

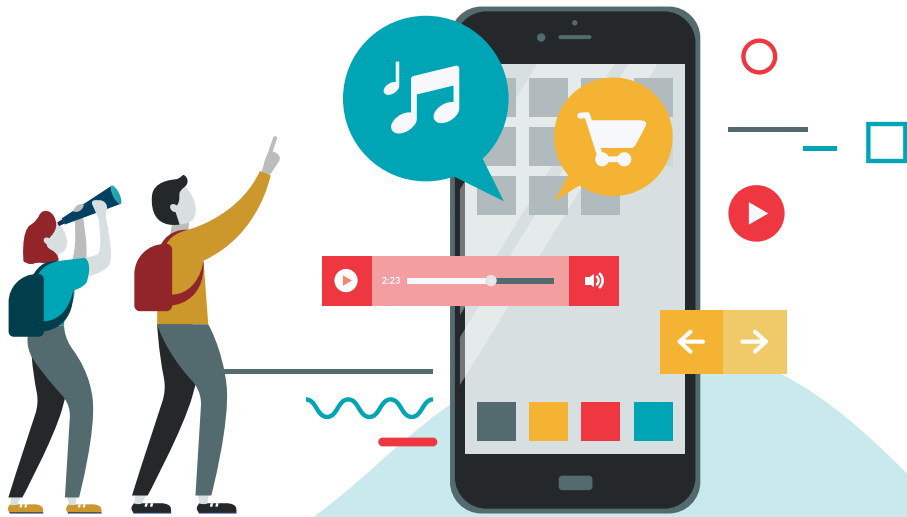
FROM IDEA TO SUCCESS:

The Ultimate Guide to Digital Product Development



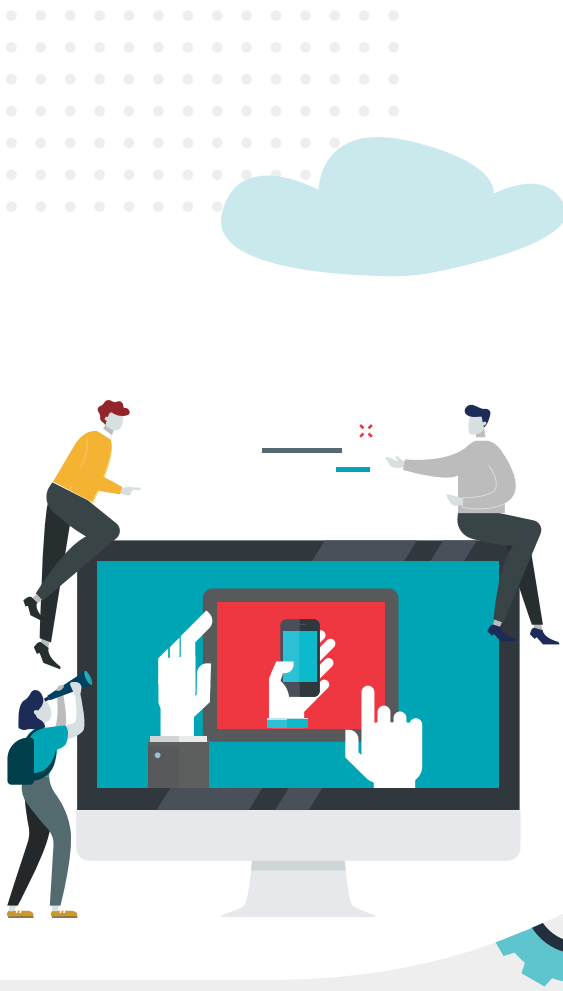
WIZELINE





Summary	03
Embarking on the Digital Product Development Journey	04
Defining the Vision	05
Positioning Statement	06
Validating an Idea	07
Pre-Mortem: Planning for the Worst	08
Aligning Stakeholders	09
Product Managers	10
Product Spec and Technical Spec	10
High-Level Architecture	11
KPIs and Smart Goals	11
Tips for Further Alignment	11
Prototyping	12
Customer Journey Mapping	13
Development	14
Sprint Zero	15
Successful Sprints	15
Testing	16
Continuous Wins	16
Launching and Marketing	17
Who, When, and How?	17
Foundations Spotlight	18
About Wizeline	19

Digital software products impact the world by fundamentally changing people's lives.



Companies like Uber, Netflix, Amazon, and Airbnb have taken digital innovation to staggering new heights, disrupting their respective markets with ground-breaking products that have profoundly changed user expectations.

To compete in this digital-first world, companies must innovate to survive. Whether it's to improve worker productivity, increase business performance, or better meet customer expectations, achieving these goals requires companies to set foot on the digital product development journey—a journey fraught with perils.

This ebook acts as a travel guide for that journey, drawing from Wizeline's many years of experience in product development.

Here we provide practical, actionable advice on defining and validating a product vision, as well as preparing for any inevitable challenges along the way. Readers can expect guidance on how to effectively align stakeholders and learn from end-users, before prototyping and moving into full product development.

No matter the journey, it's often dangerous to go alone, so take this book as a guide on the quest of digital evolution.

Embarking on the Digital Product Development Journey

As customer habits evolve and demand for fresh experiences increases, companies are under pressure to deliver paradigm-shifting software, often without the experience or know-how they need to develop these products successfully.

