

how to get product management experience

How to Get Product Management Experience: A Practical Guide to Launching Your PM Career

how to get product management experience is one of the most common questions aspiring product managers ask when trying to break into this dynamic and rewarding field. Product management is a unique blend of strategy, design, technology, and customer insight, which means gaining hands-on experience can sometimes feel like a catch-22—you need experience to get the job, but you need the job to get experience. Fortunately, there are several effective ways to build relevant skills, demonstrate your value, and land that first product management role. In this article, we'll explore practical approaches, from leveraging side projects to networking smartly, all designed to help you accumulate meaningful product management experience.

Understanding What Product Management Experience Really Means

Before diving into how to get product management experience, it helps to clarify what kind of experience employers and hiring managers actually look for. Product management isn't just about managing a product's lifecycle; it's about owning the vision, understanding user needs, coordinating cross-functional teams, and delivering business results.

Product management experience can include:

- Leading product development from ideation to launch
- Collaborating with engineering, design, marketing, and sales teams
- Conducting market research and customer interviews
- Prioritizing product features based on data and business goals
- Analyzing product performance and iterating accordingly

You don't necessarily need to have held the official title of "Product Manager" to gain this experience. Many transferable skills and responsibilities from adjacent roles can count towards building your product management portfolio.

How to Gain Product Management Experience Without a Formal PM Role

1. Volunteer for Product-Related Tasks in Your Current Job

If you're already working in a company, even if it's in a different function like marketing, sales, or software development, look for opportunities to contribute to product-related initiatives. Many companies welcome employees who show initiative by helping with user research, feature prioritization, or product launches.

For example, you might:

- Assist the product team in gathering customer feedback
- Help create product requirement documents (PRDs)
- Coordinate cross-team meetings to align on product goals

By taking on these responsibilities, you'll start developing a portfolio of product management tasks that you can showcase in future interviews.

2. Build Your Own Side Project

One of the most powerful ways to demonstrate product management experience is by creating your own product. This could be a simple app, a website, or even a physical product. The key is to treat it like a full product lifecycle:

- Identify a user problem
- Validate the idea through research or MVP testing
- Define features and prioritize development
- Collaborate with developers or designers (even if freelance)
- Launch and collect user feedback for iteration

Documenting your process and results shows employers that you understand the practical challenges and responsibilities of product management. Plus, side projects are great conversation starters during interviews.

3. Take Product Management Courses and Certifications

While certifications alone won't replace real-world experience, they can provide foundational knowledge, frameworks, and terminology that are essential for product managers. Many online platforms offer specialized product management courses that include hands-on projects or case studies.

Look for courses that cover:

- Agile product development
- Roadmapping and prioritization techniques
- User experience and customer journey mapping
- Metrics and analytics for product success

Completing these courses also signals your commitment to the field and can sometimes lead to internship or mentorship opportunities.

4. Join Startup or Non-Profit Organizations

Startups and non-profits often have lean teams where people wear multiple hats. Volunteering or

working part-time with these organizations can expose you to product management responsibilities quickly. You might find opportunities to:

- Manage a product roadmap
- Coordinate between developers, designers, and stakeholders
- Conduct market research and customer interviews
- Drive product launches and marketing efforts

Even if the role isn't officially titled "Product Manager," the experience you gain can be invaluable and highly relevant.

Networking and Mentorship: Unlocking Hidden Opportunities for Product Management Experience

1. Connect with Experienced Product Managers

Building relationships with current product managers can open doors to opportunities like shadowing, mentoring, or even referrals. Attend industry meetups, webinars, and conferences focused on product management. Engage in online communities like LinkedIn groups, Slack channels, or forums such as Mind the Product.

When you connect, be genuine and clear about your goals. Ask questions about their career path, challenges they face, and advice on how to get started. Many PMs appreciate enthusiasm and may offer guidance or introduce you to projects where you can gain experience.

2. Seek Informational Interviews

Informational interviews are a low-pressure way to learn more about the product management role and get advice from insiders. Prepare thoughtful questions about daily responsibilities, key skills, and how they built their own experience. These conversations can sometimes lead to recommendations for internships, freelance projects, or entry-level roles.

