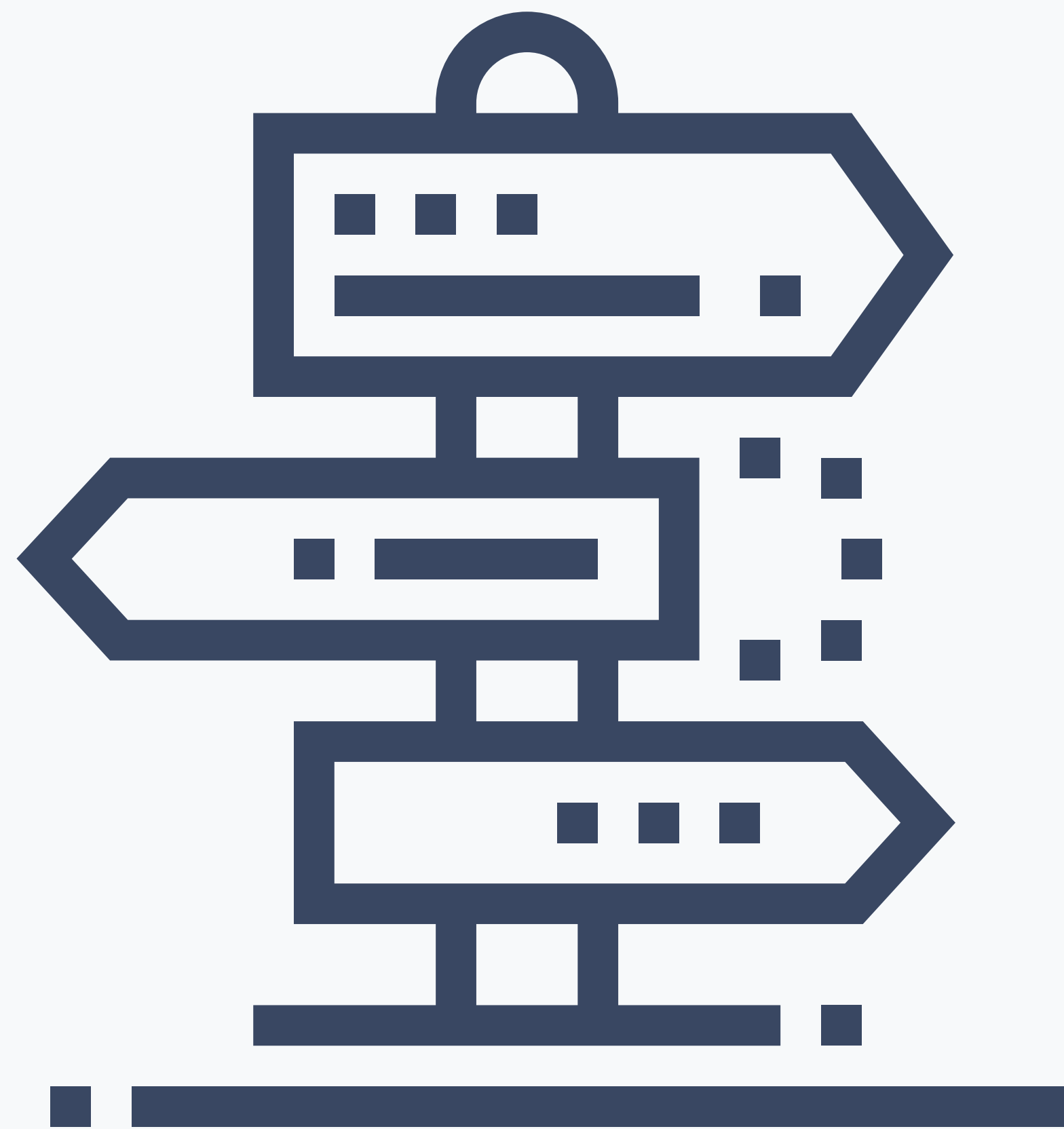# 8 ways to keep your Product Roadmap on track

with user feedback.

userback

When you're creating and executing your Product Roadmap there's nothing more frustrating than hitting unnecessary roadblocks, drifting off-course or ending up at the wrong destination.