On the plus side, this demand and inexperience has paved the way for new products to emerge, as business leaders come up with fresh ideas to engage with customers, meet their competition head on, and permeate a digital culture throughout the company.

However, while a great idea has the power to change the world, companies are discovering that vision alone does not guarantee success.

Developing a game-changing product requires a strategic, disciplined focus on the desired business goals, as well as continuously developing the idea at every stage in the project lifecycle. Digital products must be constantly adapted to fit users' needs and provide positive experiences alongside changing customer demands. Success depends on stakeholders' ability to adapt themselves and learn from their users to suit the evolving marketplace.

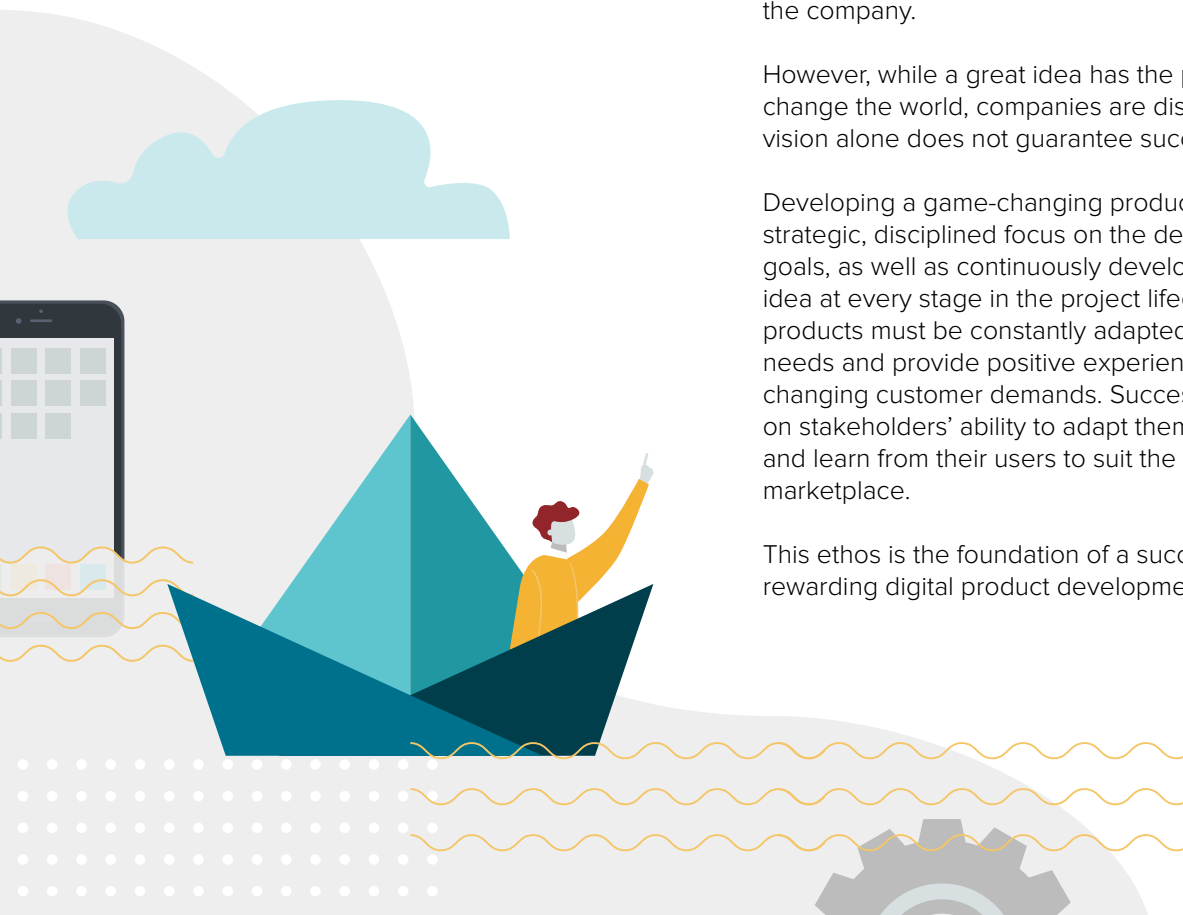
This ethos is the foundation of a successful and rewarding digital product development journey.



So where should companies start on this mission? Apps, websites, or chatbots? AI or augmented reality experiences? How about automated, self-service, virtual customer experience agents? The list of potential product areas is endless and intimidating.

Companies that set an attainable business goal instead of falling for the allure of flashy technology will find this much easier. This approach helps stakeholders formulate a strategy and decide which tech will suit the desired outcomes. For example, the end goal might be to build something that is used and adopted by customers who are satisfied with the benefits it provides. It is not simply about writing or designing software but providing a service and a discernible benefit to customers or users.

Following hundreds of successful digital product development projects, Wizeline has developed an efficient, effective strategy for achieving game-changing business goals. This ebook is a distillation of our knowledge and experience of the product development journey, giving companies a definitive roadmap for digital success.



