



The New Product Launch Process in a Software Company: A Guide to Key Activities and Best Practices

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Launching a new product in a software company is an exciting yet complex journey that requires meticulous planning, collaboration across departments, and seamless execution. The process involves a combination of technical development, market analysis, marketing efforts, and post-launch activities to ensure the product is successful in the market. In this blog, we'll explore the key activities involved in a software product launch, compare different approaches, and outline the important steps and lifecycle of a product launch.



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Key Activities in a Software Product Launch

The product launch process can be divided into several key phases, each with its own set of activities and goals. These phases ensure that the product is not only developed but also introduced to the market in a way that maximizes its chances of success. Below, we'll break down these activities into key steps.

1. Pre-launch Phase: Planning and Preparation

The pre-launch phase is crucial for setting the stage for a successful launch. It involves strategic planning, research, and early development to ensure the product meets market needs.

Activities in Pre-launch Phase:

- **Market Research:** Before diving into development, it's essential to understand the target market. This includes identifying customer pain points, analyzing competitors, and understanding market demand. Tools like surveys, focus groups, and customer interviews are often used to gather insights.
- **Defining Product Vision and Goals:** The product team must align on the core features, goals, and unique value proposition of the product. This is where the roadmap is created, outlining milestones and timelines for the development process.
- **Building a Go-to-Market (GTM) Strategy:** A solid GTM plan involves understanding how the product will be positioned, pricing strategy, target audience, and how it will be promoted across channels (social media, email marketing, PR, etc.). Coordination with sales and marketing teams is key here.
- **Creating Marketing and Sales Collateral:** This includes designing landing pages, product demos, brochures, and preparing FAQs. It's essential to communicate the product's value proposition clearly to both internal teams and customers.

Example: When launching a cloud-based project management tool, the pre-launch activities might include gathering insights on customer pain points with existing tools (e.g., lack of collaboration features), defining how your product will be better (e.g., AI-driven task management), and preparing marketing materials such as video demos and webinars to generate excitement before the official launch.



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2. Development Phase: Building the Product

In this phase, the actual software development takes place. The product is designed, built, tested, and refined to ensure it meets the user needs defined during the pre-launch phase.

Activities in the Development Phase:

- **Agile Development Cycles:** Most software companies use agile methodologies for continuous development and iterative feedback. This means the product is built in small, manageable chunks (sprints), with regular testing and updates.
- **Quality Assurance (QA) and Testing:** Rigorous testing ensures that the product works as intended. This includes unit testing, user acceptance testing (UAT), security testing, and performance testing.
- **Beta Testing:** Prior to the full launch, a beta version of the product may be released to a select group of users or customers. Beta testing helps identify bugs, gather feedback, and make improvements.

Example: If launching a new AI-powered analytics tool, the development phase might include creating machine learning models, integrating them with user interfaces, and conducting performance testing to ensure the tool handles large datasets efficiently. Beta testers might be asked to test specific functionalities like real-time reporting or alert generation.

3. Launch Phase: Going Live

The launch phase is when the product officially hits the market. This is the culmination of months of planning and development, and it involves coordinated efforts across marketing, sales, customer support, and operations.

Activities in Launch Phase:

- **Coordinated Rollout:** The product is released to the market in a controlled manner. This might be a soft launch, starting with a limited audience or geographic region, followed by a full-scale launch.
- **Marketing and PR Blitz:** The marketing team ramps up efforts to build awareness. This can include social media campaigns, influencer partnerships, paid ads, and press releases. A product launch event or webinar is often organized to showcase the product's features.



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- **Sales Enablement:** The sales team is equipped with tools and training to sell the product effectively. This could include product demos, competitor comparisons, and sales scripts.
- **Customer Support Readiness:** Customer support teams must be prepared to handle inquiries and provide assistance. This includes training the support team on troubleshooting common issues and setting up a system for reporting bugs.

Example: For a SaaS tool that helps businesses automate workflows, the launch phase might involve an online webinar demo, influencer marketing targeting business owners, and an email blast to existing customers offering them early access to the product.

4. Post-launch Phase: Monitoring and Iteration

After the product goes live, the post-launch phase focuses on monitoring product performance, gathering feedback, and iterating on improvements. This phase ensures that the product meets user expectations and continuously evolves.

Activities in Post-launch Phase:

- **User Feedback Collection:** It's critical to listen to users and collect feedback about their experiences. Surveys, reviews, customer support tickets, and in-app feedback are some of the ways to gather insights.
- **Monitoring Product Performance:** Analytics tools can track user engagement, usage patterns, and technical issues. Metrics like churn rate, user retention, and feature adoption are key indicators of the product's success.
- **Product Iteration and Updates:** Based on feedback and performance data, the product may require fixes or feature updates. This could involve addressing bugs, adding new features, or improving usability based on customer requests.
- **Customer Success and Retention:** Ensuring ongoing satisfaction is vital for long-term success. This involves creating onboarding resources, offering customer training, and building strong relationships with users.

Example: For an eCommerce platform, post-launch activities could involve gathering feedback from early adopters, analyzing customer purchase behavior to refine user interfaces, and releasing updates to add more payment integrations or enhance mobile responsiveness.



