
GROOMING THE PRODUCT BACKLOG

By Roman Pichler, 15th February 2010

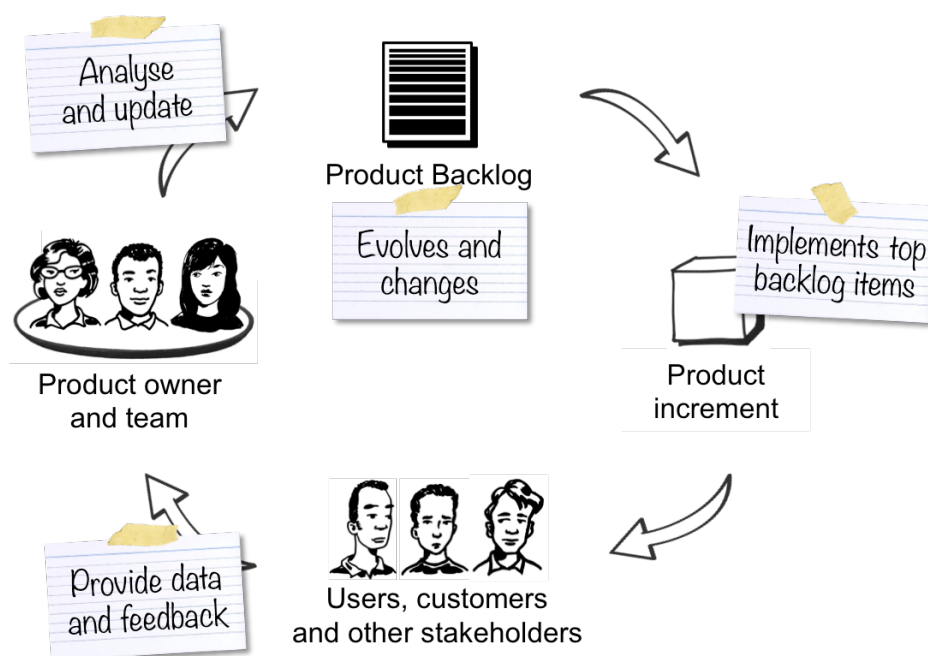
Photo by Matthew Henry, courtesy of Unsplash

Product backlog grooming or refinement plays an important part of creating and updating a product in an agile context. Done correctly, it helps you develop a successful product, a product that benefits the customers and users and the organisation developing it. This post provides my tips on grooming the product backlog. It answers questions I often get asked by product owners: Why is grooming important? What does

grooming entail? Who should carry it out? When should grooming take place? Which tools and techniques are helpful? Where should the initial backlog be derived from? And how much grooming effort is required?

Why does Grooming Matter?

Product backlog grooming, also called product backlog refinement, is the activity of keeping your product up to date. This is necessary, as your product backlog is likely to change (<http://www.romanpichler.com/blog/product-backlog-learning-tool/>) based on the learning obtained from developing software and exposing it to customers, users, and other stakeholders, as the image below illustrates.



Grooming the backlog helps you integrate the latest insights into the backlog. This ensures that you develop the right product in the right way. It also makes sure that the product backlog is workable, that there are enough ready items (<http://www.romanpichler.com/blog/the-definition-of-ready/>) to start the next sprint.

What does Grooming Entail?

Grooming the product backlog consists of the following steps, which are described in more detail in my post [The Product Backlog Grooming Steps](http://www.romanpichler.com/blog/the-product-backlog-grooming-steps/) (<http://www.romanpichler.com/blog/the-product-backlog-grooming-steps/>):

1. Analyse feedback / data from users, customers, and internal stakeholders (<http://www.romanpichler.com/blog/stakeholder-engagement-analysis-power-interest-grid/>).
2. Integrate the learning.
3. Decide what to do next.
4. Get the product backlog ready: Select a sprint goal and write detailed user stories that are ready (<http://www.romanpichler.com/blog/the-definition-of-ready/>).

Carrying out the grooming steps should result in a product backlog that is DEEP (<http://www.romanpichler.com/blog/making-the-product-backlog-deep/>): detailed appropriately, emergent (<http://www.romanpichler.com/blog/product-backlog-learning-tool/>), estimated, and prioritised. You should also ensure that your backlog is concise and visible for everyone involved in the development effort. A concise product backlog allows to effectively integrate the insights gained. A visible backlog encourages creative conversations.

Who should Carry out the Grooming Work?

