Mobile
Product
Manager

How the role is evolving in 2020

HEADY

Intro

In a connected mobile ecosystem that gets more complex each day, the role of mobile product manager has never been more important, or more challenging. Plenty of attention has been paid to mobile product managers (MPMs) in recent years. But the pace of change is only accelerating. The job is changing. And only those MPMs who can supplement their management skills with deep mobile expertise and understanding of the product landscape will be able to keep their teams ahead in the race.

There is no "traditional" path to become a MPM. Heady MPMs come from marketing, from computer science, from project management, and more. But what our

MPMs all have in common is an obsession with user journeys, product design and development, a level-headed vision for how to achieve it, and the benefit of shared tribal knowledge.

At Heady, we're a little obsessed with mobile products. Our MPMs are more than a little obsessed. So here's a look at their roles, what they see happening in the mobile landscape now, and where it's going next.

"You're the voice for the person who's not there, whether that's the user or the developer or the client."

Marina
Product Manager at Heady

From Maintenance to Enhancement

Mobile product managers, at the most basic level, are tasked with keeping mobile products running consistently in an environment of constant change. As new vendors emerge, rules evolve, and technology pivots, a MPM's work of "lifecycle management" is an always-on responsibility. It begins with product maintenance: making sure that bugs get fixed, code gets updated, security remains strong, and more. But for skilled, future-focused MPMs, maintenance is simply a foundation for the real work: app enhancement.

Mobile product enhancement involves the refinement and improvement of products: proactive changes that are grounded in user insights. (Think new features, improvements to the user interface (UI), refreshed technology.)

These product refinements, a key part of mobile product lifecycle management, almost always originate in one of three places. They come from a business need, a user need, or a tech advancement.

Mobile product managers are responsible for balancing all three elements in considering any enhancement. In other words, MPMs must make sure that product changes both delight users and further the business, while taking advantage of new opportunities presented by the underlying technology.

"If you're not moving forward, you're falling behind."

Jake
Product Manager at Heady

For example: let's say that Company X's leadership team is interested in a technical advancement in location-tracking. Company X wants to activate location-tracking in its app, so that it can gather and leverage additional user data.

This is where a mobile product manager shines. The MPM in charge of Company X's app must use what they know about mobile trends and user habits to develop a strategy for implementing location-tracking that those users will find acceptable—or, even better, appealing. Maybe the MPM recommends that users get targeted discounts based on their location, or can see when friends are nearby. In this way, the MPM finds a way to enhance the product for both the business and the users.

In a Complex Ecosystem
Mobile Product Managers Must Be Agile

Location-tracking is just one example of mobile tech, in an ecosystem that is growing and diversifying at breakneck speed. It's the mobile product manager's responsibility to stay aware and deeply informed about new technologies—and to translate both maintenance requirements and enhancement opportunities to business executives

Given the increasingly complex tech landscape and the unique, small-screen requirements of mobile devices, MPMs must be cutthroat prioritizers. At Heady, MPMs execute both maintenance and enhancement priorities using the agile process. This requires the MPM to create detailed roadmaps, set goals and deadlines, and manage their developer teams during two-week sprints. The agile process also allows MPMs to act quickly when new opportunities arise.

Staying in lockstep with app users and on top of new technologies and trends requires that mobile product managers live and breathe their products. A great MPM will always do this, whether they work in-house or at a partner organization. And in fact, partnering rather than hiring brings with it a few key advantages.

"You need to be really, really in tune with your user, because you have limited screen space and infinite technologies to work with."

Katarina
Head of Product Management at Heady

Future-Proof Mobile Product Managers

In the future, the mobile ecosystem will be even more complex than it is today. So mobile product managers must be constantly developing new strategies for their lifecycle management responsibilities. The "tribal knowledge" generated at an organization like Heady, where mobile products are our sole focus and MPMs share knowledge, is key to such continuous evolution.

In the future, missteps in product changes will be even more costly than they are today. The knowledge-rich environment of a mobile-focused organization like Heady provides some protection against missteps. Heady MPMs are empowered to move their teams through maintenance tasks efficiently and pursue industry-first enhancements confidently—because they must also complete thorough research and validation of any idea.

Therein lies the other meaningful advantage to partnering for mobile product management: consistent, thorough vetting of any and all ideas. Given the existential relationship between mobile app success and a partner firm's success, the bar for decision-making is simply higher for MPMs at a company like Heady. The ultimate winner in such a scenario? Undoubtedly, it's the brand.

Mobile tech will continue to be fast moving, as the world grows hungrier for the hyper-targeted, personalized experiences that mobile products provide. Every brand needs a mobile product manager who understands the discipline of delivering exceptional experiences to the brand's users, while balancing business requirements and emerging tech. In choosing that manager, companies would do well to consider not just today's definition of the role—but where it's headed.

"We have to prove an idea is a good idea if we want it to be implemented, which is super valuable for a Brand Partner."

Marina
Product Manager at Heady

About Heady

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Heady is a mobile product consultancy building sustainable innovation through design and technology.

We design locally and build globally, using teams in clients' regions who work side-by-side with international engineering talent. Our people collaborate on equal footing to create cohesive, collectively vetted products. We are proud of our business model, our competitive prices, and our intuitive design.

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