Using Internships and Entry-Level Roles as Stepping Stones

If you're early in your career or switching fields, internships and associate product manager (APM) programs are excellent paths to gain structured product management experience. Many tech companies and startups offer rotational programs that expose you to multiple aspects of product development.

While these roles may not be highly paid initially, the learning and networking opportunities are

invaluable. They provide a safe environment to practice:

- Writing user stories and acceptance criteria
- Analyzing product metrics
- Collaborating with cross-functional teams
- Handling stakeholder communication

Landing such a role often requires demonstrating your passion and foundational knowledge, so combine this approach with side projects and networking to strengthen your candidacy.

Leveraging Transferable Skills to Build Product Management Credibility

Even if you haven't held a PM title, you likely possess skills that overlap with product management. Highlighting these is crucial when applying for product roles.

Some transferable skills include:

- Project management: Coordinating timelines, resources, and deliverables
- Data analysis: Interpreting user data or business metrics to inform decisions
- Communication: Facilitating discussions between technical and non-technical teams
- Problem-solving: Addressing customer pain points or process inefficiencies
- UX/UI understanding: Familiarity with design principles and user experience

When updating your resume or LinkedIn profile, frame your accomplishments in terms of product outcomes. For example, instead of "managed social media campaigns," say "led initiatives to improve user engagement by understanding customer needs and iterating on content strategy."

Tips for Documenting and Showcasing Your Product Management Experience

When it comes to convincing hiring managers you have product management experience, how you present your journey matters a lot.

- **Create a detailed portfolio:** Include case studies from side projects, internships, or volunteer work that outline your role, challenges, solutions, and results.
- **Quantify your impact:** Use numbers wherever possible, such as percentage increases in user engagement or revenue growth.
- **Highlight cross-functional collaboration:** Product managers work across teams, so emphasize your experience in coordinating diverse stakeholders.
- **Share your learning process:** Demonstrate how you used market research, data analysis, or customer feedback to inform decisions.
- **Use storytelling:** Engaging narratives about overcoming obstacles or leading successful launches make your experience memorable.

Many product managers also maintain blogs or write articles about their product thinking. This can further establish your expertise and passion.

Breaking into product management requires a blend of strategic learning, practical experience, and proactive networking. By exploring diverse avenues—from side projects to internships and leveraging transferable skills—you can gradually build a compelling portfolio that showcases your readiness for a product management role. Remember, every step you take toward understanding your users, driving product decisions, and collaborating with teams adds to your experience and brings you closer to your career goals.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are some effective ways to gain product management experience without a formal PM role?

You can gain product management experience by volunteering to lead projects within your current role, collaborating closely with product teams, managing side projects or startups, taking relevant online courses, and seeking mentorship from experienced product managers.

How can internships help in gaining product management experience?

Internships provide hands-on experience by allowing you to work on real product challenges, understand the product lifecycle, collaborate with cross-functional teams, and develop essential skills such as prioritization, user research, and roadmap planning.

Is it beneficial to transition from related roles like business analyst or project manager to product management?

Yes, transitioning from roles like business analyst or project manager can be beneficial as these positions involve stakeholder communication, requirement gathering, and project coordination, which are valuable skills in product management. Leveraging your existing experience can ease the transition.

Can building and managing your own product or startup help in gaining product management experience?

Absolutely. Building and managing your own product or startup allows you to experience the end-to-end product development process, including ideation, market research, development, launch, and iteration. This hands-on experience is highly valuable for aspiring product managers.

What role do online courses and certifications play in acquiring product management experience?

Online courses and certifications can help you learn the fundamentals of product management, frameworks, and tools. While they don't replace real-world experience, they complement practical learning, help you understand best practices, and make you more attractive to employers.

How important is networking and mentorship in gaining product management experience?

Networking and mentorship are crucial as they provide guidance, insights, and opportunities to work on product-related tasks. Mentors can help you navigate your career path, and networking can connect you with projects, internships, or job openings relevant to product management.

Can participating in hackathons or product management workshops help build experience?

Yes, participating in hackathons and workshops simulates real-world product challenges, encourages teamwork, rapid problem-solving, and product thinking. These experiences allow you to practice prioritization, user empathy, and MVP definition, which are key product management skills.

