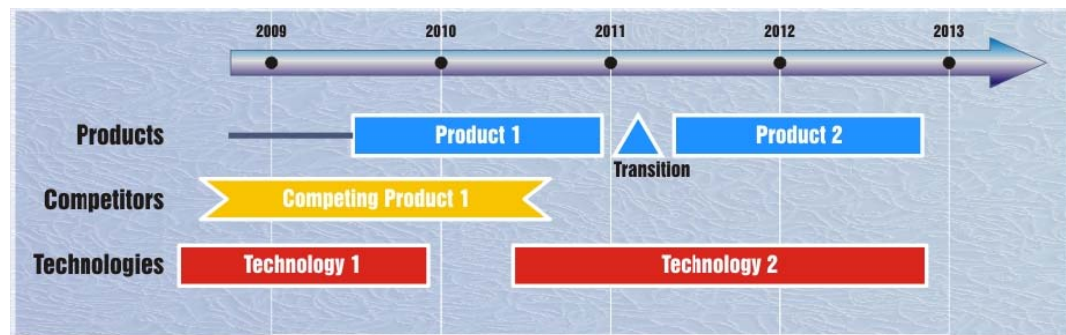


## INNOVATION ROAD MAPS

For the manager of complex product development, business planning and other innovation activities, it is crucial to organize information efficiently not only as a communication tool for the project team, but to provide a path for the activity. By systematizing the information visually, the process can be simplified and the goals and allocation of resources can be efficiently defined. Of course, finding and creating visualizations that do this well can be a tremendous effort in itself, however the rewards of properly created innovation visualization tools can be well worth it.

One of the main visualization tools that will be discussed in this article are *road maps*.

**Road mapping** is the practice of visualizing strategic planning information to communicate market, technology and product needs. Through the road mapping process, businesses and organizations achieve increased visibility across the enterprise, providing decision makers and management with information necessary to make more accurate and informed decisions about the development stream.



Sample Roadmap

Road maps are useful for capturing long-range innovation and development plans. The technique and tools of "road mapping" are one way of adapting to change because the road map allows you to visualize the many dimensions involved in strategy-driven innovation, including:

- The "Big Picture" views of planning strategy
- Project time line
- Collaborating fields and dependencies
- Resources needed to support the strategy
- The changing patterns of relationships

## INNOVATION ROAD MAPS

Roadmaps help define the *who*, *what* and *why* data of the innovation effort. A living document, the roadmap provides ongoing situational description of the innovation activity. It also acts as a database map for lots of other content relating to the development effort allowing users to drill down from the big-picture road map to detailed project plans, marketing and engineering documents or financial analysis documentation.

Depending on the project or development activity, multiple roadmaps may be used. Some of the main types of are: *market*, *strategy*, *technology*, *platform*, *product* and *visionary* roadmaps. Market road maps are used to project how the market will develop over the life cycle of the product. Strategy road maps are often tied to the market road map, but may also contain tactical assumptions. Platform road maps are used by organizations that want to develop product decisions around their core technology or process. Planning how the underlying core platform evolves is therefore extremely important. Product road maps are used to chart out how the product will develop. Visionary road maps, although mentioned last in this sequence are often undertaken prior to the others, as they define the essential aims or themes of the business or organization.

Road map creation is now available in innovation management software such as Accept 360, 280Group and Sopheon's Vision Strategist. Combined with effective database tools, this software combines the visual benefits of roadmaps with integrated drill-down ability. Software such as this allows the user to visualize and predict how external market and technology trends will impact product strategy over time, allowing better decisions on product direction or the introduction of new technologies. Centralization of product development planning information, simplifies the access of the data and utilization of it for roadmaps.

Innovation is a process that can and should be measured. Research and analysis indicates that companies applying road maps to the innovation process, in addition to the innovation successes and failures, are able to better manage innovation. Using road maps therefore not only allows the project team to track and advance their activity, but can be used as an analysis tool when examining projects underway or past projects. This feedback can then be applied and cycled into subsequent development projects.

The road map must be kept up-to-date and shared with the cross-functional team and partners outside the business or organization to be effective. Managing these tasks will present yet another operational challenge, but road maps are one of the key methods providing organization to the complex activity of strategy-driven innovation and product development.

On the whole, road mapping is an effective process for communicating long range planning and development strategies. Properly sharing roadmaps will help your organization build consensus about your needs, identify the technology and processes that will help meet those needs and configure the position needed to succeed at meeting those needs. ■