This quick guide provides examples of how you can leverage user feedback in order to keep your Product Roadmap on track.

Contents

PART 1

The Product Roadmap should start and end with your users.

"Your Product Roadmap should slot right inbetween your company vision and your more detailed development, release, and operational plans... Most of the items on your roadmap should be focused on serving the customer."

C. Todd Lombardo • Product Roadmaps Relaunched: How to Set Direction while Embracing Uncertainty

Whatever your product or website does, your reason for being... your north star... is to meet one or more specific needs of your users.

Wherever you're at in your product development journey, you have to solve a problem for users or empower them to do things they've not been able to do before.

A Product Roadmap should state both 'how' you're going to meet user needs and 'why' in order to deliver on your greater organization strategy.

It is a living document that guides the execution of the product strategy and should:

- Clearly articulate your vision to meet the needs and expectations of your users and other stakeholders;

- Ensure that stakeholders, developers, other team members, customers and users are on the same page when it comes to this vision and how it is to be executed;

- Communicate how short-term align with long-term business goals;

- Help teams make decisions on what to prioritize and how to make changes over time.

If your product is going to meet the needs of users, you have to be able to truly understand your users.

You also need to know how well you are meeting the needs of those users. And the best people to help you do that are your users themselves.

To successfully create an effective Product Roadmap you need a process that allows you to collect user feedback, assess it and then weave it into your Product Roadmap as required.

NOTE: The difference between Customers and Users
The words 'customer' and 'user' are often used interchangeably, but there is a difference between the two. Customers are people who purchase your product or service. Users are people who interact with and use the product or service. Often the customer is the user, especially when you are selling to individuals. However, in some situations, such as business or education, the customer may be someone who is purchasing on behalf of many users without actually being a user of the product themselves.

Elements of a Product Roadmap:

Typically a Product Roadmap will include:

- Customer/user insights and needs;

- Product objectives and goals;

- Key features;

- A timeline for the release of those features;

- Budget and resources;

- How progress, results and success will be measured, tracked and communicated;

- How performance will be monitored after launch.

User feedback can be a great source of insight into how to improve products and services, however many companies do not use it to inform their Product Roadmap.

Up to 50%

don't leverage customer and user feedback to make product decisions*

Only 47%

are confident that their Product Roadmap meets the needs of their users*

*Productboard 2022 Product Excellence Report

There are a number of different types of user feedback you can use to inform your Product Roadmap

"A systematic approach to capturing and synthesizing customer and user feedback is critical to making the most informed product prioritization decisions."

Productboard 2022 Product Excellence Report

User feedback can come in various forms

Here are some of the most common sources of user feedback:
- Customer Interviews
- Customer Service & Success Teams
- Surveys
- Net Promoter Score
- Open Community Forums
- Your own Feedback Forum or Portal
- Social Media
- Review Sites
- User Acceptance Testing
- Analytics & Tracking Tools
- In-App Visual Feedback Tools

Customer Interviews

Talking with users is a great way to get insights into what they need and what's working for them and what isn't. However, it can be hard to find users who want to talk to you and they are labour intensive to set up and run — you need to carefully plan your questions, make appointments and establish a consistent way to conduct the interviews.

Customer Service & Success Team

Talking to the people who regularly talk to your users — your Customer Service & Success Team — is a great way to understand what issues or questions users have and how their needs and expectations are not being met.

Surveys

User Feedback Surveys are a great way to get qualitative input and insights at scale. Once you establish a flow of questions required to get the information you need then there are a number of platforms out there that make it easy to create and manage surveys that you can send to your users.

Net Promoter Score (NPS)

Usually a quick survey, NPS measures how likely your customers are to recommend you to others — simply subtract the percentage of promoters from detractors. Including open-ended questions, allows users to add context and additional feedback. Promoters will usually say what they love about you, while Detractors highlight issues and areas for improvement.

Open Community Forums

When you scan through discussions on community forums (such as Quora and Reddit) you can often get a broader understanding of what people need and care about — perhaps not relating to your specific product, but in terms of your category and your competitors. You can also seed your own questions.

Your own Feedback Forum or Portal

You can create your own forum or portal where you can share a customer-facing version of your Product Roadmap and invite users for feedback and to vote for their preferred features and fixes.

