conversation with anyone.

► Too much experience for an entry-level role

It's very much a chicken-and-egg problem. How do you get Product Management experience, if you can't get a job without Product Management experience? Be wary of the companies that exacerbate the problem by asking for 4 years of Product Management experience for an APM position.

Many Product Leaders say that skills and capabilities are more important than official PM experience. So, we know that there are plenty of roles out there accepting people from all kinds of disciplines with those core skills.

Be wary of a job that asks for 10+ years of experience in Product Management for a seemingly 'entry-level' role. In these roles, you'll have Head of Product responsibilities on a Junior Product Manager's salary.

► It's one-sided with a lot of requirements

Jobs are a two-way street. Employees provide their time, dedication, experience, and knowledge to help meet business goals and objectives. And in return, companies provide a salary, and other benefits that may include healthcare, education, pension plans, equipment, PTO, etc.

So, beware of the companies that aren't excited to tell you about all the great things they'll offer in exchange for your hard work. If a job description has a long list of expectations and requirements for the role, but they don't highlight what you'll get apart from a salary, that's a red flag!

Good companies that care about their people understand the importance of offering an attractive compensation plan for the responsibilities, duties, skills and qualifications required. You can build the foundations of a great career with these kinds of companies.

Working for companies that expect the world from you and don't feel obliged to give you much in return is a miserable experience. You'll have to fight tooth and nail for benefits that most of the industry has as a standard.

People-driven companies will be excited to tell you about their flexible working hours, dog-friendly offices, free gym passes, unlimited PTO, and any other wonderful things they do to keep you happy and healthy.

► “Work hard, play hard.” “Bring your whole self to work.”

It's great to see so many companies starting to bring their culture and their personality to their job roles - it helps to give a sense of what the team culture is like.

But a few industry favorite cliches like 'we work hard and play hard', and 'we bring our whole selves to work' are starting to reveal some pretty toxic workplace culture traits.

Let's look at a few translations:

"We're a family." = "We'll make you feel guilty for taking time off/wanting to leave/not working overtime."

"Work hard, play hard." = "Work hard, then feel excluded for not being a party bro."

"Bring your whole self to work." = "We're going to make you feel like your job is such an integral part of your personality, that you'll never want to leave us."

If you think we're exaggerating for comedic effect...OK, we are a little bit. But it's true that many workplace cultures are less than ideal. Culture has to be built consciously, and it's not something that just happens. Companies who use these phrases in their job postings might unintentionally reveal that their culture happens by mistake, and whether or not you fit into it entirely depends on how alike you are to the current team.

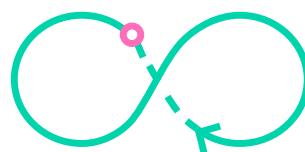
It's great to be friends with the people that you work with, especially in Product where influencing without authority can be greatly helped by strong working relationships. But some companies heavily rely on the friendships fostered between coworkers, and don't put a lot of effort into cultivating safe and inclusive spaces for everyone. It can end up leaving teams operating like high school cliques.

How to Find a Product Management Job That's Right for You

When you're trawling job boards and LinkedIn, it can start to feel like there are thousands of Product Management jobs out there, but nothing that's quite right for you. Especially when so many of them are full of red flags!

So, what can you do to find your perfect match?

- Rethink what your 'perfect' job looks like. If you're not having much luck finding anything, your search criteria might be a little strict. Think about what really matters to you, and try to broaden your horizons.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions. If you're searching for jobs on LinkedIn, don't be afraid to contact the person posting the job you're looking at. They should be happy to take your questions, or point you to someone else who can. If not...that's another sign not to waste your time on them.
- Find the job boards that work for you. There is a plethora of job boards out there that are designed to serve a specific type of talent, and to connect recruiters with talent from underrepresented communities. If this applies to you, seek out the resources that want to make your job search easier.
- Try looking for remote jobs. Perhaps you're already doing this, but if you're still limiting your search to companies that have offices near you, think about the possibilities remote work presents.



5

Side Projects

The Secret to Getting a Job in
Product Management



5

The Secret to Getting a Job in Product Management

Product Management suffers the same chicken-and-egg problem as many industries do. How do you get Product Management experience, without getting a Product Management job? And how do you get a Product Management job, without having any Product Management experience?!

Enter, side projects.

Side projects can be anything that you're working on alongside your full-time studies or full-time job. Something that's slightly more than a hobby, and often involves creativity, time management, planning, resource management, research, and most importantly...passion. It could be a blog, a podcast, a video game, or your own startup.

Side projects are the secret to getting a job in Product, as they simultaneously teach you the skills you need to succeed as a PM, and help you to showcase those skills to the world.

Why Start a Side Project?

Side projects show recruiters and interviewers that you have your ideas and an entrepreneurial spirit. It takes guts and grit to forge your own path, and this is what will make your resume shine. Companies like hiring people with an entrepreneurial spirit, and the guts to make something for themselves.

Depending on which route you go down, they can also be a great way to show off your knowledge, technical abilities, and design skills. For example, if you have a podcast, you could design a homepage for it.

They're also useful for someone looking to transition from one discipline to another. If you have extensive experience as a software engineer, but have no managerial experience, building an app and stepping into a management role will give you that experience.

Not only will having a side project make you stand out in comparison – but it will give you a lot of references and conversation points during the interview. For example, if you get the popular question, “how would you prioritize multiple features?” you will be able to use your own experience as a reference and answer it more clearly and confidently.

How to Kickstart a Side Project

You don't need to build a whole startup, it can be a small side project that's as simple as starting a blog all the way to the complexity of building an app. There's no rule which says one is more valid than the other.

The main goal of having a side project is to show that you can:

- Take action
- Put together a plan
- Finish what you start

By making a plan, you'll be flexing your Product Manager skills before you even start the actual work. Make sure to take stock of what resources and time are available to you. Start small with plans to scale, just as products do. If you're building something big, do all the work a Product Manager would do, like customer research and roadmap building.