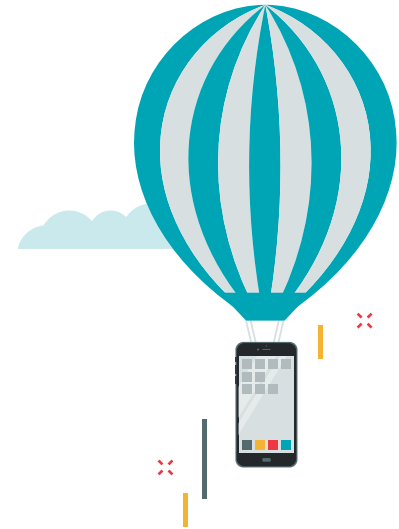
Defining the Vision

Great ideas can change the world, but even the best visions must be adequately defined, validated, and documented before they can be developed successfully.

The first stages in any digital product development journey are to understand what problem the idea will solve and for whom, as well as why it matters, how to justify an investment, and how to set the stage for more manageable expectations.

Establishing a shared understanding of the vision, including the target market, the problem, user personas, stakeholders, and end goals, is a necessary step toward success. A great way to do this is with a solid vision statement, which helps others to understand the intent of the product so they can contribute constructively.

“The first step is to understand what problem the idea will solve and for whom.”





Positioning Statement

A straightforward way to state your vision is through a positioning statement, which explains what the product is, who it's for, the problem it solves, the benefits it provides, the alternatives that already exist, and the optimal outcome that customers will realize from it.

Here is a simple formula to write a positioning statement that fits any product.

- **[Product name] is:** describe the product
- **For:** target customer profile
- **Who:** have a specific pain point
- **[Product] Provides:** key services/benefits
- **As opposed to:** alternatives/competition
- **So customers can:** realize an optimal outcome.

For example: **MD Near Me** (copyright Wizeline Inc.) is a mobile application **for** people traveling abroad **who** struggle to communicate with foreign doctors. MD Near Me provides a map and a list of doctors in their area who speak their language, **as opposed to** a generic map and navigation tools like Google Maps, **so customers can** quickly find a

medical expert who communicates in their native tongue.

Writing this out is a simple exercise that will align stakeholders to the core vision, while also helping to justify investment and convince stakeholders of the benefits. It is also helpful to add a finish line to that statement, which should be a specific, measurable goal that drives the entire product development process.

We will know we're successful when:
[target metric hits a predetermined level]

For example: We will know we're successful when 20,000 doctors and 500,000 users sign up to the platform.

While this is not a full outline of your expected ROI or KPIs, it serves as a tangible finish line and something to shoot for, which makes all the difference when trying to [align stakeholders](#).



Validating an Idea

To understand whether the vision is strong enough and the product is worth developing, it's vital to validate the idea before rushing into the [development phase](#). This validation process includes sizing the opportunity and projecting ROIs, researching the market for user demand and competition, and getting the company involved by communicating the product vision internally.

A vital part of the validation phase is mitigating the risk of unknowns by identifying assumptions inherent in the defined solution. This can be done by asking how the solution solves a problem, what that problem is, and what unknowns could be discovered along the way.



An example of an assumption might be that X number of people experience the problem that MD Near Me would solve—not having access to a doctor who speaks their language. In order to validate that, the team would need to conduct surveys with people who travel abroad (those who fit the customer profile) to create a sample size of the potential addressable market.

Top Tips for Idea Validation

Involve the team:

Companies can eliminate surprises and find it easier to get people on board if they have a voice.

Make it visual:

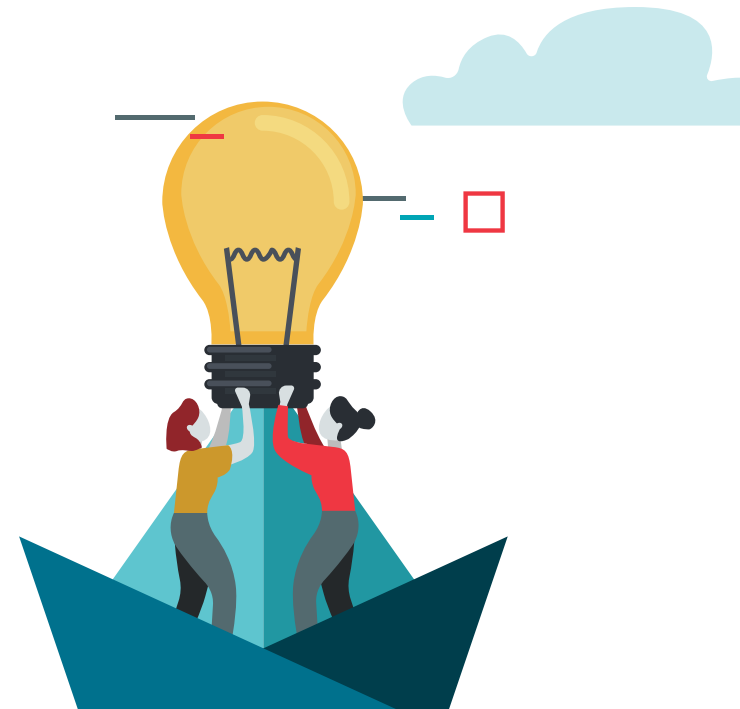
This makes it more tangible and compelling.

Repeat the message:

Give everyone the chance to get familiar with the details that matter.

Keep it current:

Continuously refine the vision help explain and justify the idea at any time.



All assumptions are worth considering, even the crazy ones, which may drive more creative and critical thinking about the plan. The more thought that goes into this process, the more risk is ultimately mitigated. Doing this in a transparent way will also increase confidence in the approach amongst stakeholders.



