productboard

6 PRODUCT NIGHTMARES
& How To Overcome Them

Written in partnership with

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Introduction

You wake up with a start. Your heart is racing. Your legs feel like jelly. Just a moment ago you were being chased by a HiPPO (Highest Paid Person's Opinion). Or was it the Feature from the Backlog Lagoon? Or a swarm of bugs? Whatever it was, it made you want to scream. But as you blink your eyes open, you begin to realize that it was just a nightmare.

We've all been there. Product nightmares feel all too real while we're experiencing them. That's why we've put together this guide to help you understand — and overcome — some of the most common product nightmares.

Your Worst Product Management Nightmares

The Feature from the Backlog Lagoon

Many product organizations have the bad habit of saying yes to all feature requests coming in. When the day comes that somebody (probably one of your big-ticket customers) comes to collect, that's when the Feature From the Backlog Lagoon emerges from your toxic dumping ground!

Escape from the Feature Factory

In a Feature Factory (coined by product thought leader John Cutler), product orgs are trapped in a dystopian, output-focused culture, churning out products and features without a clear strategy. This addiction to activities leaves teams without an understanding of the actual impact of their work.

Night of the Living Bugs

When product owners inherit backlogs and products where technical debt has been swept under the carpet, a Pandora's Box of painful, wasteful, and non-functional requirements and faulty code awaits. Say goodbye to your carefully planned product strategy and roadmap.

Frankensoft

Frankensoft is the hideous child of products and features that get mish-mashed together without any regard for strategy or user experience. Upon a retrospective, the beast realizes he is the opposite of a unified set of products and features — he is horrible!

The Dangerous Animals of Product Management

Whether you're dealing with the hungry HiPPO (Highest Paid-Person's Opinion), the charging RHiNO (Really High-Value New Opportunity), or another Dangerous Animal of Product Management, these challenging stakeholders and situations cause all kinds of problems when left to run wild.

Scrumzilla

When the scrum process takes over, everything becomes about "getting the process right" rather than delivering value. Scrumzilla destroys your carefully planned roadmap and turns your product vision into a pile of smithereens.

Tools & Techniques to Wake Up From Your Product Nightmares

Now that you've come face to face with your worst product nightmares, you might be peeking under your bed with trepidation and reaching for your nightlight. Never fear! We've collected tried and true tactics to help you wake up and make these nightmares disappear forever.
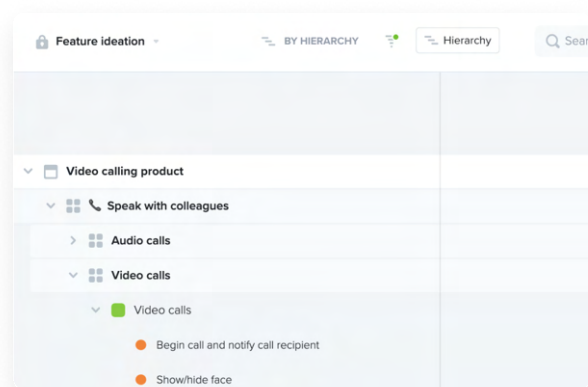
THE FEATURE FROM THE BACKLOG LAGOON

YOU PROMISED TO BUILD ME!

The Feature from the Backlog Lagoon is a monster that thrives in darkness and neglect. **You can combat it by having good backlog hygiene**. This means you need to keep your backlog organized and coherent — don't let it turn into a toxic dumping ground where you toss anything you don't want to deal with. Only add ideas and requests to the backlog if there's a chance you will return to them in the future.

How do you do this? **It helps to have a dedicated space to organize and prioritize all your feature ideas.**

Productboard's hierarchy is like a filing cabinet for all your feature ideas, big and small. It provides visibility into your greatest areas of need — across all users, or for a given segment, company, or individual. It links every feature idea you're considering to relevant user insights, helping you to understand the underlying need you'll be solving and equipping you with data to inform your product decisions.

