

A KEVIN DUNCAN PLAYBOOK

Outcome-Based Roadmaps

Why customer behaviour, not shipped features, is what your roadmap should measure – and a practical method for building one.

THE CORE PROBLEM

Shipping a feature is not success

Changing customer behaviour in a measurable, positive way is what leads to success. Shipping is just an activity along the way.

Most roadmaps are lists of features and dates. They tell a team what to build and when, but they say nothing about whether any of it will actually work. That is a release plan wearing a roadmap's name.

A roadmap has a different job. It should set out where the business is going, what needs to be true for it to get there, and how you will know when it has got there. That means measuring changes in customer behaviour, not counting releases.

This playbook sets out a practical, repeatable method for building a roadmap around outcomes instead of outputs: a structure that connects a product vision to day-to-day delivery, and keeps every feature honest about the problem it is meant to solve.

Why this is worth taking seriously. In a study of experiments run on Microsoft's own products, only around one in three ideas that were tested actually improved the metric they were designed to improve.¹ Most of what teams build does not move the thing it was built to move. An outcome-based roadmap will not fix that by itself, but it forces the question of what success looks like before the team builds, not after.

A good roadmap communicates

- What the vision and goals are
- What outcomes are needed to get there
- How success will be measured
- What the current focus is
- Some indication of timeframe, without committing to fixed dates on solutions

GET THE DISTINCTION RIGHT

A roadmap is not a release plan

The two get treated as the same document more often than not, and conflating them is where most roadmaps go wrong. A roadmap communicates strategy. A release plan communicates delivery. Both matter, but they answer different questions for different audiences.

ROADMAP FOCUSES ON

- Communicating strategy
- The vision
- Goals
- Outcomes
- Opportunities

RELEASE PLAN FOCUSES ON

- Stories
- Features
- Ideas
- Solutions

On timing. If you need to put a timeframe on solutions, use broad horizons rather than fixed dates: Current, Next and Future. A specific ship date on a feature invites the team to defend the date. A horizon on an outcome invites them to defend the value.

Strategy is a decision, not a plan

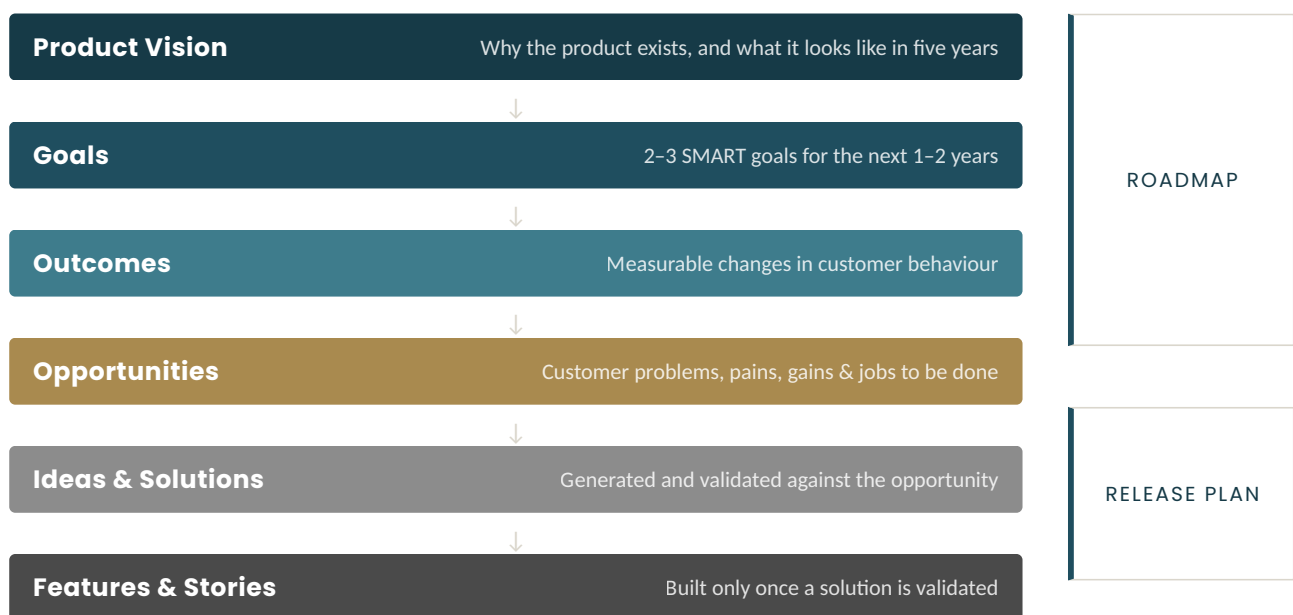
It is worth being precise about what a product strategy actually is. A product strategy is not a plan. It is a decision-making framework that a team uses to make choices over time, in order to achieve the product vision. A roadmap is how you communicate that framework, and the decisions it leads to, to the rest of the business.

