



High-Definition News

15 Years to Save 15 Seconds: Mapping the Road for Your Product

By Clark Crowdus

Have you been waiting in line 15 years to pay for your meal at a fast food restaurant? The major payment card companies have.

That's right. Since the start of pilot tests *in 1990*, American Express, MasterCard, and Visa have attempted to penetrate this and other cash-dominated industries such as movie theatres and convenience stores.

And the outcome after 15 years? You get your food faster (payment takes less than 15 seconds vs. 30 or more). The line moves that much faster. The restaurant spends less in employee wages handling your transactions. More business takes place in the same amount of time. And you typically spend more than normal—and on your payment card of choice.

But it was all part of a plan. Or, more accurately, a roadmap, that is responsible for converting the US\$140 Billion fast food industry in the USA from a cash-only business to one where, to pay, you may soon only need a specially enabled credit or debit card and the ability to *pass it near* a tech-savvy card-reading device. In a word, 'contactless' transactions are driving the growth.

Vision and technology made it happen, but without a roadmap — the plan that got the payments giants from point A (no usage in 1990) to point B (expanded merchant acceptance and sustained consumer usage in 2005)— we'd all still be fishing in our pockets and scrounging for change to pay for that burger or taco.

To a marketing strategist, the roadmap is the same kind of tool that project management software represents to an engineering company. It has tasks and timelines and a critical path that must be followed if a product is to arrive in the market on time, or at the right time.

But there is no universal roadmap and no single way to create one.

The Process of Roadmapping

Product roadmapping is a process that gives marketers the ability to envision how a product or product line will get to a destination or outcome and how long it might take to get there—just like a map. As in traveling, circumstances could force you to take detours that delay your journey. But without the map, you wouldn't even know what alternate routes existed.

In dynamic situations, product roadmapping is helpful because it enables organizations to concentrate and fuse cross-functional knowledge with strategic and creative thinking.

Every marketing roadmap is different, however. All have a number of similar elements, such as timelines, market analysis, resource assessments, competitive analysis, etc., but *each is customized* to the specific needs of the business model of the organization, the talents of the team, the marketplace, and the product or product line itself.

and the product or product line itself.

Keeping with the travel metaphor, following are a few tips on how to develop a basic product roadmap:

Assess the terrain — As with any plan, you need to define the environment and the reasons for a product's existence. What kind of terrain will you be traveling in? If you are traveling in the mountains or colder climes, for example, this suggests what you'll need to take with you. This step might include competitive assessment, market analysis, and objectives for the product and the basic strategy for making it from point A to point B. In our example, understanding the needs of the fast food operator and how and why consumers pay in certain ways helped build the roadmap.

Choose a direction — Define the challenges, opportunities, and solutions you will use to get to your destination. Create measurable goals that will lead to your objective. Then choose your direction. Will you go with an up-market strategy? Or will you try to be the most efficient and cost-effective provider? Or somewhere in between?

Pack what you need for the trip — What tools and technologies will be needed to implement your plan? What are the resources you will need and how much will they cost? In the fast food industry a technological solution that became affordable to all parties—and easy for the consumer to use—drove the product down the road the fastest.

Create an itinerary — Develop an action plan with tactics and timelines. Where are your stopovers? What are the critical points of destination? How will you know when you have arrived at your final destination? What will you do when you get there?

Above all, a product roadmap should be flexible. There are *so many* factors beyond our control, and so many variables that cannot be foreseen, that rigidity of strategy, tactic, or timeline can be harmful. Take the (previous) conventional wisdom in the payments business that swiping the magnetic stripe on a credit card *was required* for a retail transaction. Put simply, a roadmap can be wrong. And while the ability to *create and read* a map is important, so is using instinct and timing to leverage new knowledge and avoid potholes along the way.

A primary value of a product roadmap is that as things evolve, it will help you keep an eye on your position in the market and suggest alternate courses going forward.

So, as your product makes its way to a desired destination, keep your map handy and stay flexible!

Your feedback is welcomed and should be directed to Clark Crowdus, Principal, High-Definition Consulting Group at clark@high-def.biz.

Resources:

The following resources are recommended by High-Definition Consulting Group:

White Paper: B-Net (business blog) "How to use roadmapping for global platform products"
<http://jobfunctions.bnet.com/whitepaper.aspx?&scid=1569&dtid=1&docid=96346>

Article: Institute for Manufacturing (UK) "Strategic Roadmapping: Aligning markets, products and technology for strategy and innovation"
http://www.cambridgenetwork.co.uk/pooled/articles/BF_EVENTART/view.asp?

[Q=BF_EVENTART_129687](#)

Article: OK/Cancel (industrial design site) "The optimal design roadmap" <http://www.ok-cancel.com/archives/article/2005/05/the-optimal-design-roadmap.html>

Article: Circuitree Magazine "Roadmapping: Critical Thinking for Interconnect products and technologies"
<http://www.circuitree.com/CDA/ArticleInformation/coverstory/BNPCoverStoryItem/0.2135.82685.00.html>

High-Definition News is brought to you by High-Definition Consulting Group, a San Francisco-based marketing and business consulting firm that specializes in identifying and clarifying marketplace opportunities. Our aim is to bring you brief, but thought-provoking content and nuggets of marketing wisdom from our experience and from the experience of others in an easy-to-digest format.

To contact High-Definition Consulting Group, please do not reply to this message, but use the following contact information:

E-mail: clark@high-def.biz

Phone: 1-415-876-4300

Fax: 1-415-876-4333

33 Lupine Avenue, Ste. 300, San Francisco, CA 94118 USA

www.high-def.biz

Visit our archive of back editions of *High-Definition News* at: <http://www.high-def.biz/fyi.htm>

Copyright © 2005 High-Definition Consulting Group. All rights reserved.

Pay it Forward - If you find material in this or future newsletters of interest to your clients, colleagues, or friends, please forward it to them with our compliments.