Your Productboard hierarchy is like a filing cabinet for all your feature ideas, big and small.

And finally, you can keep the Feature from the Backlog Lagoon at bay by being more transparent about your decision-making process. Using a feature like Productboard's public-facing Portal, you can share and gather feedback on feature requests that are under consideration, what's being launched next, and what has already gone live.

This proactive approach helps you avoid those scary situations when someone who submitted an idea a year ago suddenly comes to collect.
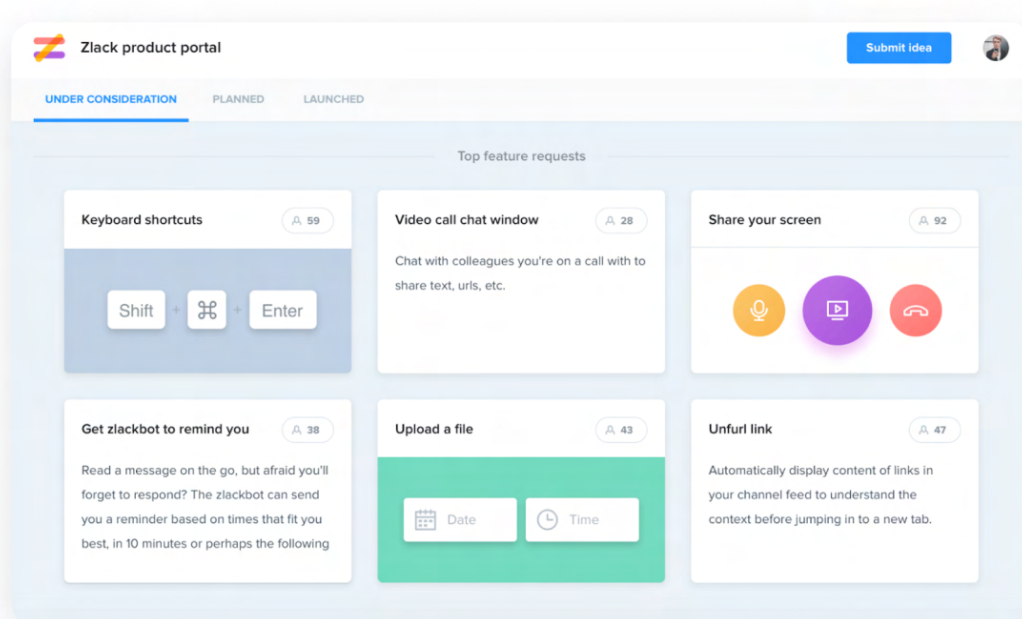
Productboard's Portal provides product managers with a single place to collect and manage customer feedback from internal and external stakeholders.

How the Portal effortlessly keeps stakeholders in the loop

Productboard's Portal feature allows you to add feature ideas that are under consideration, share what's planned, and what's already been launched. You can choose to share your Portal exclusively with customers or make it public for voting and new idea submissions.

Validate your feature ideas

Collaborate with your customers by collecting feedback on feature ideas, learning what resonates the most, and sourcing new ideas you might not have thought of.

Take action on user feedback

Surface your top-requested feature ideas and understand the user needs behind them. Drill into the feedback behind every idea and follow up with users to gain even more clarity.

