

Feature prioritization

A strategic guide for time-strapped product managers



Table of contents

Introduction to feature prioritization	01	Structuring feature requests and prioritization	13
What is feature prioritization?	02	How to gain customer feedback for data-backed prioritization	14
The importance of strategic prioritization	02	4 techniques for managing feature prioritization	17
How to streamline the decision-making process	03	Key metrics for evaluating feature success	19
Top 5 feature prioritization frameworks	04	Successful feature prioritization case studies	20
Comparison of key frameworks	08	Learning from past decisions and adjusting strategies	21
Overcoming common challenges in feature prioritization	09	Finding the next big thing to build with Dovetail	22
The power of the 5 Ws and H in product management	11	Conclusion and key takeaways	25
		Turn raw data into actionable insights in minutes	26

Introduction to feature prioritization

This feature prioritization guide empowers your teams to make data-driven decisions, helping you identify and prioritize the new features that will captivate users and accelerate market success.

Use this guide to refine your insight-gathering process, apply structured frameworks that prioritize high-impact features, and form strategies that drive customer satisfaction and long-term loyalty.

What is feature prioritization?

Feature prioritization is selecting the most valuable features to add to a product based on strategic criteria. It's a process that helps teams weigh factors like impact, relevance, complexity, and cost to make reliable, high-impact decisions.

This process involves applying various frameworks to assess each feature's importance, potential value, and ROI.

Using these frameworks, you and your team can make well-informed choices that align with customer needs, drive satisfaction and loyalty, avoid wasting valuable resources, and strengthen your competitive advantage in the market.

The importance of strategic prioritization

The choices your team makes today shape the future of your products and set the course for success. Yet, prioritizing the right features is a constant challenge. If you're like most product managers, you run into:

- Conflicting priorities from multiple stakeholders
- Balancing diverse perspectives across teams
- Adapting to evolving customer expectations
- Limited evidence to predict feature impact on customers and the business

You want to deliver features that benefit your customers. However, your team needs clear, data-backed methods to streamline the process, make reliable and efficient decisions, and focus on the most important features for your users.

How to streamline the decision-making process

In product management, choosing one course of action can mean sacrificing resources for other equally important initiatives that could enhance customer experience (CX). So, using proven frameworks can streamline your decision-making process and improve the reliability of pursuing a new feature.

This approach enables confident, data-driven decisions that align with customer needs while balancing stakeholder demands and conflicting priorities.

6 steps for getting started

The process of choosing which features to build involves a series of deliberate actions and six key best practice steps:

STEP 1

Issue identification

Setting out the issue you want to address. This step is essential for clarifying the focus of the decision-making process. It ensures that the team addresses the right problem or opportunity.

STEP 2

Data collection

Gathering relevant information and feedback is crucial for understanding the context and implications of the decision. For instance, this can include user feedback, market research, and performance metrics.

STEP 3

Solution ideation

Brainstorming potential solutions fosters creativity and encourages diverse perspectives. This step is critical for generating a range of options to consider.

STEP 4

Assessment

Evaluating the feasibility of solutions and predicting outcomes helps teams prioritize based on potential impact and resource availability. Metrics like cost, time, and ROI are essential.

STEP 5

Deciding

Making decisions based on evidence and established frameworks is vital to ensure that the chosen features align with strategic goals and user needs.

STEP 6

Review

You can improve your decision-making by reflecting on each choice's effectiveness and identifying key takeaways for future decisions. This step is crucial for continuous improvement, as it allows you to establish feedback loops by regularly gathering input from your team, stakeholders, and customers and using that feedback to refine your approach and prioritize features more effectively next time.

Top 5 feature prioritization frameworks

To make better, more informed, and relevant decisions for your customers, using established frameworks is helpful. These can assist your team in weighing up the different aspects of features, assessing impact, and considering ROI to make the decision-making process more reliable.