Additional Resources

How to Get Product Management Experience: A Strategic Guide for Aspiring Professionals

how to get product management experience remains a pivotal question for many aspiring professionals aiming to break into one of the most dynamic roles in the technology and business sectors. Product management, often described as the intersection between business, technology, and user experience, requires a unique blend of skills and practical exposure. However, acquiring relevant experience can be challenging, especially for those without direct access to product teams or formal roles. This article delves into strategic approaches and practical insights on how to get product management experience, supported by industry trends and actionable steps.

Understanding the Landscape of Product Management Experience

Before exploring methods to gain product management experience, it is essential to understand what constitutes that experience. Product management involves overseeing the lifecycle of a product—from ideation and development to launch and iteration. Experience in this field encompasses not only managing products but also collaborating cross-functionally with engineering, design, marketing, and sales teams.

LSI keywords such as "product lifecycle management," "stakeholder collaboration," and "market research skills" are integral to any discussion about product management expertise. Candidates with hands-on involvement in these areas tend to be better prepared to transition into dedicated product

roles.

The Role of Formal Education vs. Practical Experience

While formal education—such as degrees in business administration, computer science, or specialized product management courses—can provide foundational knowledge, many hiring managers place a premium on demonstrated practical experience. Educational credentials can serve as an entry point but must be complemented by real-world application.

Research from the Product Management Festival suggests that 78% of hiring managers prefer candidates with prior product ownership or management experience over those with only theoretical knowledge. Hence, understanding how to get product management experience through practical avenues is crucial.

Effective Pathways to Gain Product Management Experience

1. Internal Transition Within Your Current Organization

For professionals already employed in tech or business roles, leveraging internal opportunities can be a strategic way to build product management experience. Many companies encourage cross-functional collaboration and may offer rotational programs or shadowing opportunities within product teams.

Engaging with product managers to assist in specific tasks—such as writing user stories, analyzing customer feedback, or prioritizing features—can build relevant skills. This approach benefits from existing company knowledge and network, reducing barriers that external candidates often face.

2. Volunteering for Product-Related Projects

Volunteering for projects that require product management tasks is another viable route. Startups, nonprofit organizations, or open-source initiatives often seek help managing product backlogs, coordinating releases, or conducting competitor analyses.

This type of experience is especially valuable because it offers a hands-on environment with a degree of autonomy and accountability. Additionally, it enriches your portfolio with tangible results that can be demonstrated during interviews.

3. Building and Managing Your Own Side Projects

Creating a product independently—whether a mobile app, website, or digital service—provides unmatched insight into the end-to-end product management process. This route not only teaches critical skills like user research, MVP definition, and roadmap planning but also fosters entrepreneurial thinking.

While self-driven projects may lack the scale of corporate products, they serve as compelling proof of initiative, problem-solving abilities, and commitment to the craft.

4. Leveraging Product Management Certifications and Bootcamps

Structured training programs such as Pragmatic Institute, General Assembly, or Product School offer certifications that simulate real-world product scenarios. These bootcamps often include capstone projects that mimic the lifecycle of actual products, giving participants a controlled environment to apply concepts.

Though certifications alone do not replace experience, they can significantly enhance understanding and provide credentials that validate your knowledge to potential employers.

Essential Skills to Cultivate While Gaining Experience

Acquiring product management experience is not solely about the duration spent in product roles but also the development of specific competencies. The following skills are critical:

- **Customer Empathy:** Understanding user pain points and needs through qualitative and quantitative research.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Utilizing analytics tools to inform prioritization and measure success.
- **Cross-Functional Communication:** Navigating conversations between engineering, marketing, sales, and leadership.
- **Roadmap Planning:** Defining product vision and aligning features with business objectives.
- **Agile Methodologies:** Familiarity with Scrum or Kanban frameworks to manage product development cycles.

Focusing on these skills during internships, side projects, or volunteer work accelerates the acquisition of meaningful product management experience.

Industry Trends Shaping Product Management Experience

The evolution of product management demands that candidates stay current with emerging trends such as AI integration, data privacy considerations, and remote team management. Incorporating these topics into your learning and practical projects can distinguish you in a competitive job market.

For instance, understanding how to incorporate AI-driven features or comply with GDPR regulations can be part of your product management toolkit, reflecting a modern and holistic approach to product stewardship.