Close the feedback loop

Easily send an update to everyone who requested a feature to invite them to a beta or to celebrate when it goes live.
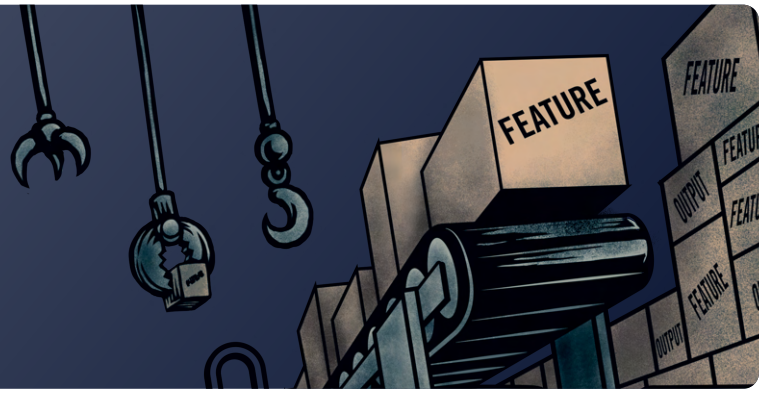
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Customers, engineers, and other stakeholders will often focus on solutions, so it's easy to end up building features based on their requests alone. One of your biggest tasks (and the best way to vanquish the Feature Factory) is to re-frame these conversations, identify the underlying cause, and move into the problem space. **Shift your focus from outputs to outcomes.** Train management to coach teams so they think about the long-term value of their work.

Continuous discovery is a tool to help you to avoid living the Feature Factory nightmare This approach involves collecting feedback from your users on a regular basis, both to identify their underlying problems and to ensure that you're building solutions that actually address them. During conversations, use tactics like the five whys to get beyond feature requests at face-value. Hold regular retrospectives to identify areas for improvement and make adjustments to the process as needed.

Use these tactics in tandem with a tool like Productboard's Insights board, which allows you to focus on core user problems and see recurring trends in your incoming feedback. Productboard can also help you streamline and structure your discovery activities in other ways.
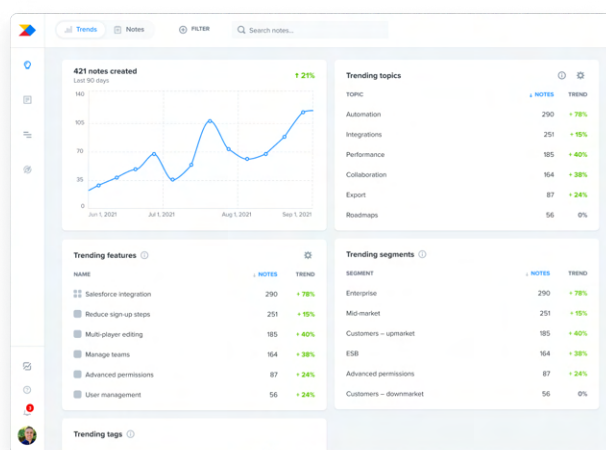
Productboard's Insights board shows you what's most important to customers and how their needs evolve — all while zeroing in on the customers, segments, or product areas that matter most to you.

3 ways Productboard can help you conduct better product discovery

Product discovery is a learning process that helps product teams refine their ideas by deeply understanding real user problems and then landing on the best ways to solve them. It is a useful practice for escaping the feature factory and any of the six product nightmares.

Here's how Productboard's product management system can help you streamline and structure your discovery activities.

1. Collect feedback from customers along with segment trends and themes in Insights

On the Insights board in Productboard, you have a centralized feedback repository for collecting feedback from many integrated sources on an ongoing basis. You can then review feedback to identify interesting user insights and link them to related feature ideas, or take advantage of Productboard's intelligent capabilities for automatically distilling trends in large volumes of feedback — called "smart topic detection."

2. Narrow in on a few ideas and filter them on the Features board

For many, product discovery really begins when you start narrowing down what ideas you're interested in pursuing and researching them further to ensure that you understand the user need you'd be solving. Productboard helps you do this with user impact scores, which show you the features that are requested by the most users. You can also filter this for individual customer segments.

3. Get the full context of feature requests whenever you need it

Productboard shows you all the user insights associated with each of your feature ideas. This gives you a lot of clues into underlying user needs — especially because you can navigate from each insight back to the original source of the feedback.