Social Media

By monitoring social media for mentions of your product or company you can get valuable insights into what users really think or need. People tend to be more honest when they're not talking to you directly.

Review Sites

Listing on review sites like Capterra and G2 allows you to see user reviews for your company and for your competitors. These unsolicited reviews often identify key issues and themes as well as highlighting what people love about your product.

User Acceptance Testing (UAT)

UAT takes place in the final stages of development and is the closest thing to "real world" testing with users, allowing you to verify the end-to-end flow of your product and highlighting the fixes and enhancements that need to be made before you launch.

Analytics & Tracking Tools

What customers say they do and what they actually do are often very different! Tracking and analytics tools can help you see what users are really doing on your website and web applications by automatically capturing quantitative data about user actions, such as how much time they spend using the product, which features they use most, or how often they make purchases.

In-App Visual Feedback Tools

Allow users to provide contextual and visual feedback while they're actually using your platform — they can submit and annotate screen grabs and videos in real-time. The more advanced of these tools also automatically collect detailed user and session data in the background (which really helps developers). You can literally see things from the user's perspective, making these kind of tools perfect for collecting bug reports, feature requests and other general comments.

Managing user feedback is hard work, but worth the effort, because it helps build better products with features that users love, faster.

The most appropriate type of User Feedback for your Product Roadmap will depend on your business and where you're at in the Product Development Lifecycle.

For example when you're in the early scoping phases you may use one-to-one interviews and in later stages you may employ a tracking tool.

You'll probably need to use a combination of user feedback techniques over time — some manual and some automated, some solicited and some unsolicited — so you'll need to work with user feedback tools that are simple to integrate with your business and workflow platforms.

The good news is that there is a growing number of easy-to-use user feedback tools available. For example Userback is an In-App/On-Site Visual Feedback tool that provides real-time access to valuable contextual feedback data that can shape future product decisions and accelerate the product development lifecycle.

PART 3

8 ways to keep your Product Roadmap on track with user feedback

"Your customers can tell you the things that are broken and how they want to be made happy. Listen to them. Make them happy. But don't rely on them to create the future road map for your product or service. That's your job."

Mark Cuban • Billionaire, entrepreneur, television personality and media proprietor

The better you can manage user feedback, the more able you are to create a Product Roadmap that allows you to build a better product and build it faster.

User feedback provides insight into user needs, preferences, and pain points — the information you need to identify areas of improvement, prioritize features, and develop strategies for solving customer problems and addressing their needs.

Additionally, user feedback can provide valuable information on the effectiveness of existing features and functions, helping you to refine and optimize your Product Roadmap, for example:

1. Validate your vision
2. Focus on the needs of users (not stakeholders)
3. Give everyone a voice (and build a stronger product community)
4. Prioritize features and fixes that add greatest value (and park the rest)
5. Address issues before they become frustrating delays
6. Leverage the past
7. Close the loop and keep moving, faster
8. Use the Product Roadmap to inform the Product Roadmap

1. Validate your vision

Whether you're building from scratch or enhancing an existing platform, when you have a vision for what you want to achieve, you will be making assumptions and decisions based on your past experience and gut feel.

However, we live in rapidly changing and increasingly unpredictable times. No matter how well you think you may understand your users and their requirements, there's every chance that there will be some level of discrepancy between what you think people need and what they *actually* need.