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Comparing Different Approaches to Product Launch

While the core activities in the product launch process remain the same across software companies, there are different approaches depending on the product type, target audience, and company resources. Here are a few variations:

1. Agile Launch vs. Waterfall Launch:

- **Agile Launch:** In this approach, product features are released in stages, often starting with a minimum viable product (MVP). The goal is to get the product into users' hands quickly and iterate based on feedback. This is common in SaaS or web applications where user feedback is essential for shaping the final product.

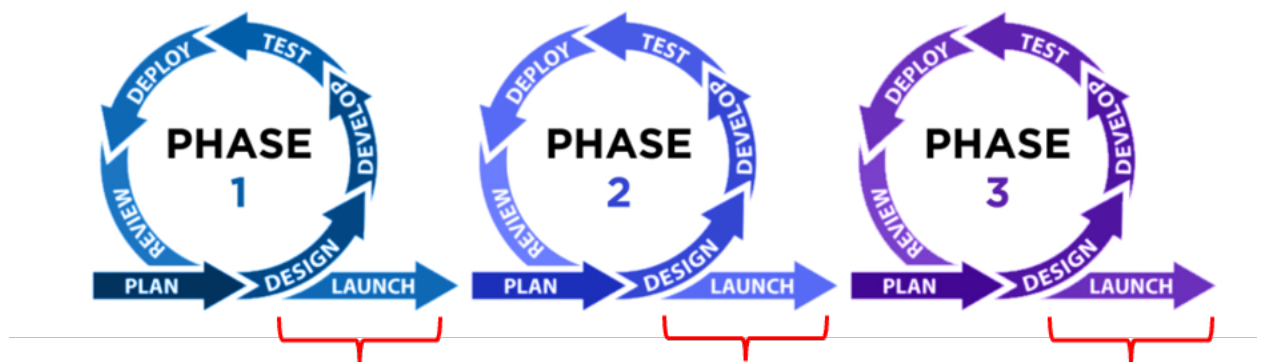


Figure 1: Agile Product Launch Process

- **Waterfall Launch:** A more traditional approach, where the product is fully developed and tested before the launch. This is often used in larger, more complex software systems (e.g., enterprise software or hardware-related software).



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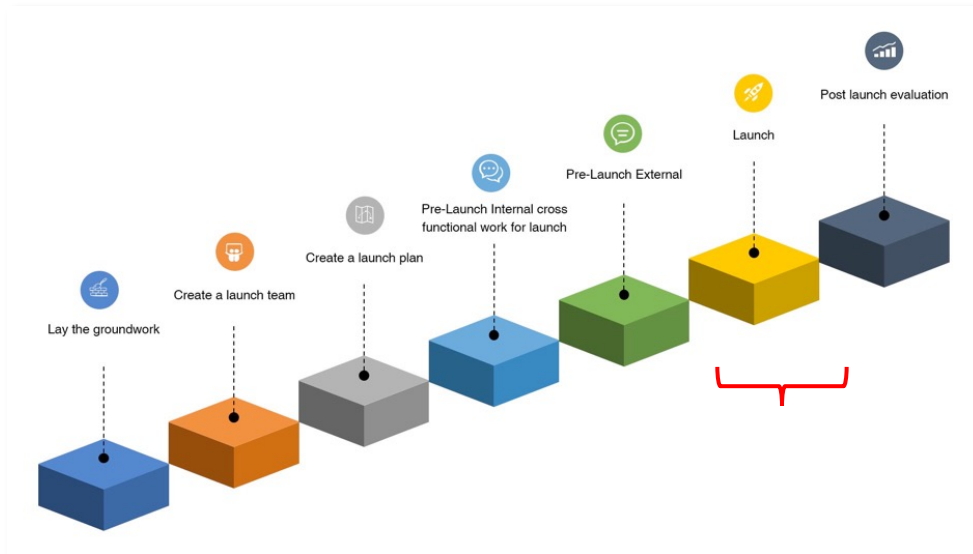


Figure 2: Waterfall Approach

2. Soft Launch vs. Full Launch:

- **Soft Launch:** A limited release that targets a smaller, controlled audience to test the product in real-world conditions. This helps iron out potential issues before the full-scale launch.
- **Full Launch:** A broad release to the general public, typically with a bigger marketing push and press coverage.



Conclusion: The Product Launch Lifecycle

The lifecycle of a product launch in a software company is a multi-faceted process that requires careful planning, execution, and continuous iteration. From pre-launch market research and planning to post-launch monitoring and feedback collection, every phase plays a crucial role in ensuring the product's success.

Whether your company adopts an agile approach with early customer feedback or follows a more traditional waterfall methodology, the key is to stay aligned with customer needs, be responsive to market demands, and continuously refine the product to deliver value. By following these best practices, software companies can navigate the complexities of product launches and increase their chances of long-term success in the competitive tech market.

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Robert is seasoned high-tech software executive with more than 30 years of proven industry experience, both in entrepreneurial and enterprise corporate settings. With proven track record of bringing to market dozens of enterprise-class commercial platforms and products, Robert has built and led high-velocity product and strategy teams of product managers, developers, sales teams, marketing teams and delivery units.

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