

A vibrant, multi-colored hot air balloon basket is shown from a low-angle perspective, looking up from inside the basket. The balloon's envelope is composed of numerous triangular and quadrilateral panels in a variety of colors including red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, and white, creating a rainbow-like effect. The basket's structure is visible in the center, with ropes and a central hub. The background is a soft, out-of-focus sky.

CREATE YOUR OWN PRODUCT ADVENTURE

by Steve Johnson

Product management is a wheel, not a line

Most product management and development methods take a “step 1, 2, 3” approach as if you’re starting from nothing. They assume you don’t already have a product in some phase of its life cycle. However, the reality is this: most of us don’t start from the beginning. We usually start somewhere in the middle. Product leaders are often called on to jump in midstream.



The **Under10** framework has helped hundreds of companies implement a simple idea-to-market process. Ideally, under 10 documents and under 10 steps. Each step requires one or more of the key artifacts — but only you can determine exactly what information you need for each step.



The process for building products is not a line, it's a wheel.



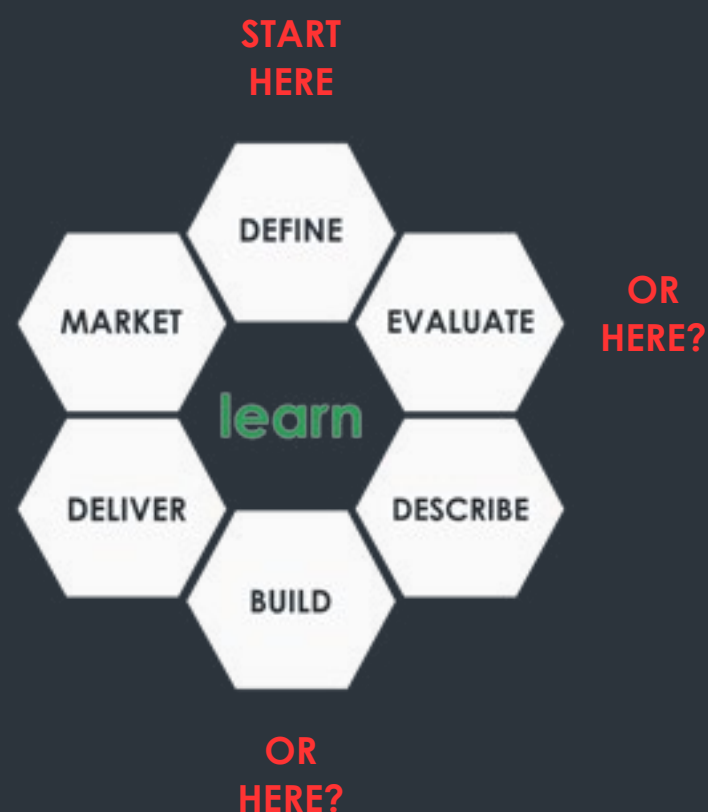
We move high-priority product ideas from **DEFINE** to **EVALUATE** to convince company leaders or investors to allocate funds and dedicate resources to the idea. Some firms call this product strategy.

Once we have the go-ahead, we **DESCRIBE** and **BUILD** the product, working with a technical team that is assigned specifically to this product. This is often called product management.

Along with building the product, we work on items to **DELIVER** and **MARKET** the product through our marketing and sales efforts. Sometimes we refer to this as product marketing.

In our model, **LEARN** is at the center of everything. Learning informs each step of our model. Learning is necessary at every stage — in fact, learning is never completed. You continue to learn by analyzing the business results to determine what worked and what didn't so you can refine your idea and go through another cycle.

As I said before, you're likely to join a product team at any step in this cycle.



Adventure: Meghan the product manager



Poor Meghan! She's been promoted to product manager (whatever that means) for the company's flagship product. She has business skills and technology expertise but it seems as if she's always rushing from one fire to the next. She's continually cleaning up the mistakes made by others.

Why do organizations hire a product manager mid-project? Here are some common scenarios:

- The former product manager has left for a new opportunity.
- The president has finally decided he or she needs to focus on the overall business and has hired a product manager to take over the product from day to day.
- The developers have been working for months without a product manager and now they've realized the need for a full-time person to guide product strategy.

Meghan has joined a company during the **BUILD** phase. She needs to keep the team on-task and protected from interference. Primarily she needs to get ready to launch the new version of her product.

What is Meghan's product adventure?

BUILD. Identify any blocks or distractions for the product team. Reverse-engineer product stories from features already planned. Create or revise market and product personas. Monitor the status of product story development. Formalize story acceptance using the Five Queues.

DELIVER. Engage with potential customers to validate personas, product capabilities, and messaging. Brief the promotions team with successful implementations, market feedback, and updated personas. Define one or more Market Plans for launch.

MARKET. Monitor the status of Launch Plans using the Four Queues. Launch the product in phases: invitation, soft launch, and global launch. Use feedback from one phase to refine plans for the next phase. Support sales teams to identify necessary sales tools (like an ROI calculator) and customer self-service deliverables (like a self-assessment worksheet).