What if you want even more feedback? Easy. You know who this user is and have their email address captured in Productboard, so you can easily follow up with them to ask more questions or schedule a conversation.
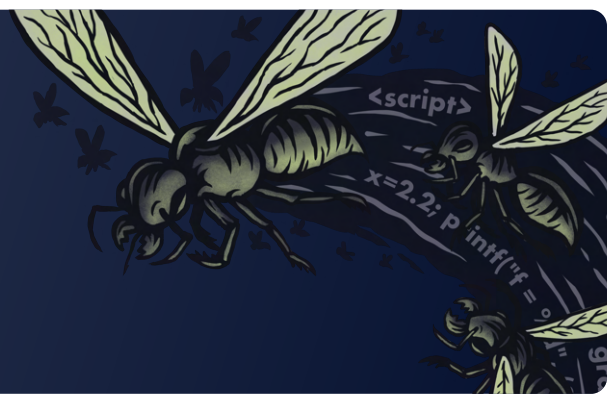
NIGHT OF THE LIVING BUGS

It's important to accept that bugs are natural and account for them when you design processes. For example, you can develop and implement a test strategy that includes automated unit, integration, functional, performance, and stress testing. Similarly, you can shape your product backlog so it includes a healthy mix of bug fixes and technical debt resolution.

When trying to squash bugs, it's important to maintain a mindset of simplicity. Less is more — otherwise bugs start getting built on top of bugs.

If you're on a team with a high degree of maturity and accountability, you can take a broken window approach. If engineers see something that's small and broken as they're working, they can fix it. And product managers can plan with their teams to allow time for these types of fixes.

FRANKENSOFT

You can avoid Frankensoft by always tying your work back to larger objectives and product strategies. **When teams are united around a broad product vision and strategy, they're more likely to develop a cohesive product that doesn't just feel like a random collection of features.** Leaders will be empowered to sunset under-performing products and features.

Thinking strategically about your roadmap can also help you avoid the awkwardness of a Frankensoft. Consider how you'll create connections and continuity so all your different themes are intentionally tied together. **Rather than thinking about your roadmap as a collection of features, focus on the outcomes you'll be delivering.**

Embedding design with your teams can help you deliver consistent design language and user interface elements so the final product feels cohesive and not disjointed.

The Night of the...   **SIDEBAR**   The Dangerous An...

4 steps for building an outcome-driven product roadmap

1. Align on product vision, strategy, and objectives

To define a clear product vision and strategy, consider what type of long-term outcome and benefit you want to deliver to your users. It'll be helpful to consider the following:

- What you want to achieve in the near-term, mid-term,
  as well as further into the future
- Insights from prospects, colleagues, & customers
- Market trends
- Technological trends
- Competitive intelligence
- The company's business model
- Unique differentiators

Once product vision and strategy are set, product teams can break them down into objectives. Product objectives should be high level enough to represent a worthy outcome for your customers or product, yet specific enough to help guide your prioritization decisions around which features to build next.

2. Prioritize what to put on your roadmap based on desired outcomes

Once you align the product team behind a common vision, strategy, and objectives, it's time to prioritize the products and/or features that will go on your roadmap. The following inputs are a great place to begin:

- Insights from prospects, colleagues, and customers
- Market segments that your product serves
- Date-based milestones, such as conferences, industry events, or marketing campaigns
- Capacity planning — what is the bandwidth of your team?

3. Build your roadmap to summarize your plan

Now it's time to create a working draft of your roadmap that communicates the products and/or features you are building, when you will be working on them, roughly when they will be released, as well as why they are a priority vs. all of the options that were considered. To make your roadmap informative and easy to understand for your end audience, try including these elements:

Timeline. Even in the agile world, it is important to set expectations around when short-term, medium-term, and long-term features will roll out so other teams can plan around them. We're not talking about specific dates or deadlines. Instead, show a general time, such as the month.

Solutions. Communicate what features you want to roll out in the above timeline. You can be as high-level or as detailed as you want, just explain why you are including each feature to give context.