Grooming the product backlog should be a collaborative effort that involves the product owner (<http://www.romanpichler.com/blog/one-page-product-owner/>) and the development team. This helps to analyse the data correctly and to draw the right conclusions. It encourages collective ownership, and leverages the creativity of the entire team. It reduces the work load of the product owner, and helps ensure that the high-priority items are ready (<http://www.romanpichler.com/blog/the-definition-of-ready/>).



Product owner and
Development Team

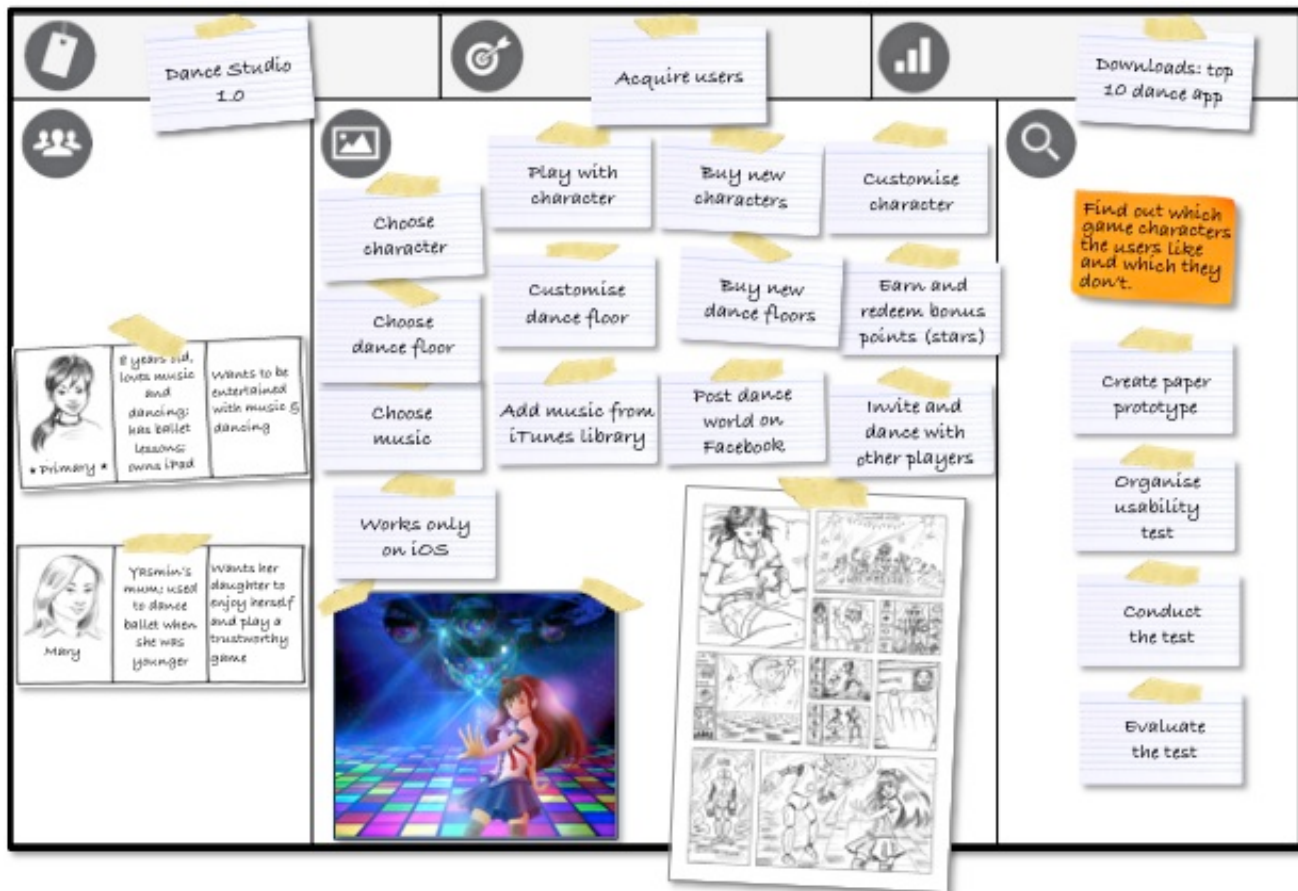
When should Grooming Take Place?

Grooming can take place before new development work starts or while it is being carried out, for instance, during the next sprint. If you require user and customer feedback to ensure that you are taking your product in the right direction, then you should first obtain the relevant data, analyse it, and integrate the new insights into the backlog before you continue coding. You can find out more about the right time to groom your backlog in my post “When should the Product Backlog Grooming Take Place?