THE CHAIN

From vision to delivery

Resources fund activities. Activities produce outputs. Outputs only matter if they create outcomes: measurable changes in customer behaviour. Outcomes are what let a team claim real progress against a goal, and goals are what make a vision more than a slogan.

Notice what is missing until the final stage: features, stories, ideas and solutions. Before any code is written, a strong roadmap has already defined success and identified what to focus on to achieve it.



FIVE STEPS

Building the roadmap

01

Start with a vision

A vision answers why the product should exist and what it looks like on a five-year horizon. It should be clear and compelling enough that people can hold it in their head, not a paragraph of corporate language.

EXAMPLE

Buying a home is as simple, fast and transparent as buying any other regulated financial product.

02

Set two or three goals

Goals sit on a one to two year horizon. Each one should be SMART, and achieving it at scale should represent real progress towards the vision. Two or three is enough; more than that dilutes focus.

EXAMPLE

80% of property transactions on the platform complete in under six weeks, by Q4 2027.

03

Define the outcomes

Now focus on outcomes: the specific customer behaviours that need to change in order to achieve the goal. Things like sign-up rate, conversion rate, satisfaction, or time to complete a task. Make them SMART, and always include the starting and target metric. Without both, you cannot tell whether you have achieved anything.

Format — Customer behaviour [x] changes from [current metric] to [target metric] by [date]

EXAMPLE

The percentage of buyers who upload all required ID documents within 24 hours of starting their application increases from 35% to 75% by Q2 2027.

If your organisation already runs on OKRs, this maps directly across: Goals become Objectives, and Outcomes become Key Results.

04

Find the opportunities

An opportunity is a customer problem, pain, gain or job to be done which, if solved, would move one of your outcomes. Identifying real opportunities takes deep knowledge of the customer, the data and the market. The aim is to build things that are valuable to the customer, usable, technically feasible, and viable for the business, not just interesting ideas.

05

Generate, validate, then build

Hand the outcome and its opportunities to a cross-functional team, and let them generate ideas. UX, data and customer feedback should validate that an idea actually solves the problem before any production code gets written. Only once a solution is validated should the team move to building features, stories and shippable code.

A useful technique for keeping the connection between outcomes and solutions explicit is the **opportunity solution tree**, popularised by product researcher Teresa Torres. It maps an outcome down through the opportunities that could move it, the solutions considered for each, and the experiments used to test them.

Watch for the HiPPO. Many roadmap items still start life as an idea from the most senior person in the room, rather than a validated customer problem. This pattern has a name in product circles: **HiPPO**, the Highest Paid Person's Opinion, a term coined by web analyst Avinash Kaushik.² Senior judgement is genuinely valuable, but every idea, wherever it comes from, is a hypothesis to test, not a certainty to build.

Write the experiment down

For every idea tested, record: which opportunity it addressed, what you tried, what the result was, and whether you proceeded, pivoted or abandoned it. Writing it down keeps the team honest, makes thinking explicit to leadership, and lets learning carry across teams over time, rather than being repeated by the next team to touch the problem.

The best product teams avoid building features that create no value. A strategic framework for outcomes is what lets an empowered, cross-functional team iterate on solutions until the objective is actually met, rather than stopping the moment something ships.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Anatomy of an outcome-based roadmap

The layout below is a simple way to put an outcome-based roadmap in front of a business audience: goals down the side, time horizons across the top, and a named, measurable outcome in every cell. Colour runs from cool to warm, left to right, from what is being measured now to what is still on the horizon.