By continuously collecting and assessing user feedback throughout the product development lifecycle you can validate your product decisions and identify opportunities based on real-time data and insights, rather than relying on inaccurate assumptions or untested hypotheses.
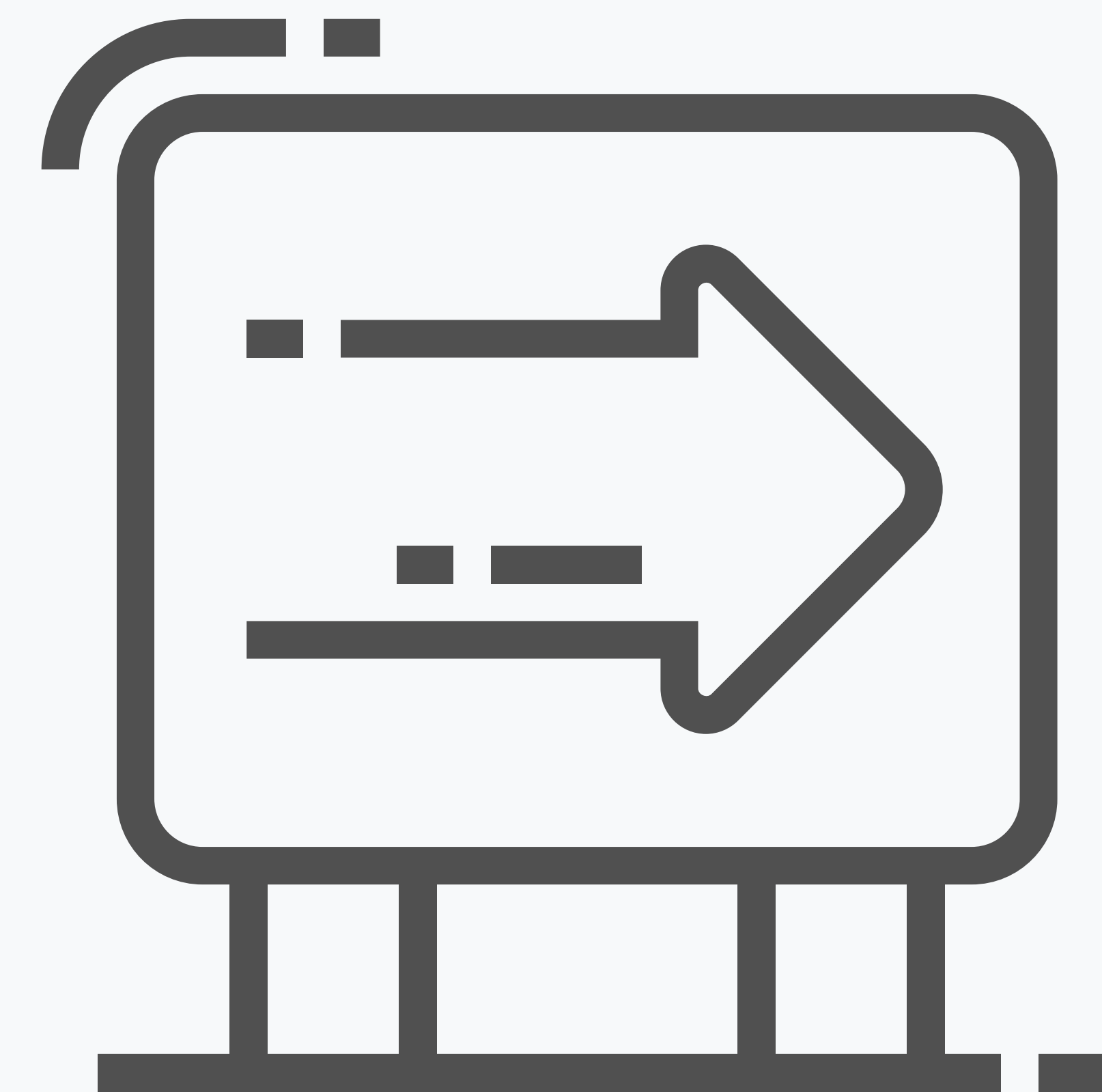
2. Focus on the needs of users
(not stakeholders)

During the Product Development Lifecycle there can be friction between the drive to meet user needs whilst trying to meet potentially unrealistic stakeholder expectations, for example timelines, sign ups or ROI.

User feedback provides Product Managers with the evidence they need to create a Product Roadmap that is designed to meet user needs.

If on the other hand you're unable to collect user feedback — or cannot process it in a meaningful way — then it can be easy to default to focusing on satisfying stakeholder requirements at the cost of the user experience.

3. Give everyone a voice
(and build a stronger product community)

Collecting diverse 360° user feedback creates greater opportunity for developing a Product Roadmap that meets the needs of a wider range of people, while strengthening user community.

However, when you collect user feedback you often only hear from those people who are highly passionate about your product — they really love it or they're really frustrated. But just because someone is 'shouting' louder than others doesn't mean their feedback is more valid (although you may need to manage them more carefully)!

