

Conducting a Successful Product Launch

Conducting Successful Product Launches

How-To Guide

Depending on which industry statistics you choose to believe, the percentage of new products that fail is high: between 25 and 50 percent. For companies where products are their path to revenue and growth, the failure of a single product is often crippling. There are many reasons products can fail in the market, but a poor product launch is perhaps the most preventable of them all.

The product launch is a critical step in the go-to market strategy for a product, yet it is often neglected. A well-planned launch will:

- Accelerate product revenue, providing momentum that makes it difficult for competitors to catch up.
- Establish the product in the market the way you've positioned it. Thoughtful positioning and an effective launch are strong barriers to competition.
- Provide a springboard for post-launch product marketing efforts.

Products that are not launched well are challenged to sell, grow or even survive. Companies who invest heavily in product development and then pay scant attention to launching those products place barriers in their own path to success. Sometimes it is a failure to plan a launch that inhibits a product's success. Other times, it is failure to begin planning early enough that is the cause of failure.

This How-To Guide will define a product launch; when one is needed; who should serve on the launch team; what the critical success factors are; and conclude with an action plan on how to execute your own product launch.



Use our **Product Launch Plan** and **Product Launch Checklist**

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What is A “Product Launch”?

In the simplest terms, a product launch is the formal introduction of a new or enhanced product to the market. A product launch is about much more than solving the logistical challenge of getting product distributed and into the hands of the buyers. In marketing terms, a product launch is equally concerned with the publicity and awareness aspects of a new product. Because a product launch is so multi-faceted, the process is often far from simple. Instead, it's a well-orchestrated sequence of events that requires thorough, advanced planning. Here are some characteristics of a product launch:

- **Objectives** - From their inception, most products have a set of market performance objectives. Product launches almost always have specific objectives as well that are complementary but separate from the product's market objectives.
- **Intentional** - Products are deliberately, intentionally launched, rather than escaping or slipping into the market without any announcement or fanfare.
- **Planned** - A product launch is often a carefully choreographed sequence of events that must occur on a schedule and on a specific date to have full impact.
- **Cross-functional** - A high degree of interdepartmental coordination is required to launch a product well; it is not just a function of the marketing team.
- **Catalyst** - When planned well, a product launch almost always helps the product experience greater success in the market faster than it would without the help of a launch process.
- **Event** - A product's entry into the market is heralded by an announcement, many times the launch is structured around a special event, or at least it occurs very publicly at an event.
- **Communication** - The level of detail, planning and players involved in a successful product launch require proactive and detailed communications to occur or the launch is compromised.

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When is a Product Launch Needed?

Is a formal product launch always a necessary part of the product development process? Not always! Here are three common product development scenarios, not all of which would include a formal product launch process:

- The most straightforward case is for **products that are completely new to the market**. In this example, these products have no established customer base or market awareness, so a formal product launch is almost always recommended.
- **Existing products, which are enhanced with significant new functionality, features or terms** and conditions surrounding their purchase or use, are another common case. Here, a formal product launch is also highly recommended. If you've changed a product in a way that repositions it in the market, creates a new market for it or has new applications, a formal launch is certainly in order.
- **Existing products that have only incremental changes** may or may not benefit from a formal product launch. If product changes are insignificant to the market, you can forgo a launch. If, however, your research indicates that the market will embrace the changes in the product, consider a formal launch. Let the market be your guide.

Even when a formal product launch isn't necessary, it's probably still wise to make an announcement. Product announcements and launches are related but not the same. Announcements generally are tactical, one-time events appropriate for minor product changes. They are managed by the marketing or PR team and don't require long lead times to plan. By contrast, the product launch is more strategic in nature. In fact, if your company relies on products for revenue, then a product launch is one of the most strategic activities of any that you will undertake.

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The Product Launch Team

Conducting a successful product launch requires the involvement of people from several functional areas in a company. The launch team should form fairly early in the product development cycle to give it plenty of time to do its work. You should assemble a product launch team that has representation from each of these functional areas in the company:

- **Marketing** – the organisation is usually held responsible for the launch, and sometimes it is the only department contributing team members to the launch effort. If the Product Management function exists in a separate organisation from Marketing, then it should also have representation on the launch team.
- **Public Relations** – if separate from the marketing department, a member of the PR team can help with the media relations, publicity and announcement that usually accompanies a product launch.
- **Research & Development** – the organisation that developed the product. A representative from R&D can help the launch team fully understand the capabilities of the product, ensuring that all communications represent the product well.
- **Customer Support** – this organisation is often the last to know about product announcements and launches, but the first to hear from customers with questions or problems.
- **Sales** – the team most eager to begin communicating with customers about new products.
- **Manufacturing** – the group that is building the product the team will launch.