Pre-Mortem: Planning for the Worst

Taking place in the early stages, the pre-mortem is a session that gives everyone a chance to share their concerns about the project without consequence. Timing is vital in this exercise, as it must take place after the team is clear on the scope and objectives of the overall project.

The purpose of the pre-mortem is to unearth previously unanticipated risks so the team can develop proactive measures to address them. It is the opposite of the post-mortem, in which the team gets together to assess performance against expectations and devises a plan to adjust for the future. Getting the team to imagine a disastrous future is more effective than just asking the team to brainstorm risks.

Try prompting the team to imagine that the project has failed. Ask them to write down how this happened. This helps the team come up with tactics to avoid or mitigate risks, enabling them to assign owners responsible for driving each tactic during the actual project.

Mistakes happen when roles aren't clear. Assigning ownership in this way clarifies how stakeholders are expected to be involved. Also, when each individual knows how they make an impact, it can be highly motivating for them. One person should be responsible for each task: corralling stakeholders, compiling all the necessary information, and getting a decision made. This may or may not be the project's full-time owner,

depending on the decision, so assign people roles based on their individual strengths and the organization's structure.

Once the vision has been outlined and validated, and the team is prepared for any eventuality, it's time to bring all the stakeholders together and get everyone on the same page.

“ The pre-mortem gives everyone a chance to share their concerns without consequence.”

Aligning Stakeholders

Whether developing a digital product for a single client, for internal employees, or a wider customer base, there are always multiple stakeholders to consider. Each person involved with the project must align with the overall vision and business goals, while also getting involved with other stakeholders to promote transparency and collaboration along the way.

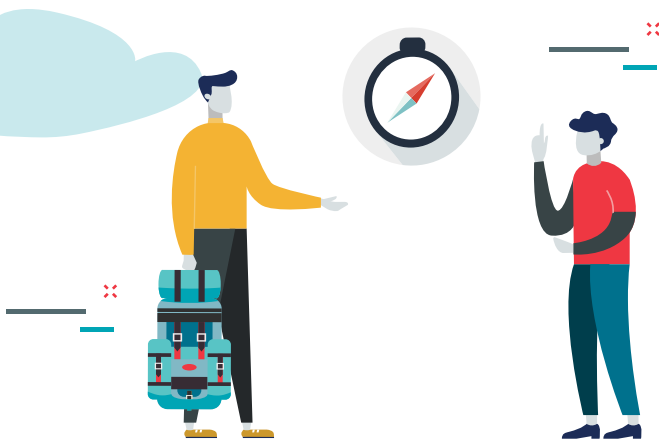
For example, design is not the sole responsibility of the design team, management is not only handled by the operations team, and security is not simply about making a final check at the end of the project. The most successful projects enable stakeholders to build out their capabilities at every stage in the product life cycle, which, in turn, encourages alignment.



Product Managers

The simplest and most efficient way to get everybody on the same page is to hire or assign a product manager to the task. A good product manager can juggle leadership, strategy, customers, go-to-market, research, and development all at the same time, keeping everybody aligned with the product and business goals along the way.

The best product managers will always listen and capture information from these key stakeholder groups, then translate, report, and escalate that information back to them in familiar formats with simple, actionable language. They will also automate the objective reporting of feedback, delivery status, and top-level metrics as the team or the product scales, all in the interest of solving the pre-defined market problem.



Product Spec and Technical Spec

Two useful tools for initially aligning stakeholders are the draft product specification and the technical specification documents. These take some time to compose but should reflect a lot of the work done in previous phases, so there is no need to reinvent the wheel.

The draft product spec establishes the initial single source of truth for product intent, requirements, outcomes, scope definition, user stories, and more essential context. It should communicate the product's value, usability, and feasibility to anyone that reads it. An excellent place to start is by writing a product overview, listing out success metrics and problem-oriented feature requirements, and adding a few user stories to highlight the problem and solution. It's essentially a more in-depth and robust [positioning statement](#).

The draft technical spec goes one step further, compiling the information required for the engineering team to design and describe a well-considered solution architecture. Based on the clearly stated product intent in the product spec, these documents can be written in parallel with

one another, but it helps if some version of the product spec exists before the engineering team starts writing because they share much of the same information. It should also cover aspects like technical design, related future improvements, and functionalities that may be out of scope for the project.

Keep in mind that because the tech spec is built on the information in the product spec, any changes to either document must be reflected on both. This can create a document management and change management nightmare if done in parallel or without proper coordination, so plan ahead before creating either document.

It's important to remember that, in an agile development environment, digital products are constantly undergoing many evolutions and iterative designs, so firm specifications should not be viewed as gospel throughout the project. Instead, think of these documents as a means to create stakeholder alignment before the iterative process begins.