Common Challenges in Gaining Product Management Experience and How to Overcome Them

One of the primary obstacles is the "experience paradox," where employers require experience for entry-level roles, yet candidates cannot gain experience without employment in those roles. To navigate this, aspiring product managers must adopt a proactive mindset, seeking alternative avenues such as internships, apprenticeships, or contract roles that offer exposure.

Another challenge is the broad scope of product management, which can be overwhelming. To mitigate this, focus on specialized niches initially—such as growth product management, technical product management, or UX-focused product roles—before expanding your expertise.

Networking and Mentorship

Building relationships with established product managers can provide invaluable guidance and open doors to opportunities. Platforms like LinkedIn, industry meetups, and product management forums enable meaningful connections.

Mentorship programs, whether formal or informal, help aspiring professionals understand the nuances of the role and receive feedback on their progress. This human element often accelerates learning beyond what self-study or courses can offer.

Conclusion: Navigating the Journey to Product Management Expertise

The quest for how to get product management experience is multifaceted, demanding a blend of strategic planning, skill development, and practical exposure. By actively engaging in internal company projects, volunteering, creating side products, and pursuing targeted education, aspiring product managers can build a compelling portfolio that resonates with hiring managers.

Success in this field hinges not only on acquiring experience but also on demonstrating adaptability,

analytical thinking, and effective collaboration. As product management continues to evolve, professionals who proactively seek diverse experiences and embrace continuous learning will be well-positioned to thrive.

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how to get product management experience: The Practitioner's Guide To Product Management Jock Busuttil, 2015-01-06 Product management has never been a more necessary or in-demand discipline for both technology startups and more established companies. Through technology, we have the means to enrich our work and leisure time in ways people, even just a few years ago, could only have dreamed about. It is easier, cheaper and quicker than it ever has been before to create technology products in both software and hardware. Everything is continually changing and the pace of innovation is perpetually increasing - just look at 3D printing. Product management is the art, science and skill of bringing a successful product to life. In The Practitioner's Guide To Product Management, Jock Busuttil looks what product managers do, how the role came to be, how it's still continuing to evolve, and why it's such good news that there's no prescribed route to becoming one. Busuttil also delves into examples of the good, the bad and the ill-advised products to consider why they succeeded and failed and give you the inside track on avoiding all the common product management pitfalls. The book examines the fine line between success and failure and reveals nine ways you can increase your product's chances of success. If you're new to product management and wondering what it's all about or if you're a product manager shooting for professional success, this book will give you the inside track on starting, developing, and then selling a new product.

how to get product management experience: Product Management For Dummies Brian Lawley, Pamela Schure, 2017-01-05 Your one-stop guide to becoming a product management prodigy Product management plays a pivotal role in organizations. In fact, it's now considered the fourth most important title in corporate America—yet only a tiny fraction of product managers have been trained for this vital position. If you're one of the hundreds of thousands of people who hold this essential job—or simply aspire to break into a new role—Product Management For Dummies gives you the tools to increase your skill level and manage products like a pro. From defining what product management is—and isn't—to exploring the rising importance of product management in the corporate world, this friendly and accessible guide quickly gets you up to speed on everything it takes to thrive in this growing field. It offers plain-English explanations of the product life cycle, market research, competitive analysis, market and pricing strategy, product roadmaps, the people skills it takes to effectively influence and negotiate, and so much more. Create a winning strategy for your product Gather and analyze customer and market feedback Prioritize and convey requirements to engineering teams effectively Maximize revenues and profitability Product managers are responsible for so much more than meets the eye—and this friendly, authoritative guide lifts the curtain on what it takes to succeed.

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you to the wisdom and knowledge from a group of the world's leading product management experts. Among the contributors, there are leading authors, professors, CEOs and vice presidents, bloggers, consultants, trainers, and even a few salespeople and engineers. In total, there are over five centuries of collected wisdom represented here. The contributors each share one rule they think is critical to succeed in product management based on their hands-on product management and product marketing experience with companies such as Apple, eBay, Intuit, SAP, and Yahoo!