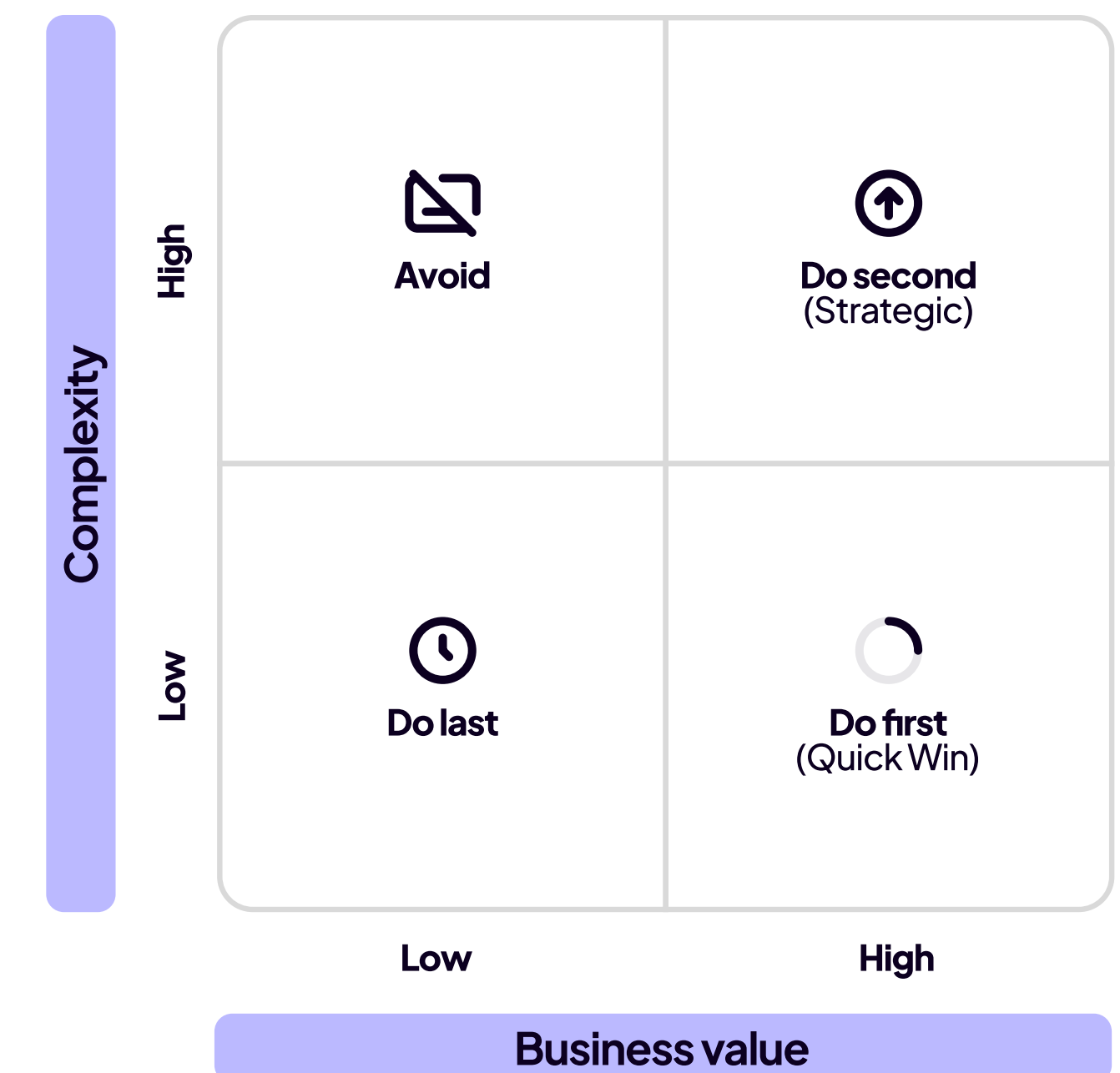
FRAMEWORK 1

Value vs. Complexity Quadrant

The Value vs. Complexity Quadrant is a process for visually assessing potential features' merit by plotting them on a two-axis graph: value (impact) and complexity (effort). Here's how it works:

- **Identify Features:** List the features or initiatives you want to evaluate.
- **Assess Value:** Rate each feature on its potential value to customers and the organization, using a scale (e.g., 1 to 5) where higher scores indicate greater value. Consider factors like customer satisfaction, market demand, and business impact.
- **Evaluate Complexity:** Rate each feature numerically based on the implementation complexity, where lower scores reflect less complexity. Consider aspects such as development time, resource requirements, and technical challenges.

- **Plot on the Quadrant:** Place each feature on the quadrant based on its value and complexity ratings. Features that fall into the high-value, low-complexity quadrant will get priority.
- **Prioritize:** Focus on features in the high-value, low-complexity quadrant for quick wins, but also consider strategic initiatives from other quadrants based on your overall goals.



FRAMEWORK 2

MoSCoW method

The MoSCoW method helps teams rank the importance of features for prioritization based on their essentialness to the overall product.

The acronym stands for:

- **Must-have:** Critical features that the product cannot function without.
- **Should-have:** Important features that enhance the product but are not essential to its core functionality.
- **Could-have:** Desirable features if time, budget, and resources allow.
- **Won't have (this time):** Features not needed for the current project iteration but may be considered for future releases (this helps prevent scope creep). In some cases, the "W" may also stand for **Optional** or "Wish" items, which are not required now but may be later.

FRAMEWORK 3

Weighted scoring

A weighted score chart is a tool that assigns numerical values to each feature based on specific criteria, typically using a scale of 1 to 5. Each criterion is weighted according to importance, allowing for a more nuanced assessment. Typical criteria include customer satisfaction, feasibility, technical complexity, and business value.

The overall score for each feature is calculated by multiplying the assigned values by the corresponding weights, helping teams prioritize features based on their relative impact.