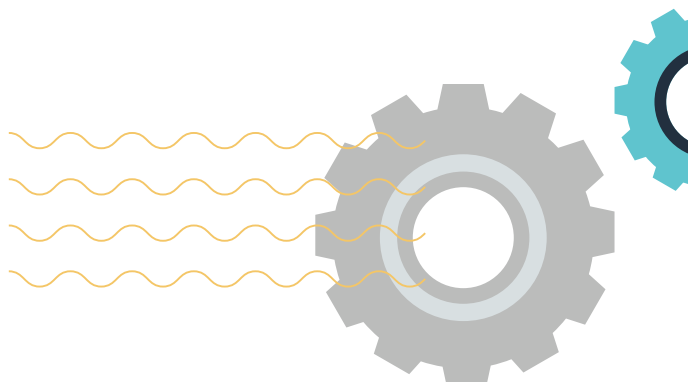
High-Level Architecture

Obviously not everything in the spec documents will make it to the first sprint—in many cases, the spec will evolve and some things may not make it to the product at all—but they are helpful for sparking conversations and keeping the big picture in mind.

A more fluid approach is to outline the product's architecture at a high level. It's recommended to develop a visual outline of the components that will be built, the capabilities required to build them, the problems that each component will solve, how they are linked to one another, along with the focus areas for each team involved.

This architecture many times mirrors your organizational structure, and vice versa, representing a visual map of the whole project that evolves alongside each new iteration—think a living, breathing family tree of components that should be constantly adapted when the project changes.

For those stakeholders who are most invested in the project, this essential diagram keeps them aligned throughout the entire product lifecycle, not just at the initial planning phase.



KPIs and Smart Goals

Stakeholders love results, and KPIs (Key Performance Indicators, for the uninitiated) give everyone something attainable to shoot for.

After extending the [positioning statement](#) to define success, it is helpful to validate the vision further by laying out SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound) goals. These goals may be multidimensional, but try to pick a single measure of success if possible.

Defining success in this way will keep stakeholders focused on the right things, help deflect tangential requests, and make assessment easier later down the line. Quantified benefits like this also help business leaders and project managers make better, more confident decisions.

SMART Goals

SPECIFIC

What do I want to accomplish?
Why is it important?
What are the requirements? Constraints?

MEASURABLE

How will I measure progress?
At what level will we realize success?

ATTAINABLE

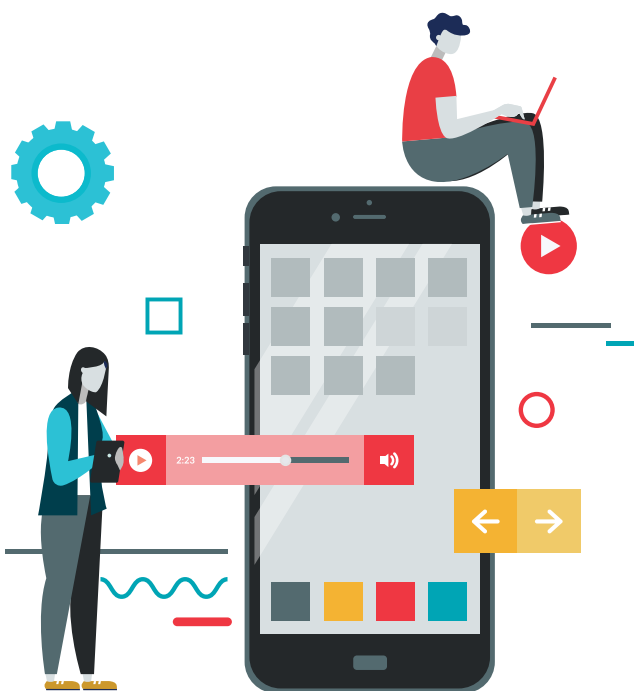
How can the goal realistically be accomplished?
What steps do we need to take?

Tips for Further Alignment

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Most stakeholders are experts at what they do, so take advantage of that and motivate them by bringing them into your process. It also helps to automate whenever possible. For example, a simple form in the right context can capture essential data much more efficiently. Finally, be transparent, within reason. People always like to know where they stand, so try to continuously share the plan, especially when things change.

With the vision defined and the stakeholders involved and aligned, it's time to work on designing and prototyping the first iterations of the product, exploring the customer journey, and applying user experience (UX) design thinking to the project.

Prototyping



Prototyping is one of the most important parts of the product development journey. With a scaled-down prototype of the product, developers can focus on its core functionalities and allow design proposals to be tested with users or shared with stakeholders. This helps to quickly gather feedback that can be incorporated before development starts on the final product.

The prototype only requires a basic design to showcase the main features and should not be integrated into the product's final architecture. Still, it's important to define the prototype's requirements from an early stage, as this helps to decide how big and how real it needs to be to serve its purpose.

The best prototypes take aspects like scope, aesthetics, interaction, and content into account from the offset. Establishing a clear purpose for the prototype is vital from the beginning, whether it's to gather customer feedback, get executive buy-in, or share new ideas with stakeholders. Knowing the prototype's purpose will be really helpful when

defining project scope and the level of fidelity required.

For example, when a cybersecurity company approached Wizeline to help develop a product, its purpose was to retain their foothold in the market, as many down-market competitors were starting to emerge.

The company had no in-house engineering capacity to build the product, and it was reliant on legacy systems and old documentation, so we started by running UX workshops to define the functionality for an MVP and beta versions of the new product. These prototypes were then demoed to help us gather user feedback and assess potential risks. This was looped back to the client and project stakeholders for continuous validation.

This approach to prototyping helped us stay laser-accurate on the final product's purpose: to give the company an edge in a competitive market.

Customer Journey Mapping

Once a prototype has been developed, it's advisable to begin mapping out the customer journey, a collaborative activity that helps stakeholders understand how users interact with a product across all relevant touch points.