You should also make sure you have a solid vision and a strong ‘Why’. When someone asks you ‘hey, why did you do that really cool thing?’, you'll want a more interesting answer than just ‘for the experience’.

Time management is another highly-valued Product Management skill. Make sure you prioritize your time like a champ and block off a few hours a week to work on your project.

5 Popular Side-Project Ideas:

1. Publish Your Own Blog

A blog is one of the easier (even though it's definitely not easy!) ways to show off your skills.

The topics you write about can be a great window into your interests for prospective employers. You don't have to write about Product Management exclu-

sively, so get creative with your subjects. It's wise to target the industry you want to work in. So, if you want to work in the gaming industry, for example, you could write video game reviews or deep dive into what you think the implications of VR are on the future of gaming.

You can either run your blog on something easy and user-friendly like Medium, or go the extra mile and build your own WordPress site, which will show off your tech skills and eye for design.

What you'll need:

- **Hosting platform.** If you've got tech skills you've been wanting to flex, then you could build your own website and have your blog exactly the way you want it. Or, you could choose a user-friendly website builder.
- **Content ideas.** Use keyword research tools like SEMRush or UberSuggest for maximum visibility.
- **Visuals.** Remember not to use any images you don't have permission to use.

2. Start a Podcast

If you've ever been having a really cool, indepth, insightful conversation with someone and thought 'wow, I should have a podcast!' you're not the only one!

If you're specialized in a certain area, or have a passion for interviewing industry professionals, the podcaster's life could be the one for you. It's a great tool for boosting your profile, as it lets people hear how you conduct yourself around others, and allows you to go in-depth on your opinions and knowledge.



3. Start a YouTube Channel

You don't have to limit yourself to professional content; you can also use your YouTube channel as part of your hobby. Maybe you've got some great GoPro footage from all the surfing you do, or you want to start making travel guides for your city. Anything that makes you stand out and shows that you've got the initiative to start something for yourself.

4. Launch Your Own Product

Create a product. Come up with a problem you want to solve, decide on the Minimum Viable Product (MVP), interview potential users, write user stories and build mock-ups. All this will go into a product roadmap. Give a developer

some experience with you and work with them to build the product – then you're already a product manager.

A tangible product will increase your interview game, but even having simply gone through the process with documents to prove it, puts you ahead of the rest.

5. Join a Hackathon

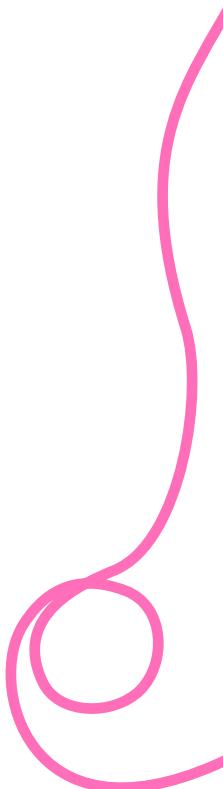
Hackathons, also called hackfests or sometimes codefests, are events for software developers to come up with a demonstrable MVP in a short time based on a particular theme or addressing a certain problem.

Hackathons can actually be great ways to add to your PM portfolio and get some experience with building Products. They're great ways for tech people to flex their management skills, and for Product Managers to build their tech skills. It could also be the jumping off point for your very own, fully launched product!

How to Showcase Your Side Project on a PM Resume

When recruiters/hiring managers glance at your resume, they need to know instantly how your side project is at all relevant to the position you're applying to.

So, if you're gunning for a new job or promotion, and you want to leverage your side project skills to get you there, here's what you need to do to your resume and LinkedIn profile...



Put It Front and Center of Your Resume

If your side project is related to the jobs you're applying for, make it the focal point of your resume. You can list it first under 'relevant experience', and then have your day job coming in second. Your side project might not be what pays the bills, but if it's more relevant to the job you're applying for, it deserves to be center stage.

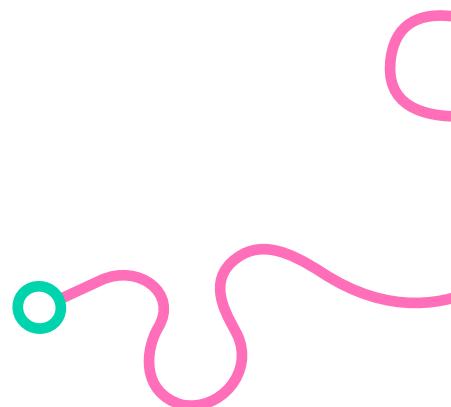
For example, if you're currently a full-time Secretary who also has their own small startup on the side, you may want to list yourself as a Founder first and a secretary second.

If appropriate, make sure that your side project is the #1 thing you're doing on your resume. If it's the most interesting thing about you, you want it to be the first thing that a hiring manager's eyes hit.

Sometimes job titles feel like things that need to be handed to us by someone else. But if you're acting as a product manager, or a founder, or a podcaster, or a mentor, then that's what you are! You don't need some C-suite boss to tell you what your job title is, take ownership of the awesome work you're doing and give yourself the title!

Use your own judgment as to whether or not your side project job title should replace your real one. If you're a UX Designer trying to break into Product, don't replace that title with 'Podcaster', as UX is a much more attractive skillset.

Connect the Dots Between the Job and Your Side Project



It might not be completely obvious to the hiring manager why your side project is relevant to the position you're applying to.

Pick through the job posting and identify the skills and experience listed that match the skills and experience your side project has helped you to cultivate. Then list those on your resume. For example, if the job posting specifically wants you to be data-driven, and you've built an app based on data, you can list the tools you used to do that, or the user interviews you conducted.

Make it as easy as possible for the person reading your resume to see why you're the right person for the job.

