IT ROADMAPS EXPLAINED WITH EXAMPLES



This article takes a look at a few of the different types of roadmaps and provides some samples that you can leverage in your own strategic planning initiatives.

What is an IT roadmap?

Before we can start talking about roadmaps, we need to understand what one is. An IT roadmap is a strategic tool that can help graphically illustrate both long-term and short-term plans. In short, it says where you are and where you plan on going within the next few years. There are several different types of roadmaps depending on what area you want to chart a course for.

Let's take a look at:

- Service roadmaps
- Infrastructure hardware roadmaps
- Strategy roadmaps
- Technology roadmaps

Service Roadmap

The service roadmap is focused on the IT Services that you provide the organization. These can be especially useful when explaining what services you plan on retiring or spinning up over the next few years. The service roadmap contains a list of all your services. It allows you show at a glance:

- The services you are spinning up
- The services you are maintaining
- Which services are in preparation for retirement
- The services that will replace any services that may be scheduled for retirement

Let's look at some great examples of service roadmaps.

University of Michigan

One excellent example is from University of Michigan. They have developed a concept called a Michigan Enterprise Strategic Assessment (MESA). This is one of the few examples I have seen that breaks the traditional graphical "Gantt style" representation of a roadmap. They instead plot services on a curve that provides a lot of information at a quick glance.

Take a look at the U-M example.

University of South Carolina

Another great service roadmap example comes from the University of South Carolina, University Technology Services. They take a different approach in presenting their roadmap. This example shows three main areas of investment as well as what efforts they have deferred. It also provides a great example of what technologies they are retiring, and which ones will be taking their place (if any).

This example is great for CIOs to get a perspective on all of the systems they are responsible for. *View the USC example.*

Infrastructure Hardware Roadmap

An infrastructure hardware roadmap is focused on the infrastructure equipment in service. This type of roadmap is my favorite way to show senior IT leadership when specific models of gear will be retired.

The infrastructure hardware roadmap is best used for areas where you have a large amount of equipment. This one also works great with any spreadsheet application.

One Example

The first column is a list of models of equipment. The second column is the number of that model you have in service. Then, there are additional columns for each fiscal year in which you want to show your intent for that model. Then you color code your intent for each fiscal year. I like using four different colors.

Color	Meaning
	Keep Buying
	Operational
	Renew contract / Major Decision
	Retirement

For example:

Item	Mfr / Model	Qty	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22
Switch	MySwitchCo Model 5000	50				
Switch	MySwitchCo Model 7000	25				
Firewall	MyFirewall Co Model 2000	2				
Firewall	MyFirewall Co Model 1000	5				

The technology roadmap lets you see a great deal of information at-a-glance. In our example above you can tell that the Model 5000 switches are being phased out in FY20. However, we are going to keep buying the 7000's until FY22. For firewalls, we have a contract decision in FY21 and FY22.

In this example I used network switches and firewalls. However, it also works for servers, storage or any component of infrastructure that has a high item count and needs a defined lifecycle.

Strategy Roadmap

A strategy or sometimes called a strategic intent roadmap lays out the work ahead based on the strategic goals of the organization. This type of roadmap provides an excellent way to visualize your strategic plan.

In most roadmaps of this style, the organizational goals are on the left side of the roadmap with a Gannt style timeline that describes the implementation timeline. If there are several supporting projects that role up into a larger strategic goal, you can show those individually as well.

Saint Louis University

Saint Louis University has done a very good job with their Strategic Technology Roadmap Summary. This example follows the Gannt style chart. It has a listing of all their IT projects and which goal they align with. They have also added color coding for project status. This is an excellent addition that gives leaders some indication as to which goals are at risk. The only thing missing from this great roadmap is a timeline summary for each goal.

Consider using Saint Louis's roadmap next time you are presenting your strategic plan to an executive committee or board of directors.

Technology Roadmap

The technology roadmap typically displays various projects that support technology stacks within your organization. This type of roadmap is typically very high level and is great for demonstrating how your products align with your overall technology portfolio. This is similar to the strategic roadmap.

However, rather than being focused on the strategic goals of the organization, it more closely resembles your organizational structure. If you want to see what your network team, Applications, service delivery and other groups have planned at a glance, then the technology roadmap is what you are looking for.

Smartsheet's Free Roadmap Templates

While Smartsheets offers their own tools for creating roadmaps they have links to several templates

that can be used with other products.

I especially like their technology roadmap. It has separate grouping areas for each technology area and also incorporates service quality and trends. It does a great job of combining projects that may not directly align with one it area and projects that do. Best of all, the template is available for download and can be used with your favorite spreadsheet application.

Wrapping up IT roadmaps

As you can see, there are several different types of roadmaps that can be used depending on your situation. I have listed just a few examples here, but there are many more to choose from. You may also find roadmaps that are categorized different than what I have presented. Regardless of what type of roadmap you choose, remember that communication is what the listener does. Know who your audience is for your roadmap and make sure you choose a roadmap that aligns with their interests.

Related reading

- BMC Business of IT Blog
- BMC Service Management Blog
- IT Management: Get Started with Help from Two Experienced Joes
- IT Strategic Planning: Why is an IT Strategy So Important?
- IT Project Management: Concepts, Solutions & Best Practices
- IT Spending Trends Today