REFINE/DEFINE. Conduct win/loss interviews and perform analysis for at least five accounts. Perform retrospective on sales efforts and recommend revisions to sales tools. Perform retrospective on revenue achievements and market share. Perform retrospective on internal processes to identify areas to improve. Conduct opportunity scoring for the business model.

EVALUATE. Update competitive profiles for existing and new competitors. Revisit development and promotions budgets. Refresh business model and brief executive team with revised business model and product roadmap.

DESCRIBE. Brief the product team on successful implementations, market feedback, and updated personas. Rank planned product stories using Quick Prioritization. Conduct discovery sessions to provide the appropriate level of detail to the product team.

BUILD. Monitor the status of product story development using the Five Queues.



MEGHAN
STARTS
HERE

Meghan will continue this cycle again and again until the product gets retired or she gets promoted. The documentation and artifacts—her product playbook—will help get the next product manager up to speed quickly.

Maybe you're like Meghan. Your onboarding was something like, "Welcome aboard. You're a product manager."

Soon there are product stories to accept, launch events to plan, and requests from sales people to visit their top clients. You don't want to be the one who says, "Everybody just hold up until I can get organized." Instead, just dive in. Participate as best you can. And discover and document as you go.

Adventure: Tom the Entrepreneur

Tom has an idea for a product or service. He wants to evaluate his idea before he seeks outside investment but Tom needs to back up a step to DEFINE to make sure he's clear on the who and what of his idea. Who are his personas? What are their problems?

What is Tom's product adventure?

DEFINE. Create a basic profile of the product idea. Interview at least five potential customers to understand their problems. Develop market and product personas. Engage with another five potential customers to validate personas and the proposed solution.

EVALUATE. Create competitive profiles for existing and new competitors. Define development and promotions budgets. Create business justification with recommendations. Brief investors with business model and product roadmap.

DESCRIBE. Create a product team of developers, designers, and testers. Brief the product team on successful implementations, market feedback, and updated personas. Rank planned product stories using Quick Prioritization. Conduct discovery sessions to provide the appropriate level of detail to the product team.

BUILD. Monitor the status of product story development using the Five Queues.

DELIVER. Revise product personas and positioning based on market feedback. Engage with potential customers to validate personas, product capabilities, and messaging.

Create a promotions team and brief them on successful implementations, market feedback, and updated personas. Define one or more activities and programs for launch.

MARKET. Monitor the status of Launch Plans using the Four Queues. Launch the product in phases: invitation, soft launch, and global launch. Use feedback from one phase to refine plans for the next phase. Support sales teams to identify necessary sales tools (like an ROI calculator) and customer self-service deliverables (like a self-assessment worksheet).

REFINE/DEFINE. Conduct win/loss interviews and perform analysis for at least five accounts. Perform retrospective on sales efforts and recommend revisions to sales tools. Perform retrospective on revenue achievements and market share. Perform retrospective on internal processes to identify areas to improve. Conduct opportunity scoring for the business model.

Tom has an idea but he needs to ensure that his idea is attractive to a market full of customers. Tom needs to write down his ideas and plans so he can interest both new investors and new employees. Since Tom is "an idea guy," he'll want to recruit a product manager to join his team sooner rather than later. Tom isn't really into the details; a product manager will ensure that everything is written down and kept current so Tom can focus on company issues instead of product issues.

Maybe you're like Tom. Cool! Not many people get to begin with a blank slate. You need to concentrate on the basics—personas and their problems—to convince your investors, your leaders, or your families to invest in your idea.



Let's get started

Nowadays, making software is less like building a home and more like maintaining one. After all software, like a house, is never really finished. Who doesn't have a list of home improvements on their "honey-do" list?

To implement these techniques, you can use Under10 Playbook software or you can use a paper system. You can often better visualize the movement of ideas from request to definition to build and launch when you use paper cards. Perhaps that's why many product teams use paper forms initially before moving to an automated system.

BUILD YOUR PLAYBOOK

Use the Under10 Playbook canvas to define your playbook. We've started the process document for you with a basic set of activities and artifacts. Add additional artifacts that are critical to your idea-to-market process.

Learn more about this product management approach in the new book, *Turn Ideas into Products*, available now.



Under10 Playbook Canvas™



LEARN		
FUTURE	NEXT	NOW
<p>DEFINE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expertise: Business Executive brief Product definition & vision Market problems & personas Opportunity scoring 	<p>DESCRIBE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expertise: Product Development brief Product stories™ & personas Competitive feature matrix Portfolio roadmap 	<p>DELIVER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expertise: Market Marketing brief Launch plans and tasks Product positioning Product roadmaps
<p>EVALUATE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expertise: Business Business model & pricing Competitive landscape Market sizing 	<p>BUILD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expertise: Product Product stories prioritization Product roadmaps Product story acceptance 	<p>MARKET</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expertise: Market Status dashboard Competitive matrix Sales enablement tools

From Under10 Playbook

Software and workshops for creating world-class products and product teams. At Under10, we help product teams apply industry best practices to their portfolio of products with proven tools and methods.