This exercise is about defining and visualizing the flow of optimal user experience, providing constant awareness of the user's pain points in a specific context. It also gives UX designers better insight for improving a prototype, ultimately building a stronger foundation for the final product.

In order to map the customer journey, first define the groups of users and customers that will be

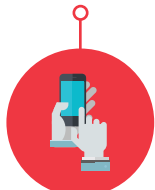
interacting with the product. Then, go over their behaviors, needs, and goals and document any gaps or new insights that arise in the process. Start with the user entry point, which is the the action that triggers users to arrive at the product, such as interacting with a Facebook ad.

Similarly, the exit point is defined as the moment when the user has accomplished what they needed to with the product, or if they abandon the product due to a big pain point. The steps in between are made up of each action the user takes to get from the entry to the exit.

Finally, try to break down how users might be feeling and thinking during each step. This helps determine the best and worst moments in the journey, allowing designers to fix issues or adapt the process to improve the customer experience.

This journey map should be shared across the organization, giving stakeholders the opportunity to understand how users will interact with the product. It also opens up the chance to work on new areas of opportunity that may have been discovered, easing the transition into full development.

ENTRY POINT



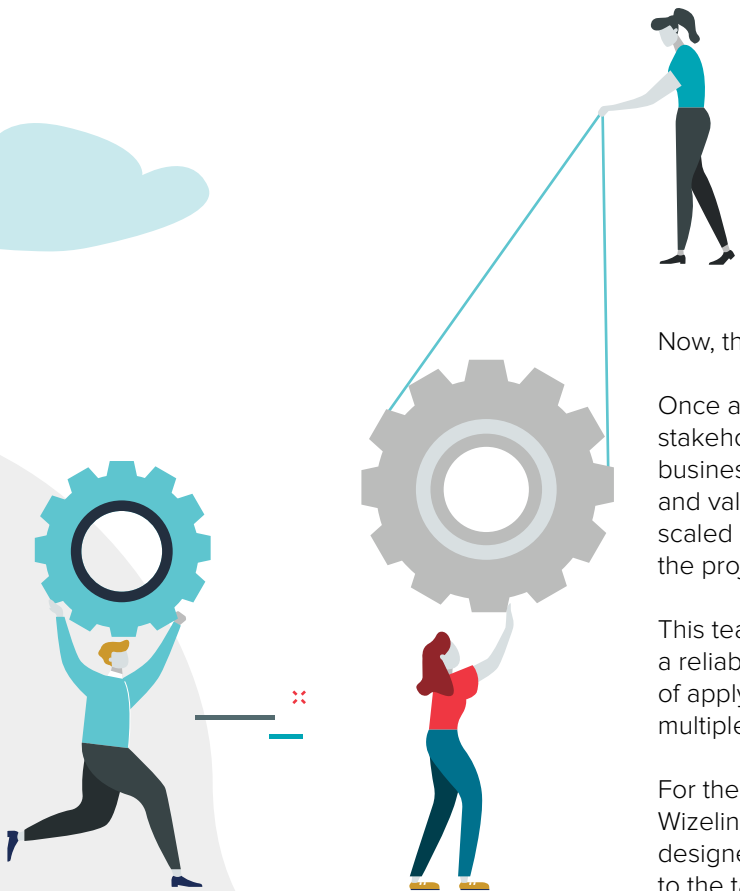
STEPS LOOP



EXIT POINT



Development



Now, the moment we've all been waiting for!

Once all of the preparation has been done, the stakeholders are fully aligned with the product's business goals, and the prototype has been tested and validated, the development team can be scaled up to take care of the most exciting part of the project: creating the final product.

This team can either be in-house or sourced to a reliable partner, but should be fully capable of applying agile development practices across multiple iterations of the product.

For the cybersecurity client we mentioned earlier, Wizeline assigned a team of six engineers, a UX designer, a technical writer, and a project manager to the task. Together, they hustled to create a new

product, building an API that could pull data from legacy systems and a new backend agnostic layer to enable the creation of future products. The team also delivered a library of processes, tools, and activities to help the client develop new products.

When tackling the challenge this way, the product took only nine months to develop, test, and deploy. The results were measurable gains in productivity, a number of additional new products launched, and the decommissioning of expensive legacy systems. This gave the client a distinct competitive advantage and great potential for increased sales.

Now, let's talk about how our teams make this possible.

Sprint Zero

The first sprint in the development process involves the tech team laying the technological foundations that the product requires. This includes deciding on which technologies to deploy and creating the environments for development, testing, and production.

Often, a quick proof of concept (PoC) is developed to help stakeholders understand the choices made by the dev team, and there are daily meetings to discuss ongoing progress, blockers, and questions that may arise at this stage.

This is also the time to set up a reporting system, project management tools, aggregation, and communications channels, such as Slack or Jira, to ensure the development team is transparent and always available. If dealing with an outsourced development partner, these steps are essential for maintaining a panoramic view of the project.

The process of setting up these technical and working foundations usually takes around two weeks, setting the stage for the real production to begin.

Successful Sprints

After sprint zero, developers will code every single day to complete the first iteration of the final product. While the overarching goal is to create a product that users can interact with, each sprint must have a specific goal, usually determined by the highest priority issues or features.