Regardless of whether their feedback is positive or negative, it's important to be able to understand whether their feedback is representative of your broader user base. The easier you make it for users to provide feedback, the more comments and suggestions you'll get to validate product decisions. At the same time these interactions will help to grow your user community.

4. Prioritize features and fixes that add greatest value
(and park the rest)

When you have a number of features or fixes to implement (including your own 'bells and whistles') it can be hard to know where to start.

The best people to guide you are your users themselves. When you make the list of features and fixes available to your users on a portal they can help you to prioritize things through activities like voting. This helps you to get ruthless with your prioritization (this is no time to be sentimental!) before you commit precious time and resources.

You can then focus on those activities that will create greatest impact, and park the ones that won't deliver value for your users.

Not only does this allow you to fine tune and streamline your Product Roadmap with their feedback, it also helps you to build an emotional rapport with them as they become more emotionally connected to your product and development process.

5. Address issues before they become frustrating delays

Bugs can create significant roadblocks in any Product Roadmap. They slow things down and you need to re-allocate precious developer time to fixing retrospective problems rather than building future features.

When you collect bug reports it's important to understand exactly where problems are occurring and how they happen. The more advanced visual feedback tools accelerate this process by automatically capturing information like system data and session details for developers so that they can get to the source of the problem as quickly as possible and fix it before it can have a significant negative impact on the user experience.

Visual feedback tools also make it easier for users to submit detailed bug reports — and feature requests — so that you are aware of them sooner and keep the Product Roadmap on track.
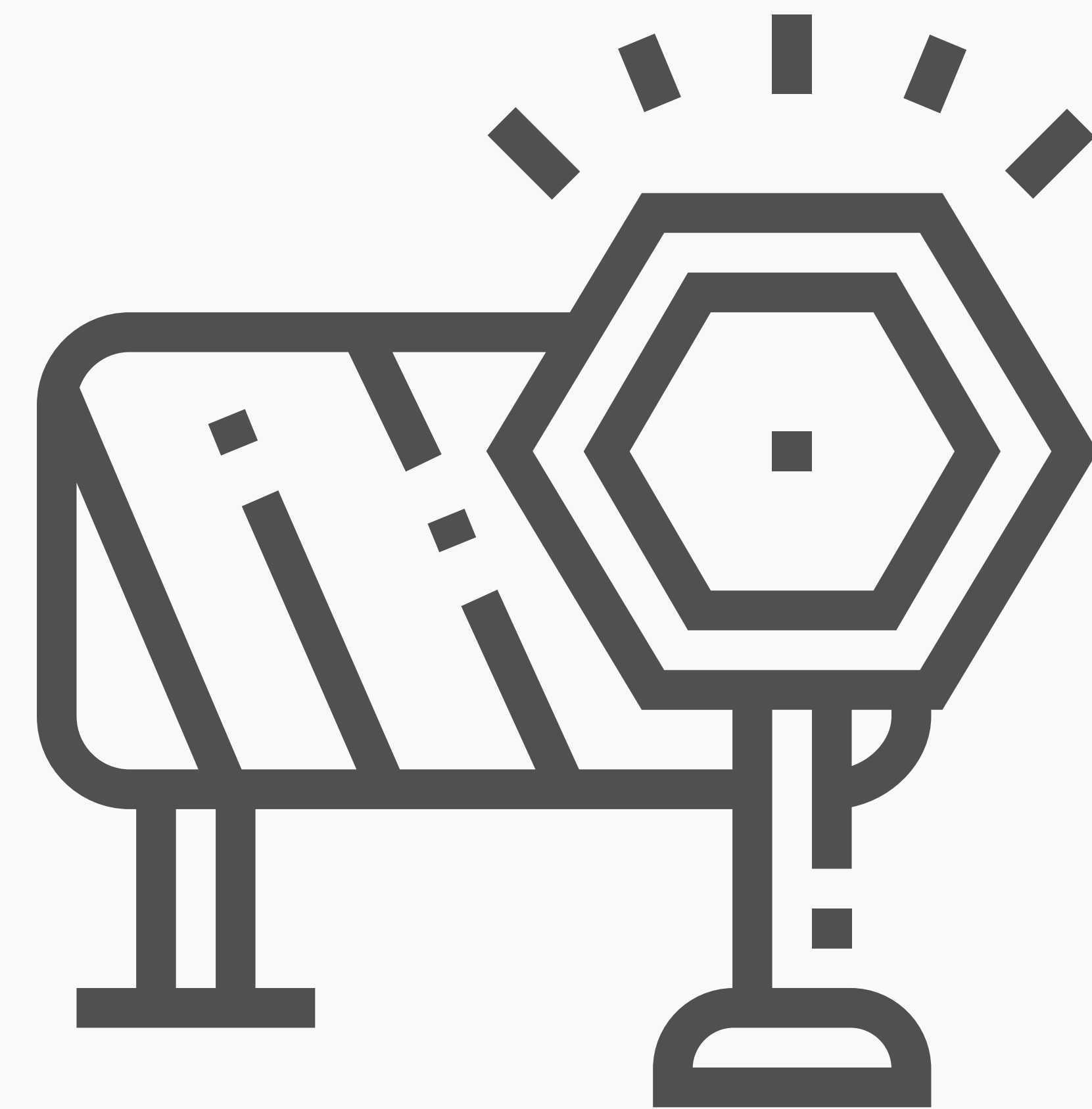
6. Leverage the past