(<http://www.romanpichler.com/blog/when-should-product-backlog-grooming-take-place/>)“.

Which Tools and Techniques are Helpful?

I prefer to work with the Product Canvas (<http://www.romanpichler.com/blog/the-product-canvas/>), a structured, multi-dimensional product backlog. The canvas allows me to capture all relevant aspects of a product, which is particularly helpful for new products and for product updates aimed at new markets.

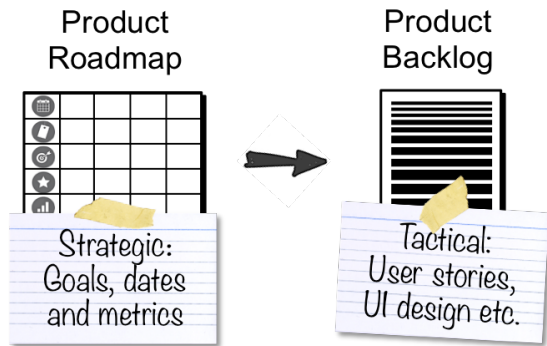


(<http://www.romanpichler.com/tools/product-canvas/>)

A great way to do the grooming work is to organise a product backlog grooming workshop. The workshop involves the product owner and the development team, and carries out the five grooming steps listed above.

Where is the Initial Backlog Derived from?

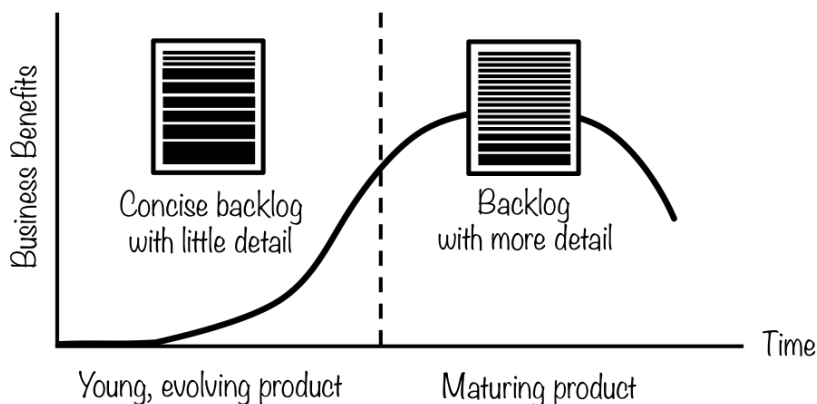
You may have noticed that my grooming process starts with “Analyse the customer and user feedback”. This implies that we have already built a first product increment. But how is this possible? I do the following: I like to derive the initial backlog from a product roadmap (<http://www.romanpichler.com/tools/product-roadmap/>), as the picture below illustrates. The product roadmap describes the journey you want your product to take including major releases, goals, key features, and dates.



I discuss the relationship between the product backlog and the product roadmap in more detail in my post [The Product Roadmap and the Product Backlog](http://www.romanpichler.com/blog/product-roadmap-product-backlog/) (<http://www.romanpichler.com/blog/product-roadmap-product-backlog/>).

How much Time does Grooming Require?

To answer this question, it is helpful to take into account the lifecycle stage of your product and the sprint duration. The more stable and mature your product is, the lower the grooming effort tends to be in the sprints. The reason for this is that there are less unknowns and risks and you rely less on feedback and experimentation to discover the right requirements. The following picture illustrates this correlation. (I discuss choosing the right level of detail in the product backlog in the post How Detailed should the Product Backlog be?)



The second factor is the duration of your sprints. I find that a two-week sprint usually

requires 2-4 hours of focussed grooming work that involves the product owner and the development team.

This post was last updated on 28 October 2015.

Learn More

You can learn more about grooming the product backlog with the following:

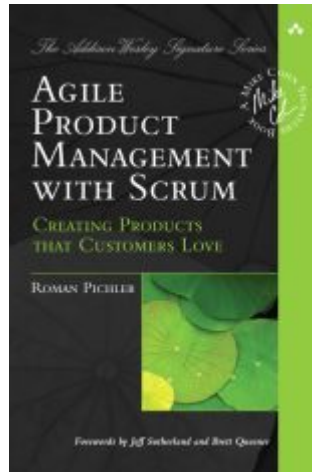
TRAINING



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(<http://www.romanpichler.com/training-courses/certified-scrum-product-owner-course/>)

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BLOG POST

How Detailed should the Product Backlog be?

🕒 5 MIN READ

(<http://www.romanpichler.com/blog/product-backlog-right-details/>)

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