Along the way, developers will run into inevitable problems, so daily communication between stakeholders and coders is essential—the whole team must be fully committed to achieving each sprint goal for it to work.

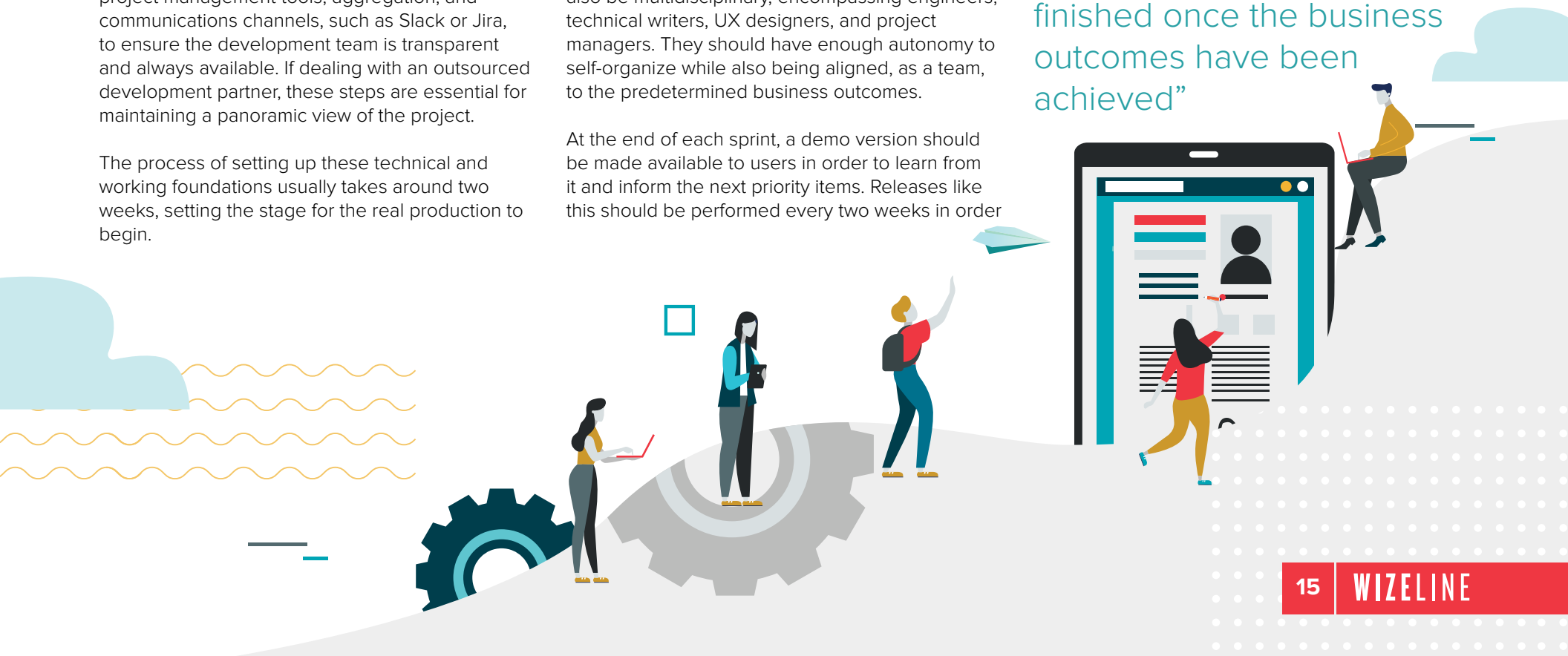
In order to be truly agile, development teams must also be multidisciplinary, encompassing engineers, technical writers, UX designers, and project managers. They should have enough autonomy to self-organize while also being aligned, as a team, to the predetermined business outcomes.

At the end of each sprint, a demo version should be made available to users in order to learn from it and inform the next priority items. Releases like this should be performed every two weeks in order

to get up-to-date and relevant user feedback. Assumptions that are more than a sprint old will be dangerously out of date.

It is not always possible to pin down a definitive end date to the development process, so think of it this way: the project is only finished once the business outcomes have been achieved. If the outcomes are achieved quickly, stakeholders may want to move the needle up, or identify insights that result in pursuing new outcomes.

“The project is only finished once the business outcomes have been achieved”



Testing

Once a polished version is ready for thorough testing, consider whether or not to test internally or with an open beta test.

An internal team, made up of internal stakeholders and end users, can provide more precise feedback, but this is limited to the devices, preferences, and behaviors of a small audience. An external, open beta test opens up the possibility to discover new pain points from a wide variety of users, which will likely extend the development process but will also result in a higher quality product.

Either way, testing is an essential part of the journey, as the insights uncovered by the process guide the final decisions that ensure the product is fine-tuned and ready for market, at least as a minimum viable product (MVP).

Continuous Wins

During the development phase, it's worth setting up the project and the team for a series of continuous wins. This involves setting very clear goals, measuring them, and communicating them to everyone involved.

By setting a particular outcome and setting expectations, it is possible to show that something that was not possible is now possible, giving teams and stakeholders the sense that they are winning. This can be supported by sharing documentation and communications throughout the company to give them something to shout about when the win is achieved.

Ultimately, it all comes down to trusting the team to achieve these wins, empowering them to make the correct decisions, and verifying the development trajectory with everybody, every step of the way.

