



How to Get Product Launches Right

Have your product launches do what they're supposed to do

Introduction

Product launches are great. It's always rewarding to see months or years of work released into the world. Of course the butterflies never leave either - will people use this feature? Will they like it? Will it solve the problem we're hoping to solve? But still, you deserve a pat on the back for shipping something.

As a product team, your goal should be to push features out. But here's the thing: **shipping a feature is only the beginning**. The problem is that for many teams, "released something" is the only goal. How did it do? Who cares - it's released!

Having worked with many companies, we've realized: many teams get product launches wrong. What matters isn't getting a feature out, it's whether that features accomplishes its goals. And those goals need to be tied to both the product *and* the business.

There are many steps to doing product launches right. But in our experience, every product launch goes better when teams do these two things:

- Set success criteria that ties the launch to business outcomes.
- Distinguish short-term success (30 days or so) from long-term success (6 months to a year).

In what follows we'll walk through both of these. Read on to learn how to do product launches right!

Why do all this measurement? At Heap, we have two main reasons:

- Measurement helps ensure your launches are improving the business.
- Measurement makes sure you're using launches as opportunities to learn. Even unsuccessful launches can be enormously instructive. If you're not learning, you're not doing it right.



Before Launch

Getting a launch right means knowing what “right” means. To do that, you have to set out success criteria in advance. There is no substitution for doing this.

At Heap, our PM’s fill out a **Hypothesis Brief before even starting to design a new feature. We’ve included a short version at the end of this white paper.**

We’re sure it’s easy to see why this step is so important, but just in case:

- Clarify the problem you’re trying to solve, and makes you clarify how you’re trying to solve it.
- It forces you to articulate the change in behavior that will count as success.
- It forces you to establish the KPIs that you’re trying to move, and to spell out your mechanism for moving them.

When filling out your Hypothesis Brief, it’s important to be specific. The goal isn’t just to give you extra work. It’s to sharpen your view of your product, and give you the opportunity to think hard about what you’re trying to build, rather than storming ahead and building for the sake of building.

For this reason, an answer like “this feature will lead users to convert more” isn’t ideal, as it isn’t specific enough to measure. Better is, “this new feature will lead users to do X, which will change the way they do Y, which will raise retention rates and NPS score.”

PMs may be worried that they’re setting themselves up for failure by articulating success criteria in advance. To the degree that success means more than “shipping something new,” they’re probably right.

And if the launch doesn’t go as planned, they’ll have measurable information about why.

You can [download a complete Hypothesis Brief](#) from [heap.io](#).



After Launch

As we describe in the introduction, when launching a new feature, you want to **evaluate success on two different time frames**. In the immediate period post-launch, the focus should be on measuring and increasing adoption by the intended audience. In the longer term, you'll want to measure the impact your feature had on the business.

30 days after launch

***Note:** 30 days may not be the right time frame for your product. The goal is simply to choose a period in which enough people will have used your feature to give you a sufficient set of data. 30 days is often a good guideline for B2B SaaS products.

In the first month, you'll want to closely track adoption of your feature. Adoption is a complicated activity. At very least, it should measure whether users are getting value from your feature, rather than simply logging in. To track adoption properly, we like to ask the following questions.

Here's the first set of questions to ask:

- Are people engaging with the feature?
- How are users discovering the feature?
- What are users doing in our product before and after using this feature?
- Are they using it repeatedly, or are they trying it once and dropping off?

You can easily measure all of these in Heap.

Visit our [help center](#) to learn more.

You'll want to use an [After-Action Report](#).



30 days after launch

Active Usage Analysis

While the period immediately after launch should be dedicated to measuring adoption, the longer-term time frame is about measuring **the impact of the feature on your business.**

Remember, when designing a feature, you should have a persona in mind. “All users” is rarely the right category to design for. Rather, features should be designed for a specific type of user: new users, power users, resurrected users, and so on.

So, to see who is using your feature, you want to query usage among as many of the following categories as possible:

- Core users
- New users
- Resurrected users
- Power users
- Users with specific demographic features
- Users with specific behavioral features
(Users who have also done X thing in your product)
- Mobile vs Web users
- Users from different sources

Then go deeper. Once identifying who is using your feature, you can figure out how each group is using it.

- For each user group that is using the feature, how often are they using it?
- Are they using the feature in the way you'd imagined?
- Where in the user flow are they using the feature?



6 months to 1 year after launch

While the questions above are designed to measure adoption, the questions to ask six or twelve months after launch are about **the impact of your feature on the business.**

If you wrote a Hypothesis Brief before launch, you will have already targeted KPIs you want your feature to impact. Now is the time to measure them.

When doing this, it's important to be sophisticated about KPIs and metrics. Numbers can go up and do for all sorts of reasons. Your job should be to do your best to show that they increased *because of your feature.*

So how do you do that? The main strategy for this is to try to disprove your hypothesis. If your goal was to increase conversion, you'll want to track conversion rates in people who use your new feature and in people who don't use your new feature, then compare the difference.

Questions to ask 6 months to 1 year after launch.

How did your feature:

- Improve retention?
- Increase sales?
- Improve engagement?
- Reduce churn?



Conclusion

At Heap we believe deeply that one thing can make product launches more effective: data. The more you measure, the more you learn.

To get product launches right, you should always do both of the following:

- Use a Hypothesis Brief to spell out goals in advance
- Ask lots of questions about your data.

Do both of these, and you'll not only be able to verify the impact of your feature, you'll make sure you use every launch as an opportunity to generate knowledge about your product and your users.

Happy launching!

For more information, please visit heap.io.