Add Relevant Links

Side projects take a little more explaining than more run-of-the-mill jobs. Put yourself in the shoes of the recruiter, and imagine looking at a resume that says 'Product Manager at Google for 3 years.' Any tech recruiter knows exactly what that means, and needs little extra context. Now imagine that they're looking at your resume, with your side project listed as your most recent experience. How self-explanatory is it?

The beauty of sending digital resumes is the ability to add hyperlinks to your projects. Add a link to your homepage, blogs you've written, your podcast on Spotify...whatever would be most useful while introducing people to your side project.

How to Showcase Your Side Project on LinkedIn

There are some special features on your LinkedIn profile that you may not have spotted, but which can boost your appeal to recruiters. Besides the obvious (adding your side project to your Experience section), here's what you need to do:

Set yourself up as a 'content creator'

This feature is especially useful if your side project is a blog or a podcast, but even if it's not this feature helps to single you out as an expert in your field.

Setting yourself up as a content creator on LinkedIn is simple, and you just need to add the hashtags for the areas relevant to your side project. Even if your side project is an app, this feature can help you draw attention to it. For example, let's say your app helps people to more easily understand their finances, you could add #FinTech and #finances to your profile. You don't have to be a vlogger or an eBook author to be considered a content creator!

Not only does this help to bring more people to your side project (making it more successful!), it also helps to place you on the feeds of people who can help you get your next job in product!

When recruiters and hiring managers drop by your LinkedIn profile (and trust me, they will!) it shows them instantly what you're all about.

Add featured content to the top of your profile

LinkedIn allows you to add links to the content you want to keep static on your page, which is a great way of directing visitors to the things that best represent you. If you have a blog, showcase your best articles here. If you have a homepage for your side project, this is how you can make sure it's front and center. This is also a great place to highlight any press that may have been written about you and your venture.

Share updates regularly

This is where you'll have to put most of the effort in, especially if you're not super into LinkedIn or sharing things about yourself on social media.

Making this time and effort to share your endeavors will help to put you more on the map in the space you're operating in. It'll also help you to expand your network and make the right connections. You never know who could open a new door.

6

Acing the Product Management Interview

Securing Your Dream Job

6

Congratulations! You've finally landed an interview!

The key to succeeding in the interview is preparation. In this chapter we're going to help you get to grips with what to expect from the PM interview process, walk you through the types of questions you can expect to answer, and help you prepare a killer elevator pitch for yourself.

What to Expect From the Product Management Interview Process

This is the typical interview process used across the tech industry. The details, the exact number of interview rounds, and the amount of time it takes to get from application to job offer will differ from company to company.

Wherever you're interviewing, make sure you're always fully prepared for the next step. If you're unsure, never be afraid to ask your point of contact what to expect next.

Step 1: First Contact

The interview process doesn't begin with your first actual face-to-face interview, it begins with your very first interaction with the company. Whether it's a hiring manager getting back to you following your application, or a recruiter who reaches out to you on LinkedIn, this is the door opener. So, remember to be professional, courteous, and all the other good things that'll help you get to the next step.

Basically, never underestimate the power of making a good first impression on a recruiter!

Step 2: Recruiter/Hiring Manager Interview

The first person you speak to, whether that's over video chat or a phone call, will usually be a recruiter or a hiring manager. For very small startups who don't yet have HR, you may end up talking to someone closer to the role, like a Senior Product Manager or Head of Product. But for midsize organizations and up, you can expect some kind of Talent Manager.

This first interview is mostly to see if you tick all the company's boxes. They'll want to verify your experience, gauge your interest in working in their industry/niche, and generally assess what kind of person you are. You'd never be rude to the waiter on the first date, right? Well, someone who is rude to the recruiter is never going to make it to the relationship stage with that company. They may not be the CPO, but at this stage, they're the most important person for you to impress.

This is also your opportunity to ask questions about the hiring process. How many stages will there be, and will you be expected to attend any in-person interviews or group onsites? The sooner you get an understanding of what's to come, the sooner you can start preparing for it.

If you're nervous about your lack of Product Management experience, and how to demonstrate your other skills in an interview, be assured that leaders look for things other than direct PM experience. Tina Xie, Director of Product at Salesforce, says...

"Candidates that stand out to me are those who can demonstrate the impact they have had on the business and articulate their understanding of their domains, what problems they were able to solve and how they worked cross-functionally to deliver against challenges."

So don't let your insecurity over a lack of Product Manager experience overshadow all of your other excellent qualities. If you don't believe in yourself, you can't expect anyone else to believe in you either. If you're confident that you can do the job, show them that confidence.

For larger companies, like FAANG, you may go through several rounds of these interviews before moving on to the next stage.

Step 3: Face-to-Face Interview

Before WFH became a norm, this stage was commonly known as the first 'face-to-face' interview stage. This is where you'd usually be invited to the office for the first time to meet with a Head of Product or a Senior Product Manager. If the company you're applying to is remote-first, this will take place via video conferencing. A hybrid company may still invite you to the office, so be prepared to make arrangements.

You'll be asked some of the more traditional Product Manager interview questions in this interview. We'll give you a more detailed list at the end of this chapter, but you can expect a range of technical questions, design questions, strategy questions, and questions designed to gauge your product planning capabilities. This interview is the same as for any other job. They want to know about your previous experience, whether or not you're a culture fit, and whether you have the potential to fill the need they have.

At this stage you may be asked to complete some take-home tasks. These usually shouldn't take you more than an hour or two. If the workload they give you is excessive, that's a red flag (more on that later!)

These tasks are designed to give the team a taste of how competent you are at the job, and essentially that you can complete work on time and to a high standard.

Step 4: Group Interview/Team Interview

At this point in the process, you'll be invited to either a group interview or a team interview or a mixture of both.

For FAANG companies, group interviews are fairly common. This is where a company invites the group of the most promising applicants to the office at the same time. They may give you tasks to complete, and you'll be assessed on how well you work in a high-pressure environment. This also helps the company to see how you interact with others.