Launching and Marketing

While it seems like the hard work is over, there is much more to be done to ensure the product's success. At this stage, the MVP is ready and its users have been defined and well researched. It's time to formulate a plan for launching it to the masses.

Whether the product is for an internal team or an external user base, the launch plan should be prepared well in advance of the MVP being ready. This foresight will prevent a mad scramble when development is complete and give the marketing team something to work with—it's much easier to adjust an existing launch plan based on the final product than come up with a new plan at the very last minute.

Who, When, and How?

Stakeholders in the marketing and sales departments are essential to the product's success, so be sure to allocate time for what they need and extend to them a high level of transparency and communication during the entire product development lifecycle.

The marketing team can help to build an audience for the product, even before it is ready. They can even be brought in to help define that audience during the validation stage and [pre-mortem](#). The [customer journey mapping](#) phase is directly linked to the target audience for marketing, so be sure to include the team in this exercise in preparation for the eventual launch.

Then there is the question of when to launch the product. Consider why certain times of the year may be more beneficial to announce it. For instance, it would be unwise to launch a summer bodies fitness app in fall, or a Christmas shopping app in mid spring. Users are also far less likely to interact with new products between Friday and Monday, so consider launching mid week, outside of the weekend lull and Monday madness.

Staggering the launch will help define a decent plan for the marketing team, while also building hype and anticipation for the product. For example, pre-launch might include writing related blog posts or announcing plans through email. The pre-launch could then introduce a website and offer pre-order

bonuses if selling the product to end users. Once the official launch date arrives, it's time to fire on all cylinders—social media, press coverage, events, training—and realize the original vision by sharing it with the world.

Don't forget to collect feedback from users at every possible moment during the launch phase. This vital information should be looped back to the development team so they can improve the product, add new features, and prepare it for the next iteration.

That's right. It's time to start the journey again and release version 2.0.



Foundations Spotlight

No matter how well the product journey is going, there is always the risk of misalignment, miscommunication, and differing expectations. To deal with this challenge, Wizeline has created an effective, standardized approach to product development planning called Foundations.

Foundations is a set of processes that align everyone on strategy and vision, ensuring that documentation is created and ownership is clearly defined when kicking off projects. Its core goal is to get delivery teams, clients, and stakeholders on the same page, which greatly increases the probability of successful project outcomes.

Wizeline's Foundations Workshops are comprised of three essential, sequential elements for success. Vision, documentation, and ownership.

1. Vision

Establish shared understanding of market, problem, persona, stakeholders and goals

2. Documentation

Create necessary artifacts to enable rapid delivery from distributed, cross-functional project contributors

3. Ownership

Define roles and responsibilities for healthy team-wide communication and collaboration

Outcomes:

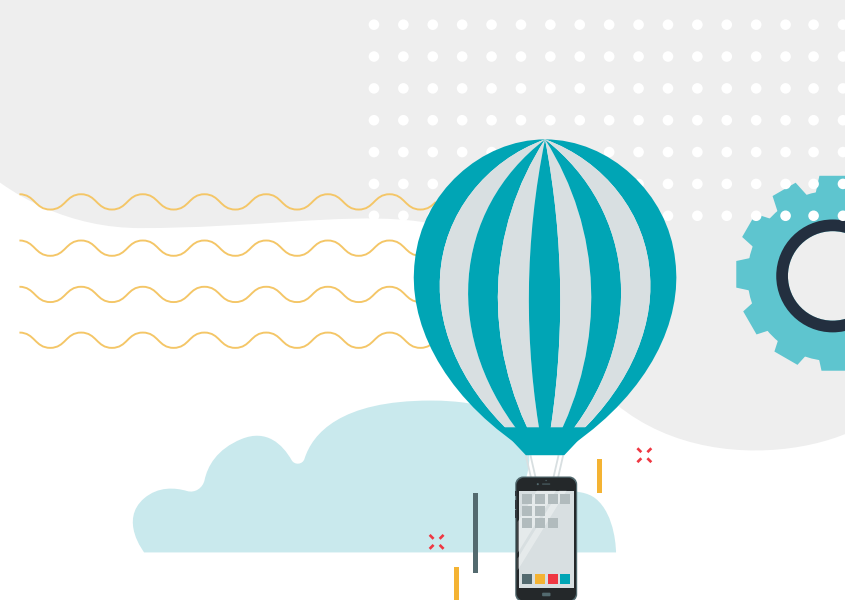
- Accurate project scope & expectations
- Tight alignment across all stakeholders
- High confidence in successful delivery



Through a mix of product strategy, user experience design, scoping, and product management workshops, Foundations helps clients start every project with a strong bedrock of alignment between strategy, design, and plan of action.

“Start every project with a strong foundation that aligns strategy, design, and plan of action.”

Our Foundations workshops expand on the advice in this e-book in great detail, giving clients the chance to learn first-hand about Wizeline's methods for a successful product development journey. This is the Wizeline difference.





About Wizeline

Wizeline is a global product development company that helps clients solve their biggest challenges with design and technology. Headquartered in San Francisco, Wizeline is committed to collaboration without borders by sharing Silicon Valley innovation with the rest of the world. The company has offices throughout Mexico, Vietnam, Australia, and the U.S. For more information, please visit www.wizeline.com/consulting.



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