Vision: Buying a home is as simple, fast and transparent as buying any other regulated financial product.
2027 Goal: 80% of property transactions on the platform complete in under six weeks.

THEME	CURRENT · Q3 2026	NEXT · Q1 2027	FUTURE
Cut transaction time	Faster document upload Time to upload all required ID documents drops from 5 days to 24 hours.	Faster conveyancer response First response time to a buyer query drops from 3 days to same-day.	No-call completion 80% of buyers complete their purchase without a single phone call to their conveyancer.
Build buyer trust	Live status visibility Buyers can view live transaction status in-app, up from 0% today.	Visible query resolution Buyers can see the status of any open query without contacting anyone.	Higher process NPS Buyer NPS for the transaction process improves against today's baseline.
Stay compliant	AML checks in-flow Anti-money-laundering checks are completed inside the application flow, not by email.		Full audit trail Every transaction has a complete, exportable audit trail for regulators.

WHERE THIS BREAKS DOWN

Common pitfalls

- ✗ **Dates on features instead of horizons on outcomes.** A ship date invites the team to defend the date. A horizon invites them to defend the value.
- ✗ **A release plan wearing a roadmap's name.** If every line on your roadmap is a feature, you have a backlog with a coat of paint on it.
- ✗ **Mistaking an output for an outcome.** "We shipped X" is an output. "Customers now do Y" is an outcome. Only the second one is progress.
- ✗ **Measuring teams on velocity and features shipped.** Delivering the wrong feature faster still delivers no value. Measure teams on the outcomes they move.
- ✗ **Skipping straight to ideas.** Ideas are easy. Solving a real customer problem is hard. Without a defined outcome, there is no way to tell the difference between the two.
- ✗ **Treating the roadmap as a fixed contract.** A product strategy is a decision-making framework, not a plan. Expect it to change as you learn.

THE CANVAS

Build your own

Use the canvas below to draft your first outcome-based roadmap. Start at the top and work down: a vision and goals you cannot yet measure are just a slogan, and outcomes with no goal above them are just metrics.

VISION (5 YEAR HORIZON)

GOAL 1 (1–2 YEARS, SMART)

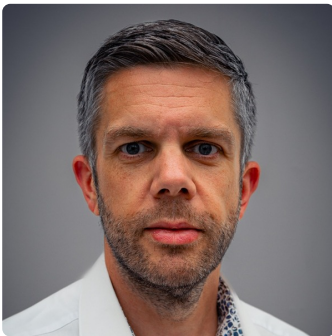
GOAL 2 (1–2 YEARS, SMART)

THEME	CURRENT	NEXT	FUTURE

Fill each cell with a named, measurable outcome, not a feature: customer behaviour [X] changes from [current] to [target] by [date].

THE AUTHOR

About Kevin Duncan



Kevin Duncan is a product and digital transformation leader with over a decade of experience delivering product strategy and large-scale change across financial services, government and consumer sectors in the UK.

He has led product and outcome-based planning for organisations including the UK Government, Yell and LMS, and currently leads product strategy and transformation for the UK mortgage and property ecosystem as Product Director at Novus Strategy & Consulting.

This playbook is drawn from workshops Kevin has run with product and delivery teams on moving from output-driven to outcome-driven roadmaps.

Want this run as a workshop for your team?

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References

1. Kohavi, R., Longbotham, R., Sommerfield, D. and Henne, R.M. (2009) *Controlled experiments on the web: survey and practical guide*. Data Mining and Knowledge Discovery, 18(1), pp.140–181. Also Kohavi, R., Crook, T. and Longbotham, R. (2009) *Online experimentation at Microsoft*. Third Workshop on Data Mining Case Studies, KDD.
2. Kaushik, A. (2006–2007) coined the term "HiPPO" while writing on web analytics; documented in Kohavi, R., Henne, R.M. and Sommerfield, D. (2007) *Practical guide to controlled experiments on the web: listen to your customers, not to the HiPPO*. Proceedings of the 13th ACM SIGKDD International Conference on Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining.
3. The opportunity solution tree technique referenced in Step 5 was developed by product discovery coach Teresa Torres.