While the Product Roadmap is about realizing the vision for the future, user feedback can help you to leverage past learnings.

If you have a product that has been around for a while then you may find yourselves scoping features or functionality that have been discussed or implemented in the past.

By reviewing historical user feedback you can see how users felt about these features back then and involve them in the process to ensure that what is being proposed adds value and is an improvement on anything that has been done before.
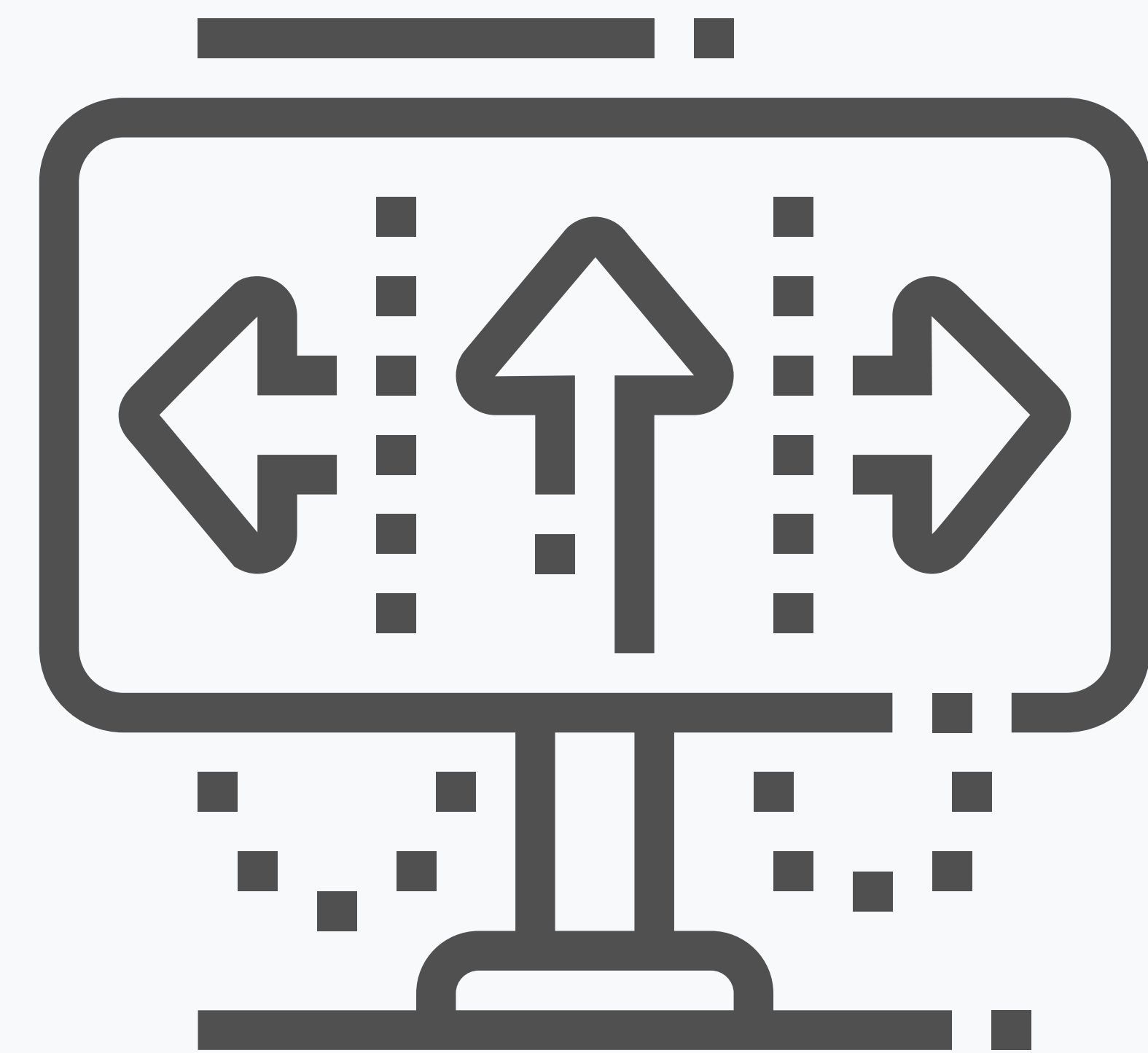
7. Close the loop and keep moving forwards, faster

