

BUY A FEATURE

Goal: Prioritize Features

Which feature will entice customers to purchase your product? Which feature will cause customers to upgrade? Which feature will make customers so happy that they'll ignore or tolerate the features that they wish you would fix or remove?

Product planners endlessly debate these and other kinds of questions. Choosing the right set of features to add to a release often marks the difference between short-term failure or long-term success. Unfortunately, too many product planners make this choice without involving the people most affected by it – their customers. Buy a Feature improves the quality of this decision by asking your customers to help you make it.

The Framework

Create a list of potential features and provide each with a price. Just like for a real product, the price can be based on development costs, customer value, or something else. Although the price can be the actual cost you intend to charge for the feature, this is usually not required. Customers buy features that they want in the next release of your product using play money you give them. Make certain that some features are priced high enough that no one customer can buy them. Encourage customers to pool their money to buy especially important and/or expensive features. This will help motivate negotiations between customers as to which features are most important.



This framework works best with four to eight customers in a group, so that you can create more opportunities for customers to pool their money through negotiating. Unlike Product Box, Buy a Feature is based on the list of features that are likely to be in your development road map.

How to Use the Framework

While one of the more complicated frameworks to set-up, Buy a Feature is designed to assist with process of prioritization before you make decisions on which features to include and which features to cut. Buy a Feature is also one of my favorite frameworks since it is accessible, easy-to-play and fun. There is something about introducing play money to an interaction that lowers people's inhibitions to playing games "at work".

The key to this framework is to briefly present the features so the participants can quickly understand what the features are about and recognize the benefits of the feature. In my experience, all you have is about one line to describe the feature and another line to describe the benefits. If you write (or explain) much more than that, it tends to slow down the game. In addition, only provide the players features your business have questions about. If you know you are going to develop the feature or that the feature must be in the product, there is no point to include it in the game unless as a sanity check, i.e. we want to confirm the customer will indeed buy this feature.

The next facet you need to reflect on is the pricing. Pricing is very subjective in this framework. My only advice is to price the most valuable, or difficult to implement, features higher than the others. By pricing these features higher, you ensure the players must collaborate in order to buy these features. If features are truly desirable by many of the customers and end users, they will pool their money to buy it. It is also important to have really cheap features available to leverage someone's desire for an "impulse buy".

In my experience, the best way to start with pricing is to give each feature a tee shirt size - XS, S, M, L, XL, XXL or XXXL. Next, assign dollar amounts based on a range for the tee shirt size. For instance, a small would have a range of \$20-\$30, a medium would range from \$50-\$70 and so.

Finally, the last element to consider is how much total money to introduce into the framework. Too little money and the game is over too fast with minimal interaction. Too much money and there is no sense of scarcity. As a general rule, there should be enough money to buy between 45%-55% of the features. For example, if the cost of all the features is \$2000, the players should have money supply of between \$800 and \$1300. Normally, money is evenly distributed among the players.

While the framework is being played, pay attention to the game interactions. Make a note of which features were bought first, generate the most discussion and the ones that remain after all the money is spent. Be sure to ask the players why some features were more enticing than others and why some features were bought faster than others. Note which players cooperated with one another and try to understand what motivated them to work together to purchase the features they desired.