The dynamic in group interviews is different to a 1-1 interview. If you've made it this far, the company has likely already decided that you've got the knowledge and the hard skills necessary for the job. Now they want to know how likable you are, how good you are at communication, and whether or not you're someone they want to speak with every day.

Group interview days are either incredibly fun or incredibly daunting, depending on your temperament! Extroverts, who are energized by being around others, need to take care not to steamroll other applicants in a bid to stand out. On the other hand, introverts who may be feeling shy or unsure of themselves in a group setting, need to make sure that they let their personalities shine.

A team interview, sometimes called a panel interview, is when a single candidate is interviewed by more than one interviewer. This usually consists of the teammates who will be working most closely with the advertised job role. At most companies, this will be much more laid back, designed to assess your culture fit. It may involve a team lunch, or it may be something closer to a regular interview. If this is taking place in the office, this is your chance to get to know what your day to day will be like outside of the work itself. The key here is to

let your personality shine, but also to figure out if this is a job that you'd enjoy doing five days a week.

Step 5: Offer...or Not

Once you've been through the entire process, you'll get an offer...or you won't. We'll get to what to do when you receive an offer (other than celebrate) in Chapter 7. So, let's focus on how to handle it if you don't.

The first thing you should do is try not to be disheartened. Great people get passed over for great jobs all the time, and more often than not it's something that's completely out of your control. Sometimes you'll be lacking one particular skill that another applicant had, or you just didn't click with the team personality-wise. And that's OK! If you didn't get the job, it may not have been the right match for you anyway.

Use it as a learning experience. The more interviews you do, the better you get at them. Deepen your learning by asking for feedback from the company. They might give you useful information that can help you tailor your job search or reveal the skill gaps you need to fill.

Depending on the feedback, you may be encouraged to keep applying for future jobs at that company. Some of Google's best people had to apply two or three times before they were a match. If the feedback you receive is positive, keep the contact details of everyone you spoke to, and reach out when future opportunities pop up.

Tell Me About Yourself: The Secret Behind the Perfect Elevator Pitch

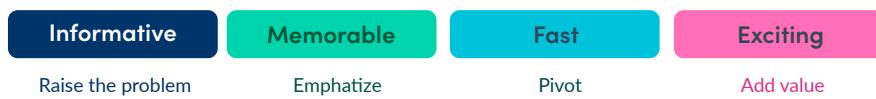
Many in the business world are familiar with the elevator pitch concept, and this is exactly what you need when you're asked the predictable and frustratingly simple question; what can you tell me about yourself?

Elevator pitches are sales pitches that are so short, you could deliver them in a short elevator ride of 30 seconds. Every word counts and you have to sell an entire story in only a few sentences.

Learning how to craft the perfect elevator pitch for yourself will help you to answer this question without fumbling around, desperately trying to think of anything interesting.

Elevator pitches vary in length depending on how long you have. When you're networking and you need to quickly grab the attention of an important connection, you may only have seconds to make a good impression. But when you're in an interview for a job, where the goal is to learn more about you, you'll have the luxury of a few minutes.

Your elevator pitch should be:



The goal is to give your listener a bitesize amount of information that'll make a great impression and lodge yourself firmly in their memory.

Being skilled at elevator pitches is useful for anyone in and around Product. If you need to pitch a feature to a stakeholder, pitch a whole product to an investor, or pitch yourself in a job interview.

Step 1: Identify Your Key Milestones

These may be different depending on who you're pitching yourself to. Identify which key milestones in your life/career are the most relevant to your audience. Let's say you're a Senior Product Manager, looking to move up a step on the career ladder, and you're in an interview for a Head of Product position at a new company.

They'll probably want to know your education level, your previous experience, and any leadership experience you've had. They don't necessarily want to know about the time you worked at Dairy Queen for a summer when you were 18. Your CS degree is probably more relevant to the role. (Though save the Dairy Queen anecdote for when you have more time to spin your story, it's probably a good one!)

Identifying the most important pieces of information to cover will help keep your pitch as informative as possible.

Step 2: Arrange Them Into Past, Present, and Future

The key to making your pitch memorable, is to tell your story in a way that's easy for the human brain to process. And brains love a timeline.

To that end, you should start your elevator pitch by talking about where you've been. This could be anything from your educational background, the last com-

pany you were working at, or the last company you founded which has recently been acquired. How far back you need to reach depends on the purpose of your pitch and what you hope to gain from it.

"When I got my CS degree from Berkeley, I knew I wanted to work in the tech industry but wasn't sure in which capacity. So engineering seemed like the natural path. Then I realized that Product Management was my calling and I managed to move laterally to a PM position, and eventually became a Senior Product Manager."

Then talk about where you are now. This will usually involve your current job or major project. It's great to include some success metrics if you can. (As you want a position that hinges on great leadership skills, try to fit these into the pitch now!)

"I'm leading two teams, both working on aspects of our new app. In the past year we've managed to double adoption rates through rigorous iteration of our onboarding process. We've had to adapt to switching to a remote work model, but I invested a lot of time into building our culture, so the transformation has been a positive one overall."

Finally, talk about the future. Where is it you want to go? What ambitions do you have? Basically, are you looking for the very same thing that your pitch audience wants to provide?

"Now I'm excited to find a new challenge. I've seen the opportunities and potential that lie in the EdTech space and I just think it's a really exciting space to be in at the moment. I'd love to move into more of a people management role, and develop my experience as a mentor for the future generation of Product people at a company."

Step 3: Rehearse, but Don't Be Robotic

You may have heard the phrase 'bring your personality to work'. That's never more helpful than in this kind of elevator pitch. While telling your story, you need your personality to shine through. The elevator pitch you prepare should be no more than a list of bullet points. Understandably, you may feel the urge to write out a full script, but that's a dangerous game to play if you're not an excellent actor.