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how to get product management experience: The Product Manager's Toolkit® Gabriel Steinhardt, 2017-05-15 This book provides a consistent and holistic managerial approach to product management and presents a practical and comprehensive methodology (roles, processes, tasks, and deliverables) that covers all aspects of product management. It helps students of product management, product management practitioners, product management organizations, and corporations understand the value, theory, and implementation of product management. It outlines a practical approach to clarify role definitions, identify responsibilities, define processes and deliverables, and improve the ability to communicate with stakeholders. The book details the fundamentals of the Blackblot Product Manager's Toolkit® (PMTK) product management methodology, a globally adopted best practice.

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professionals. This book takes an often complicated job and provides clear direction. With its proven strategies and practical examples, product managers can maximize their return on investment and ensure their organization's success. Brad Morton, Senior Vice President, Product Management, Morehead Associates Reading this book, I relived my early days - finding my way as a new product manager. It made me wish there had been a practical guide available to navigate the practice of product management then. Take Charge Product Management is that practical guide for beginning product managers! The substance of the book also provides seasoned professionals with a wealth of actionable information on the art and science of product management. David Murdock, Director, Consulting Services and Product Management at Quorum Health Resources A fast-paced and comprehensive approach to product management shedding needed light on the role, responsibilities, and job expectations, and providing the necessary tools for product managers to succeed. A fantastic read for executives looking to create a new product management organization and hire the right people for the job! David Palkoner, Director of Product Management, Solucient, LLC. About the Author Greg Geracie is the President and Founder of Actuation Consulting, LLC., providing product management advisory services, training, and consulting to organizations nationwide. Actuation Consulting is the culmination of over 23 years' experience in product management and marketing leadership positions for start-ups, private equity-backed ventures, mid-sized companies, and multi-billion dollar corporations.

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how to get product management experience: Product Management Essentials Aswin Pranam, 2017-12-12 Gain all of the techniques, teachings, tools, and methodologies required to be an effective first-time product manager. The overarching goal of this book is to help you understand the product manager role, give you concrete examples of what a product manager does, and build the foundational skill-set that will gear you towards a career in product management. To be an effective PM in the tech industry, you need to have a basic understanding of technology. In this book you'll get your feet wet by exploring the skills a PM needs in their toolset and cover enough ground to make you feel comfortable in a technical discussion. A PM is not expected to have the same level of depth or knowledge as a software engineer, but knowing enough to continue the conversation can be a benefit in your career in product management. A complete product manager will have a 360-degree understanding of user experience and how to craft beautiful products that are easy-to-use, with the end user in mind. You'll continue your journey with a walk through basic UX principles and even go through the process of building a simple set of UI frames for a mock app. Aside from the technical and design expertise, a PM needs to master the social aspects of the role. Acting as a bridge between engineering, marketing, and other teams can be difficult, and this book will dive into the business and soft skills of product management. After reading Product Management Essentials you will be one of a select few technically-capable PMs who can interface with management, stakeholders, customers, and the engineering team. What You Will Learn Gain the traits of a successful PM from industry PMs, VCs, and other professionals See the day-to-day responsibilities of a PM and how the role differs across tech companies Absorb the technical knowledge necessary to interface with engineers and estimate timelines Design basic mocks, high-fidelity wireframes, and fully polished user interfaces Create core documents and handle business interactions Who This Book Is For Individuals who are eyeing a transition into a PM role or have just entered a PM role at a new organization for the first time. They currently hold positions as

a software engineer, marketing manager, UX designer, or data analyst and want to move away from a feature-focused view to a high-level strategic view of the product vision.

how to get product management experience: Product Management Simplified

Gurucharan Raghunathan, Lokesh Kannaiyan, 2022-01-06 More than 80% of the PMs are not having clarity on the right resources to become a PM • Nearly 50% of the PMs are taking more than 12 months to gain awareness of the different roles and responsibilities of a PM • Nearly 60% of the PMs are taking more than 6 months to learn the fundamental concepts of a PM This book is crafted with the step-by-step procedure, case studies and proven methods to get your product management basics right. This book also provides a structured approach to transition into product management from diverse disciplines such as engineering, project management, sales, marketing and customer support. Testimonials Product Management Simplified is a great starting guide for an aspiring Product Manager. Laid out in a very illustrative and easy to read manner, the book does a very good job of hand holding the reader through the various nuances and techniques of product management... - Raghu Ramanujam, Director of Product Management, Flipkart Experienced PMs can get benefitted by connecting all the dots by leveraging comprehensive coverage of Product Management fundamentals and relevant frameworks.. - Javed Beg, Director of Product Management, Oracle I highly recommend this book to anyone who is exploring product management as a career choice or anyone who wants to move to the next level in their PM journey... - Dinesh V, VP Product Management, OrangeScape ...Guru and Lokesh have laid out the steps to effective and successful Product Management through insightful data, lucid representation and witty presentation... - Arks Srinivas, President, Career Launcher Educate Ltd.