Strategic context. Let all teams know where the product is headed and why you're building these features next. Strategic context helps stakeholders to understand the rationale behind tough trade-offs, even if they don't personally agree with it.

4. Communicate your roadmap and rally the team

The final step is to rally everyone around the roadmap and empower them to get the information they need. For example, you can set up a regular meeting cadence or send emails updating the team about any product roadmap changes.

Provide roadmap access to all members involved in the product lifecycle — from development to go-to-market. An easy way to do this is through a product management platform like Productboard, where stakeholders can view and track tailored, up-to-date roadmaps that are relevant to their needs.

With Productboard, you can manage access to the roadmap and hide certain features based on roles and permissions. Once stakeholders have access, they can click on features and releases to learn more about the context, like what problem you're trying to solve and which objectives you're addressing. They can even see the customer feedback behind each feature or release. This self-serve approach is much more powerful than a static slide that's quickly outdated and forgotten.

DANGEROUS ANIMALS OF PRODUCT MANAGEMENT

IF YOU BUILD THIS FEATURE, WE'LL MAKE THE SALE!

Many Dangerous Animals appear when there's no clear product vision or strategy, and each animal in the menagerie requires its own set of tactics to be tamed.

HiPPO
(Highest Paid Person's Opinion)

ZEbRA
(Zero Evidence but Really Arrogant)

Seagull
Seagull Manager

WoLF
(Works on Latest Fire)

RHiNO
(Really High-value New Opportunity)

PUFFIn
(Plans Unending Feature Factory Initiatives)

GOOSE
(Guesstimating Overly Optimistic Scheduling Estimates)

PUMA
(Promotes Unusually Meaningless Assumptions)

CoBRA
(Cognitive Bias Related Assertions)

YAK
(Yet Another KPI)

With a tool like Productboard, you can invite stakeholders from across the organization to view or contribute to your product plans and create tailored roadmaps that meet the specific needs of each type of stakeholder. This gets everyone on the same page and showcases the "why" behind your product decisions.

Other Dangerous Animals like to pounce on shiny objects or hyper-focus on their favorite features or ideas. Instead of letting them swoop in and take over, put your users and customers front and center by regularly referring to the User Impact Score — an auto-calculated score that can help you surface your top-requested feature ideas — when evaluating ideas. This way, you'll always stay focused on what's most valuable to your target customer and your business.

To get even more insights from your users and disarm the Dangerous Animals with data, Productboard's [integrations](#) with Amplitude and Mixpanel surface behavioral data so you get a clear idea of how specific cohorts are using specific features. Our integration with Salesforce also ensures that you're prioritizing for the right segment.
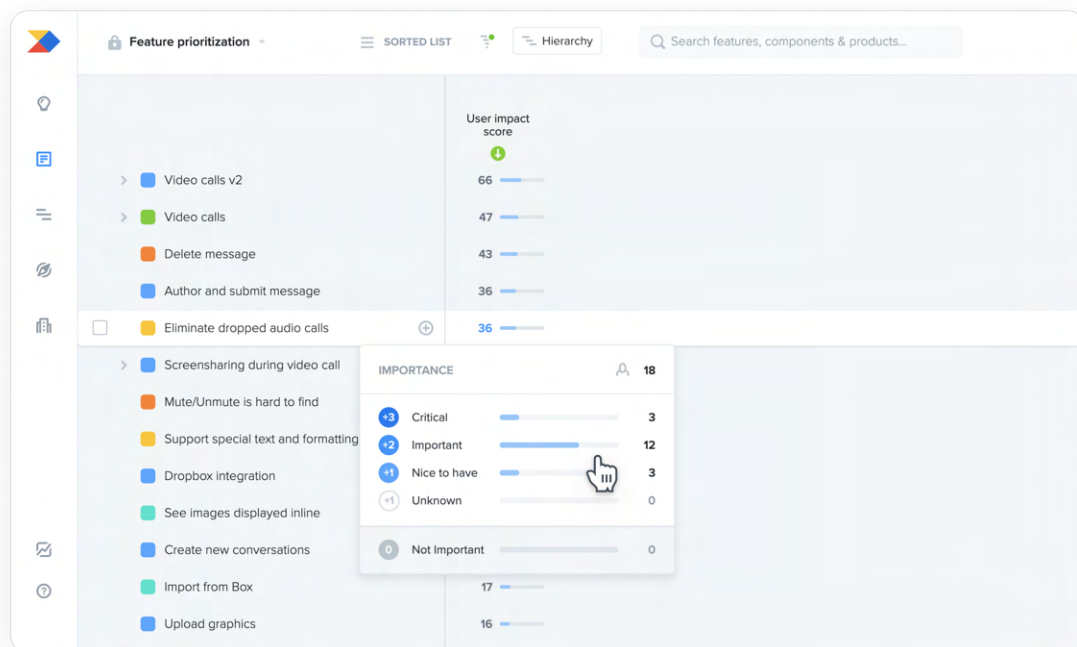
*You can filter your user impact score to show the most pressing feature ideas.*