When you have a complete script that you try to memorize like a TED talk, you risk sounding robotic. Everyone in the tech world knows that an elevator pitch is, and everyone knows that you have to practice them. But you still need to sound natural and at ease.

"Give your pitch in a way that feels natural and authentic in the moment."

If you're of a nervous disposition, having a script that you feel pressured to memorize and deliver word for word can actually be detrimental. If, in the moment, you fluff one of your 'lines', you can get flustered and forget everything else you had planned to say.

So don't be afraid to give your pitch in a way that feels natural and authentic in the moment. Add a few funny quips and embellishments if appropriate. And let your personality shine through. That's how to make your personal elevator pitch exciting.

Typical Product Management Interview Questions (and Knowing How to Answer Them)

The secret to acing a product management interview isn't just knowing what questions to expect. It's getting inside your interviewer's mind, and understanding why they're asking you these questions, and what they want to know.

1. What do you see as a Product Manager's main role within product development?
2. How do you stay user-focused?
3. What main changes would you make to [our product]?
4. How do you see your career developing in the next 5 years?
5. Tell us about a time you used data to influence an important stakeholder.
6. Tell us about a time you faced failure and how you bounced back.
7. What are your main strengths and weaknesses?
8. What's your approach to prioritizing tasks?
9. Why do you want to work at [our company]?
10. Why do you want to be/what do you love about being a Product Manager?

Behind the Questions...

1. What do you see as a Product Manager's main role within product development?

Why they're asking: Product Management is not a well-defined role across company lines. Each organization has a slightly different approach to development, and so they have a different view of Product Management and its role.

On top of that, each individual Product Manager builds their craft in a slightly different way. You might start out doing PM one way at the start of your career, and then have developed a completely different set of frameworks and techniques by the end.

An interviewer will ask you your approaches to PM, and how you see the role's place within development, to make sure that you're on the same wavelength.

What they want to know: Every interview takes place on the basis that there is a need to be filled within a company, and the interviewee has the potential to fill that need. When you're asked 'what do you see as a Product Manager's main role within product development?', the interviewer wants to know that you both see that need in the same way.

They want to know what you see as a PMs main responsibilities, the level of authority they have, and how far the buck stops with the PM in your opinion. If in doubt, quote the old PM adage... "with great responsibility, comes no power."

2. How do you stay user-focused?

Why they're asking: Most companies, especially product-led companies, pride themselves on being customer-obsessed. As a Product Manager, you're expected to be the voice of the customer, and to hold the most customer knowledge. No pressure, but how user-focused development is sort of depends on how user-focused you are.

What they want to know: The most important thing they want to know is that you are user-focused, so you need to make that absolutely clear, without a shadow of a doubt. You can talk about methods you've used in the past, and how you've revisited user feedback throughout development to make important iterations.

If you've ever had to say 'no' to stakeholders in order to be a better advocate for your users, this is the time to make that known. Think about times you've had to make tough choices in order to build a better product for your users, or talk about the methods you've used (they could be agile user-first frameworks like story mapping) or how you embed the voice of the customer into development.

3.What main changes would you make to [our product]?

Why they're asking: Pointing out flaws in someone else's work (especially when you're trying hard to impress them) isn't the most comfortable conversation to have. This is a mini-test on how you deliver feedback, whilst also testing your awareness of the product.

What they want to know: This (usually) isn't a trick question. They really want to know how you would improve their product. Try to use your PM thinking skills to unpack this question. While you don't have access to the data to back up your suggestions, you should be in a position to come up with a hypothesis.

For example, if you're interviewing at Spotify, you might suggest adding a chat feature in order to easily share songs between friends, because you have personal experience of having to send links to friends via WhatsApp, which doesn't make for the smoothest experience. Talk about how you'd find out if others had the same problem, and how you'd approach solving the problem in a user-focused way.

4.How do you see your career developing in the next 5 years?

Why they're asking: Most companies won't want to invest the time in hiring and helping to shape a Product Manager, only to have them leave because their growth trajectory is not currently the same as what's on offer. They want to know that you'll be able to grow with them. There are a few different paths that a PM can take as they progress. They could go more into people-management and lead a team of Product Managers, or they could go more technical.

What they want to know: They want to know that your career goals are a match for their company. If your goal is to get a couple of years experience with them before moving over to a different industry...that's probably information that's best kept to yourself if you want to get hired! Saying that, try to be as honest as possible. If there's no room to grow within a company, and you're ambitious with your career goals, you might be better off somewhere else.

Product Management is a fast growing career, and if you're interviewing for a big company, they'll want people who are hungry for that growth and who will work towards making a bigger impact and having more responsibilities.

"They really want to know how you would improve their product. Try to use your PM thinking skills to unpack this question."

5. Tell us about a time you used data to influence an important stakeholder.

Why they're asking: Really, this question could have been about any situation a Product Manager is likely to face. They could just as easily ask about how you used data to validate a new idea, or how you managed the change from office-based to remote working. They're asking because they need to know how you handle yourself in the day-to-day situations that PMs find themselves in. It's a way of making sure that you can walk the walk as well as talk the talk.

It's also about gauging the kind of experiences you've had in the past, and whether you're able to solve problems, resolve conflicts, and lead their teams.

What they want to know: They don't need to know all of the details (they don't have time to hear your life story), they want to know whether or not you've faced typical PM challenges and that you are adept at overcoming them. If they ask you about a situation you've never faced before, you can do one of two things. You can say "that's not something that's happened to me specifically, but in a similar vein..." and go on to talk about the next closest situation. Or if you're transitioning to PM from another discipline, and have yet to face any real PM situations, you can talk about how you would hypothetically face that situation.

It's mostly a thought exercise, so don't worry about not having the right experience. Most product leaders will tell you that it's more important to hire someone with the right instincts than to hire someone who's been through a situation before.