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Tabassum Memon, 2021-11-12 Turn your platform into the next big thing with expert advice to scale and implement a proven growth roadmap across multiple channels Key FeaturesGain expert insight about platform business models and how they're different to linear productsExplore the end-to-end platform life cycle, from developing a strategy to measuring the outcomeFollow real-life examples to discover the most effective growth strategies your platformBook Description Scaling a platform is a lot different than scaling a product. This is why product managers developing or transitioning to a platform model are often facing completely new challenges - both technical and strategic. But if you want to build the next Amazon, Netflix, Spotify, or a completely new type of platform, then you need to adopt a platform-first approach to change how you invent, develop, and market solutions. This is where Effective Product Platform Management comes in. This book addresses product management as a critical pillar of platform development. It'll help you understand the difference between traditional and modern product management for platforms and even decide whether the platform

business model is the way to go for you. As you progress, you'll be able to build the right platform strategy, define the MVP, and focus on ongoing backlog prioritization for successful platforms. This book will also walk you through the practical steps and guidelines that can ease your organization's transition from linear products to platforms. By the end of this platform product management book, you'll have learned the essential aspects of product management for building successful and scalable platforms. You'll also have a clear understanding of the next steps you need to take to perfect and execute your new platform strategy – and take on the world. What you will learn

Understand the difference between the product and platform business model
Build an end-to-end platform strategy from scratch
Translate the platform strategy to a roadmap with a well-defined implementation plan
Define the MVP for faster releases and test viability in the early stages
Create an operating model and design an execution plan
Measure the success or failure of the platform and make iterations after feedback

Who this book is for If you're a product manager, product owner, product director, or a business executive working on a platform strategy and its day-to-day execution, then this book is for you. It will also be useful for change managers and program managers tasked with transitioning from products to platforms. You won't need any prior knowledge of platform strategy or platform transitioning before you get started, since the book covers all the basics – but taking notes to reflect on your journey as you work through the practical examples in this book is recommended.

how to get product management experience: API Analytics for Product Managers Deepa Goyal, Kin Lane, 2023-02-21 Research, strategize, market, and continuously measure the effectiveness of APIs to meet your SaaS business goals with this practical handbook

Key Features
Transform your APIs into revenue-generating entities by turning them into products
Meet your business needs by improving the way you research, strategize, market, and measure results
Create and implement a variety of metrics to promote growth

Book Description APIs are crucial in the modern market as they allow faster innovation. But have you ever considered your APIs as products for revenue generation? API Analytics for Product Managers takes you through the benefits of efficient researching, strategizing, marketing, and continuously measuring the effectiveness of your APIs to help grow both B2B and B2C SaaS companies. Once you've been introduced to the concept of an API as a product, this fast-paced guide will show you how to establish metrics for activation, retention, engagement, and usage of your API products, as well as metrics to measure the reach and effectiveness of documentation—an often-overlooked aspect of development. Of course, it's not all about the product—as any good product manager knows; you need to understand your customers' needs, expectations, and satisfaction too. Once you've gathered your data, you'll need to be able to derive actionable insights from it. This is where the book covers the advanced concepts of leading and lagging metrics, removing bias from the metric-setting process, and bringing metrics together to establish long- and short-term goals. By the end of this book, you'll be perfectly placed to apply product management methodologies to the building and scaling of revenue-generating APIs. What you will learn

Build a long-term strategy for an API
Explore the concepts of the API life cycle and API maturity
Understand APIs from a product management perspective
Create support models for your APIs that scale with the product
Apply user research principles to APIs
Explore the metrics of activation, retention, engagement, and churn
Cluster metrics together to provide context
Examine the consequences of gameable and vanity metrics

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