Remember that scrum can be your friend, but it morphs into the Scrumzilla monster when you value the process above all else. **Your ultimate goal is always to deliver customer value, not to "practice scrum perfectly."**

The key to keeping scrum in the friend zone? Be strategic about defining your overall product goals as well as the goals for each sprint. Keep your team focused on customer value. Repeatedly bring conversations back to the who, what, and why of your product vision.

One of the best ways to keep customer value top of mind is to make sure you're spending most of your time in the problem space. Regularly review your [Productboard Insights board](#), where you can collect feedback from users and identify the key themes and problems you're focused on solving. This helps you stay on top of what your customers really need and infuse their voice into every phase of the product lifecycle.
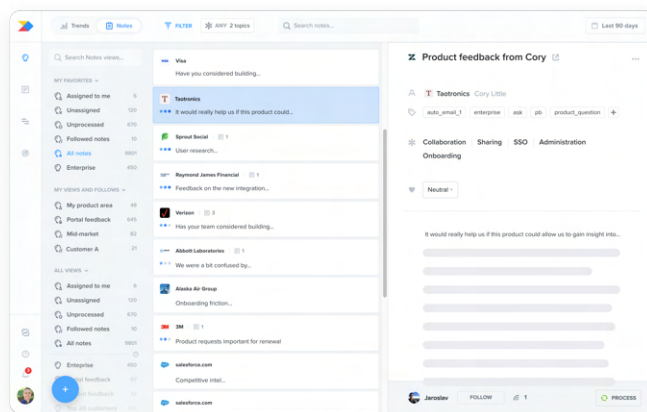
Productboard's Insights Board allows you to consolidate all your product feedback in one place and prioritize product decisions based on real customer data and insights.

Request a personalized demo
to learn more about how Productboard can
help you and your team overcome your
worst product nightmares

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About
Dean Peters & 280Group

Dean Peters is a principal consultant and trainer with the 280 Group. His superpower is cutting through the chaos and bringing people together to deliver valuable software early and continuously — all while guarding and growing the underlying culture that is critical to long-term success.

280 Group is the world's leading group of authorities on product management and product marketing, empowering product professionals with the the tools and knowledge to create products that matter. 280 Group has been in business for 20 years and serves clients around the world. Their products and services include consulting, training, certifications, templates, coaching, books and a Product Management optimization program.

Dean Peters

Product Management
& Agile Consultant

About Productboard

Productboard is a customer-driven product management system that empowers teams to get the right products to market, faster. It provides a complete solution for product teams to understand user needs, prioritize what to build next, align everyone on the roadmap, and engage with their customers. Productboard is easy to use, enables company-wide collaboration, and integrates into existing workflows. Over 4,000 organizations around the world use Productboard to build excellent products.

Learn more at productboard.com