6. Tell us about a time you faced failure and how you bounced back.

Why they're asking: Everybody fails now and again, and more and more we're learning that failure is nothing to be ashamed of. Any tech leader will tell you that failure is an essential hurdle on the road to success. Self-awareness is a very important trait for Product Managers, and so is being able to learn from failure. They're asking you about your failures to see how self-aware you are, and to also understand how you process and learn from failures.

What they want to know: They want to know how you respond to negative experiences, but it's important to select an experience that ended positively for you. Put yourself in the shoes of an interviewer and look at these two answers:

1. "In my previous role, I was told off by my manager for always being on my phone and taking personal calls. She gave me a disciplinary warning, because I didn't realize that the company had such a strict policy on taking personal calls at work. So I learned to save my phone-time for my lunch breaks."

2. "Last summer, I launched a side-project that didn't take off the way I expected it to. It turns out that it's going to take more resources to properly promote and market than I expected. So I've learned that resource-planning ahead of launch is incredibly important. I've put my project on the back burner for now to give me more time to strategize and up my marketing skills."

Which person would you hire? Person 1 was objectively doing something wrong. Person 2 was trying something new with the best intentions, that ended up not working. Both learned from their mistakes, but Person 2 was learning from a commonplace and justifiable mistake.

So choose your scenario carefully!

7. What are your main strengths and weaknesses?

Why they're asking: This is another question that's all about self-awareness. Recognising areas you need to improve on, or gaps in your skill set is the first step to growth and development. It's also important for them to know if there are any areas you're particularly weak in. For example, if they have an AI product and you don't have strong AI skills, it's not necessarily a deal-breaker, but they'll want to factor in the extra training you'll need.

What they want to know: They want to know that you're genuinely aware of your weaknesses. None of this "I'm just too obsessed with work." They want your real and raw flaws.

Think about a genuine weakness of yours, and tell them how it affects you/your work, but back it up with a plan on how you're working on it. For example, if you find yourself trying and failing to multitask effectively, you might tell them that you've started implementing the pomodoro technique.

But the other part of the question is just as important. They also want to know what your strengths are. Think about the things you pride yourself on, and try to tactically identify what would be most valuable to the role.

8. What's your approach to prioritizing tasks?

Why they're asking: Prioritization is the name of the game in Product Management, so you can probably expect this question to come up at some point in the interview process.

What they want to know: You might be tempted to throw around the names of some popular prioritization techniques, and that's fine. But it's probably more important to talk about the soft skills around prioritization. How to say no, how

to make sure you've listened to all of the right opinions and asked the right questions, and how to get everyone aligned on your prioritization decisions.

9. Why do you want to work at [our company]?

Why they're asking: Bigger companies know that their name carries a certain amount of clout. So if you're interviewing at the Googles and Apples of the world, they want to know that you really want to work at Google or Apple, not just that you want to say you do.

Even for smaller companies, they want to know that they're hiring people who have the same goals and values that they do. There's no shame in applying for jobs because you need the bills to be paid, but it's in a company's interest to find the people who are going to be passionate about the work they're doing.

What they want to know: Here they'll be looking to learn more about your goals and values, as well as what your understanding of the company's mission is. A great position to be in, is to be able to see the future potential of a company or product, and to be able to express your eagerness to help fulfill it.

Think about where the company is going, and talk about how you'd love to fit into it.

10. Why do you want to be/what do you love about being a Product Manager?

Why they're asking: Product Management isn't just about getting through your day's work, and letting the days add up until eventually you have a product. Product Management is about hunger, drive, and passion. You've got to wake up every morning excited to be doing what you're doing, otherwise how are you going to motivate your team to feel the same?

What they want to know: You should have this question answered already. And no blog, no matter how great (if we do say so ourselves) can answer it for you. Be honest, and talk about what got you started on this journey and why you're excited to be in Product Management.

The hard part won't be picking one. It'll be picking only one.

Summary: What Do Interviewers Want to Know?

No matter which questions you get asked in a Product Management interview, the two best strategies for acing it is to be honest whilst thinking about what's going on in an interviewer's head. Cut through all of the things you could talk about, spend your precious time talking about the things they really need to know.

It's very easy to say a lot without saying anything – everyone who's ever sat through a useless team meeting will tell you that! Getting into an interviewer's head isn't about telling them what they want to hear, it's about making the most of your time with them and making each second count. You want them to walk away from your interview full of reasons to hire you.

The Ultimate List of Product Management Interview Questions

Product Questions

Questions about Product are possibly the most common in PM interviews, which shouldn't come as a surprise! Even if you're not overly technical, the best way to prepare is to thoroughly read through the description of the role you're applying for, and try to find some resources (dev blogs, press releases etc) on the products you'll be working with. Being able to demonstrate your previous experience or Product Management education will be invaluable here.

- How would you prioritize resources when you have two important things to do but can't do them both?
- Describe a scenario which required you to say no to an idea or project.
- How do you decide what and what not to build?
- What is a product you currently use every day, why and how would you improve it?
- There is a data point that indicates that there are more Uber drop-offs at the airport than pick-ups from the airport. Why is this the case and what would you do within the product to change that?
- How would you improve the functionality 10x of what it is now?
- How would you increase adoption of Google's Fiber to the Home product?

- What is the key to a good user interface?
- While we make X products for the general public, we also have a B2B division. What is your experience with juggling both markets?
- How do you know if a product is well designed?
- How would you redesign our product?
- What is one improvement you would implement for our product in the next 6 months?
- What is a major challenge our company will face in the next 12-24 months?
- How would you describe our product to someone?
- Suggest a new feature for Amazon. What metrics would you use to measure its success?
- What has made X product successful?
- What do you dislike about our product?
- How do you know when to cut corners to get a product out the door?
- How do you think we came up with the price for X product?
- Who are our competitors?
- Tell me about a company that has great customer service, what they do and why do they do it well?

Technical Questions

Very, very, rarely will you be asked any overly technical questions in a Product Manager interview. Unless you're applying to be a Technical Product Manager, or you're a few rounds in for a specific PM role which requires a higher tech skill set. In general, technical questions in PM interviews are designed to see how well you'd work with engineers, and to test your familiarity with the tech the company is working with.