The longer feedback goes unresolved or unacknowledged it can have a negative impact on your Product Roadmap.

The most obvious being that there's a potential issue that you either need to address or decide not to do something about it. The other issue is that you increase the likelihood of the user or team member who raised it feeling unlistened to or unappreciated, which in turn can affect their motivation to provide feedback in the future.

When you are able to close the user feedback loop efficiently you're able to resolve issues faster — getting the Product Roadmap back on track.

8. Use the Product Roadmap to inform the Product Roadmap

One of the best ways to leverage user feedback to fine tune your Product Roadmap is to get users to give you feedback about it!

When you develop your Product Roadmap you can create different versions with specific information for specific audiences, for example:

- Developers & Designers
- Customer Success & Support
- Shareholders & Investors
- Customers & Prospects

It may be daunting at first, but when you open up your Product Roadmap to feedback from users and prospects you show that you are transparent and inclusive and build a sense of community around your product.

PART 4
Conclusion

By actively engaging with customers and gathering feedback, you can ensure that your Product Roadmap is built with an understanding of user needs and preferences, leading to the development of a more successful product.

User feedback is critical to the validation of product decisions and developing an effective Product Roadmap.

From visual and contextual feedback to one-to-one interviews there are different kinds of user feedback that you may use at different stages of your product lifecycle.

Managing user feedback can be challenging, but there is a growing number of tools that streamline and automate the collection and assessment of user feedback, making it easier to incorporate it into product decisions and your Product Roadmap.

As demonstrated by the 8 examples in this guide, when you can manage user feedback effectively, you can avoid dead ends, lengthy delays and never-ending roundabouts in your Product Roadmap.

Designed for product managers, software teams and developers, Userback is a powerful-yet-simple platform that streamlines and automates the collection, categorization, prioritization and implementation of visual user feedback such as bug reporting, feature requests, suggestions and general comments.

- In-app screen capture, video recording, annotation and session replays make it easy for users to submit contextual and visible feedback, along with system data.

- The Dashboard makes it easy to review, organize, plan, execute updates.

- The Feedback Portal allows you to share bug fixes, proposed enhancements and other requests with your users and allow them to comment and vote upvote and downvote enhancement, bug fixes and other requests for features in your Product Roadmap.

- A wide range of integrations ensure that you can easily incorporate Userback into your existing workflows, processes and Product Roadmap throughout the product development lifecycle.

To learn more about how Userback can help you keep your Product Roadmap on track, visit:
Userback.io

Thanks for reading.

userback

Want to view more?
Unlock the **full document** by siging up to our free guide,
8 Ways to Keep your Product Roadmap on Track with User Feedback.

userback