Each of these functional areas contributes information that will help plan and execute an effective product launch. Other functional areas may participate as well, such as finance or accounting. The goal in building your team is not to represent every department, but to get representation from the areas within the company that can contribute to the success of the product launch.

A benefit of using a cross-functional launch team is that these representatives will serve as liaisons to their respective organisations, keeping them informed about the status of the launch.

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Bottom Line

Launching a product is like a well choreographed ballet. There is a star – your product – but it’s well supported behind the scenes. For a product to succeed, you need to invest the time and effort to plan, so that when your product takes the stage, everyone will notice and you’ll get great reviews. Lack of attention to detail and failing to thoroughly plan puts you at risk of having the “curtain” rise while your “costume” is down around your ankles.

Action Plan

Stage 1: Get Executive Sponsorship

1 Get Executive Sponsorship

2 Form a Product Launch Team Early

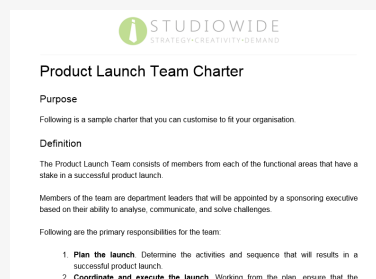
3 Define Ownership

4 Build a Launch Plan and Process

Solidify Your Team's Mission with Executive Support

- What's often obvious is that a product launch is on the horizon. What's surprisingly contentious is the need, the method and investment to make in doing one. Executive sponsorship helps this disparate group function as a team.
- Politics often affect the way cross-functional teams operate. It is important for an executive to provide a charter or mission for the team, as well as designate who will lead it. Use our **Product Launch Team Charter Template** to help get executive support.

Product Launch Team Charter Template



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Action Plan

Stage 2: Form a Product Launch Team Early

1 Get Executive Sponsorship

2 Form a Product Launch Team Early

3 Define Ownership

4 Build a Launch Plan and Process

Build Your Product Launch Team Early and Keep It Strong

- As described in this guide, seek participation from functional areas throughout the organisation to serve on the product launch team.
- Form your cross-functional product launch team early in the product development cycle, ideally as soon as commitment is made to develop a product and bring it to market. If you wait until a few weeks before expected product availability to do this, it is unlikely the team can successfully execute a meaningful product launch.

Action Plan

Stage 3: Define Ownership

1 Get Executive Sponsorship

2 Form a Product Launch Team Early

3 Define Ownership

4 Build a Launch Plan and Process

Designate Leadership and Accountability for Best Results

- The strength of a cross-functional product launch team is also its weakness: many chefs stirring the pot. Without designating an owner of the launch process and leader of the team, it will function inefficiently and perhaps fail.
- Make sure that the executive sponsor of the product launch designates someone to lead it and be held accountable for the results it should produce. Most of the time, a marketing or product management representative assembles and leads the launch team.

Action Plan

Stage 4: Build a Launch Plan and Process

1 Get Executive Sponsorship

2 Form a Product Launch Team Early

3 Define Ownership

4 Build a Launch Plan and Process

Getting to Know Your Launch Plan

- Use our **Product Launch Plan Template** to build a detailed roadmap that will ensure your launch team covers all the bases.

Product Launch Plan Template



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Product Launch Checklist

The screenshot shows a spreadsheet titled "Product Launch Checklist" with columns for Stage, Department, Task, Description, Owner, Start, Duration (days), End, and Status. It lists three tasks: Market Problems, Customer Requirements, and another Customer Requirements task.

Stage	Department	Task	Description	Owner	Start	Duration (days)	End	Status
1	Market Problems	Market Needs	Validate the understanding of Market Problems that the new product was developed to address.	Sally	05-Jan-11	35	10-Feb-11	Completed
2	Customer Requirements	Technical Requirements	Review the Customer requirements that resulted in the product feature set.	Jan	10-Feb-11	35	17-Mar-11	On Track
2	Customer Requirements	Product Team Feature Specs	Make sure that the Marketing and PR functions have the product specifications and feature descriptions to support marketing materials, web pages, press releases, etc.	Michael	17-Mar-11	35	21-Apr-11	Overdue



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About **Studiowide Academy**

Successful businesses recognise the need to have their own internal marketing capability. Those who have invested in this area are making strides above and beyond their competitors. Those who haven't are getting left behind.

Our Studiowide Academy supports Marketing teams to get stuff done, with practical tools and on-the-job coaching.

Our Chartered Marketing specialists identify best practices from peer groups and fast-growing companies, to put together Frameworks & Toolkits, Guides & Reports, Training Courses, and Project Templates.

While we do love sharing our marketing wisdom, we're not just doing this to show-off. Our goal is to help you optimise your processes, add structure to your department and get your team punching above their weight.

Please contact us to see how we can help! Visit www.studiowide.co.uk





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