- Our engineering teams are pretty used to employing x methodologies. What is your opinion of them? Have you used them in the past?
- What is the importance of engineers and technical teams as stakeholders? How do you integrate them into the overall product vision?
- Can you provide an example where a technical solution you or your team designed became a commercial product?
- How do you ensure that market-oriented teams fully understand technical challenges?

- When are Bayesian methods more appropriate than “Artificial Intelligence” techniques for predictive analytics?

Analytical Questions

A Product Manager has to come ready with an analytical mind in order to succeed. Some companies may ask you questions designed to reveal how you think, and how you'd approach a problem. The key when being asked these questions is not to rush yourself. It's OK to pause for a few moments to think. It's better than panicking and rushing through a terrible answer that you regret halfway through!

- How many people are currently online in Europe?
- How many windows are in New York City?
- How many iPads are sold in the USA every year?
- How much money is spent in the USA per year on GAS?
- How would you go about finding out the number of red cars in China?
- You want to build the world's most popular mobile messaging product, and you need to estimate how much network bandwidth would be used in a year. How would you go about doing this?
- _____ metrics are down. How would you go about determining the root cause?

Product Management Questions

Product Management is different at every company, and every person approaches their craft differently. Gauging your understanding of the role helps the company to determine your culture fit for the PM team. If you walk in with a ‘CEO of the Product’ mentality, and they’re looking for someone more humble and collaborative, you run the risk of being turned away. So just be yourself and be honest. If you’re the right PM for the team, they’ll see that straight away!

- What aspects of Product Management do you find the most exciting?
- Tell me about a time when you had to build or motivate a team.
- What do you think a day to day would be like for a Product Manager?
- How do you think Product Managers interact with engineers?
- How would you explain Product Management to a 5-year-old?
- What aspects of product management do you find the least interesting?
- Tell me about your role on your team, who else you work with, and how you work with them.

Behavioral Questions

Seeing a list of skills is all well and good, but an interview gives a company a chance to gauge how you behave day to day. They want to know that you work well in high-pressure environments, that you're able to influence without authority, and manage stakeholder expectations. If you're asked about a situation you haven't yet faced, instead of saying "I haven't done that yet," talk about how you would face it in future.

- Tell me about a challenging issue or challenge you took on
- Tell me about how you interact with customers/users?
- Talk about how you overcame product failures/challenges or poor feedback.
- Tell me about a time you had to influence someone.
- Tell me about a mistake you made and how you handled it.
- One executive says that Feature A is more important and another executive says Feature B is more important.
- How do you choose which one to implement?
- Tell me about a time you used data to make a decision.

Leadership and Communication Questions

Even at a junior level, a Product Manager is a kind of leader. (Crazy, right?!) So even entry-level PM roles will come with questions about leadership. But don't worry, they won't be too high-level or philosophical until you reach seniority. They'll be more similar to behavioral questions, and they're just trying to see how you interact and communicate with the people on your teams.

- What's the best way to work with executives?
- Is consensus always a good thing?
- What is the best way to work with customers and users?
- What kinds of people do you like to work with?
- What kind of people do you have a hard time working with?
- What would you do to get a team to stick to a schedule?
- What's the difference between leadership and management?

General / Personal / Basic Questions

PM interviews are still just regular job interviews at heart, and sometimes the simplest questions are the most important. So don't neglect to prepare your answers for the more run-of-the-mill questions.

- Why should we hire you?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What is the most difficult decision you've ever had to make?
- What do you need from your manager to be successful?
- How do you say no to people?
- What is one of the best ideas you've ever had?
- What is one of the worst ideas you've ever had?

Remote Product Management Questions

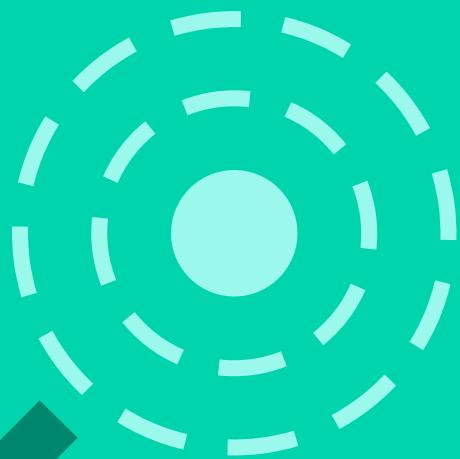
In 2021, it's quite likely that the company you're applying to has some kind of remote working/flexible hours possibility. You could even be applying for a 100% distributed remote team. Even if you've hated remote working, try not to use this as an excuse to vent! If asked, be honest about the challenges it presents you, but try to maintain a positive attitude.

- Do you have experience in a remote working environment?
- How have you kept communication from breaking down in a remote setting?
- How would you face the challenge of managing a team that works across time zones?
- What challenges have you faced when working remotely? How have you overcome them?
- How do you approach team building when that team has never met in person?

7

Becoming a Product Manager

Time to Launch Your New Career



7

Time to Launch Your New Career

You've done the work, sent all the various copies of your resume, and now you've been offered your first Product Manager position. Congratulations!

Now it's time to get started on the right foot in your new role, and close the door on your last chapter. You need to negotiate your salary, make a peaceful transition from your old role to your new one, and make a plan for your first 90 days.

Salary Negotiation

You'll likely be asked to give your salary expectations at some point during the interview process. Don't just tell them what you're making now when this happens. The salary you make at a different company should have little bearing on what your new company pays you.

Start by doing your research on the average salaries for the industry that the company is in, what stage they're at (early-stage startups don't pay as well as Google, for example), and the average salary for the company's location (US salaries are generally higher than EU salaries).

Next, ask for the salary range for the role, if they haven't already told you. If you're stepping down from a Senior role in another discipline to get a Junior Product Manager role, you may expect to take a pay cut. But try to aim for the higher end of what they're offering, since you're a seasoned professional with a lot of experience to bring to the role.

If you really want to take a job that's offering a salary lower than what you were hoping for, ask about future salary reviews and annual bonuses. They may offer salary percentage increases as a standard, making the initial pay cut temporary. Take into account the benefits the company offers too, and weigh up the pros and cons. For example, it may be better to take a lower salary for a remote job, than a full time office role that requires an expensive commute.



Don't underestimate your worth. Sometimes it's tempting to set the bar low in the hopes that the company will be more likely to hire you if you're a 'bargain'. This is usually not the case, and companies would rather invest in the perfect person for the job rather than the lowest bid.

So do your research, justify the price that you've set for yourself, and be ready to negotiate.

Transitioning to Your New Role

Once you've accepted the role, set yourself up for success by planning a smooth transition from your current role into your new one.

If you're transitioning from one role to another in the same company, it's critical for your success and the success of the person replacing you that this goes smoothly. Work with your previous direct manager (if you're changing to a new one) to ensure the team doesn't suffer your absence. This is important because, as a Product Manager, you have to work with all facets of the organization, and influence without authority. Maintaining good working relationships with your previous team will pay off in the long run.

Offer to spend time mentoring your replacement, to help them hit the ground running. But spend more of your mental energy preparing for your new role.

Resigning With Style

Even if you know for sure that you'll never want to work in your current company ever again, avoid burning bridges unnecessarily. You never know when you might need someone to put in a good word for you.

Make sure everything is in writing, starting with a resignation letter. In this letter/email, you should be courteous, and be sure to be grateful for everything you got out of the role. Explain that you're leaving to pursue a new career path, and don't feel guilty for doing so.

If there were specific reasons that pushed you away from your current company (other than the allure of Product Management of course) offer to do an exit interview to pass on your feedback. You may be able to improve things for future employees.

Getting Ready to Start

So you've got the job, signed the contract, agreed on a salary and a start date. Now what?

Now you have to mentally prepare yourself for the career change! Once you're done celebrating, of course.

When you first land in your new role, no one is expecting you to dive in and take over all of a Product Manager's responsibilities at once. Especially if it's your first time taking on the role. Instead, your company will expect you to listen, learn, and observe. Your first few weeks are some of the most precious, because you haven't yet 'drunk the Kool aid.' You can see chinks in the armor and flaws in the processes that others may not. You're in the perfect position to question 'why?' 'Why are we doing things this way?' 'Why haven't we done this yet?'

But you can't stay in listening mode forever. Eventually you have to start adding value. That's where the 30-60-90 day plan comes in. If you're not familiar, professionals use this framework in all industries, not just in tech.

Come up with a list of things you want to focus on or achieve in your first 30 days. And repeat for your first 60 and 90 days. Once you've come up with this plan, share it with your direct manager to ensure that you're aligned, and doing what's expected of you.

There are a few things that you can aim for within your first 30-60-90 days:

1. Get to Know Your Team

a. "Shall we grab a coffee and catch up?"

The people around you already know everything you need to know. Take as many opportunities to learn from them in the early days as you can. Naturally, you will meet everyone in your first week, but try to schedule some one-on-one time with people in the departments you'll be working with. It should be fairly easy to identify who has the information you need. This way you'll get a very broad understanding of how each cog in the machine operates and how they view the product.

This is also an excellent opportunity to learn what the strengths and weaknesses of each department are, as well as learn of any weak points in the cross-departmental communication channels.

b. Communication and Infrastructure

Speaking of which, part of talking to people is establishing how everyone talks to each other. Which platforms are used for which conversations, where are the shared resources stored, does the workflow make sense, etc. If you're able to break down silos and improve communication in your first few months you'll hit the ground running!

If you're part of a brand new team building a brand new product, you'll have the opportunity to implement which tools and software you'd most like to use.

2. Get to Know Your Product

a. Lifecycle

Looking at the entire lifecycle will help you put everything into perspective. To know where to take the product in the future, you need to know what the story is so far. Every new position comes with a learning curve, and knowing the history of the product will significantly help you understand where it's at now.

b. Position in the industry

What's the reputation of your company among others in the industry? How do you measure up against your main competitors? Maybe you're not even sure who your main competitors are! Make it a priority to find out in the first 30 days, as it's vital to keep an eye on the competition.

This is also where you'll learn what sets your product apart from the rest, the USP that keeps your target market choosing you over others. Let this be one of your guiding stars to help drive the business forward.

c. Deep-dive into data

Find out what the numbers are. Profit and Loss will be a pretty important KPI in your new role, so data will be your new best friend. If you can, meet with another member of the product management team to go over the numbers with you, as they could help provide crucial context to demystify any outliers.

3. Get to Know Your Customer

a. Customer feedback

If you already have a swathe of online reviews, it'd be a good idea to sift through them and see what people are saying. This will give you a clear idea of what people love the most about your product, and potential areas of improvement. If the product is fairly new and lacking extensive customer feedback, then you already have something on your to-do list as you begin moving forward in the role.

b. Marketing

Meet with the marketing team to establish how the company uses its voice, and how people respond. Look at all of the resources and platforms used, paying attention to the creative side of the campaigns (visuals, tone of voice, etc) and looking at the data. Ask to see the content calendar to understand what upcoming communications have already been planned, and look back at what has been successfully done before.

A Word of Advice...

You don't have to know everything all at once. At this stage, it is better to have a broad understanding, including the information which is most vital to your role. Expertise will come with time. Listen and learn from your colleagues, ask questions no matter how silly they may seem (we've all been there) and most of all don't let yourself be overwhelmed.

You've got this!

Product Book Path

On your path to achieving the most in product management? Here is a recap of several other books in our journey. We've got you covered whether you are fresh out the gate in product management or a seasoned PM wanting to excel.