	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4	Overall Impact	Impact Score
Weighting	5X	4X	3X	2X		
Feature / Project #1	5	5	3		58	5
Feature / Project #2	5	3		2	45	4
Feature / Project #3	1	3			27	2.8
Feature / Project #4	3		2		21	2.5
Feature / Project #5	1			3	13	1.7

FRAMEWORK 4

Kano model

The Kano model is a customer-centric framework that analyzes how product features influence customer satisfaction. When using the Kano model, product teams gather a list of proposed features and evaluate them according to their ability to satisfy customers and the investment required for implementation. The model classifies features into five categories:

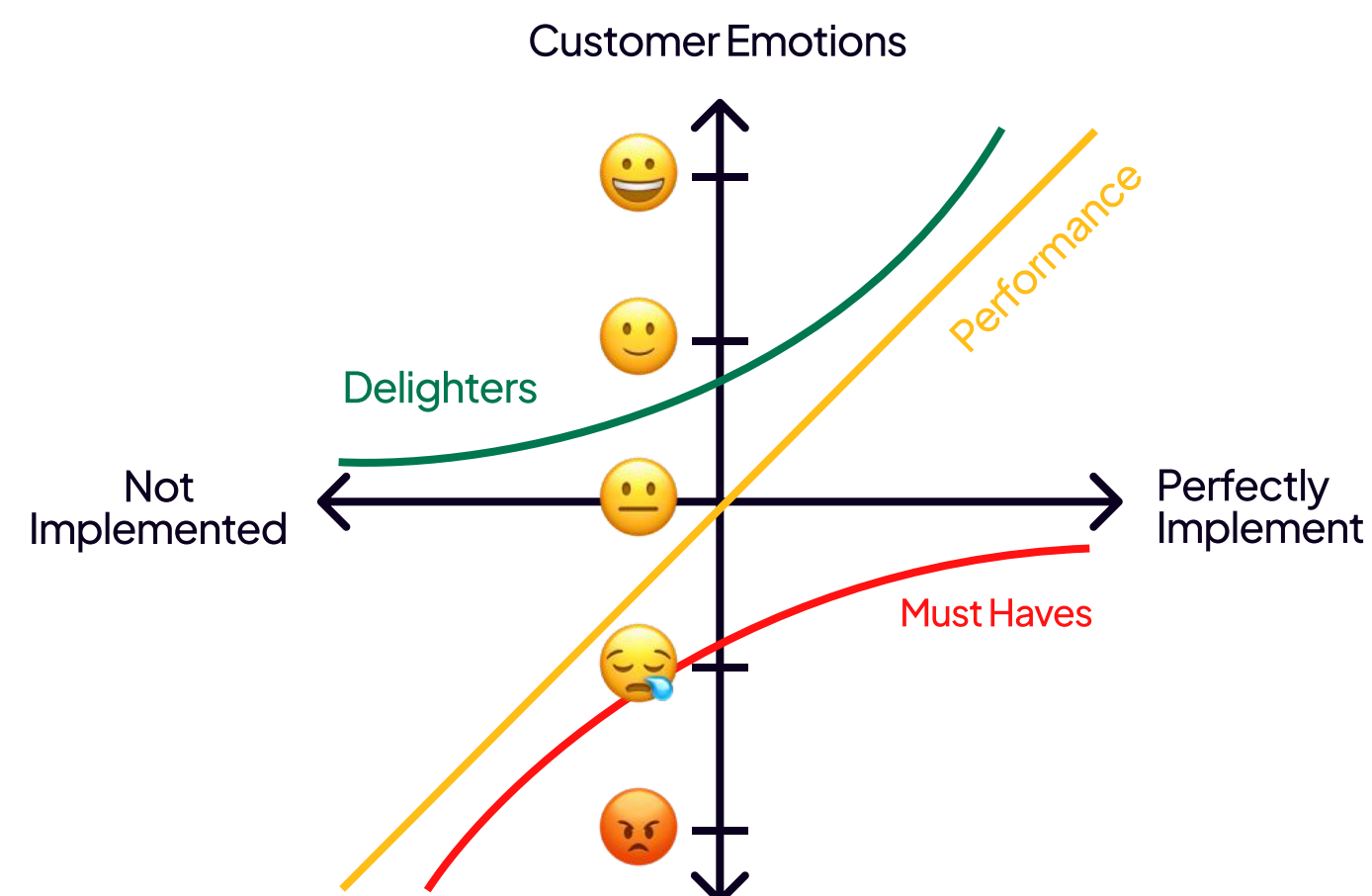
- **Basic:** Essential features necessary for the product to work as intended; their absence can lead to dissatisfaction.
- **Performance:** Features directly related to product performance, where improvements increase customer satisfaction.
- **Excitement:** Innovative features that deliver unexpected delight and significantly enhance customer satisfaction when present.
- **Indifferent:** Features that will have little or no impact on customer satisfaction.
- **Dissatisfaction:** Features that may hurt customer satisfaction if included (or poorly executed).

To gather these insights, product teams design a survey that asks users questions like:

- How would you feel if this feature were present in our product?
- What would your reaction be if you did not have this feature?
- How important is this feature for you?

Respondents can use a scale with options like:

- I like it that way
- I expect it to be that way
- I am neutral
- I can live with it that way
- I dislike it that way



Once you have your survey results, you must analyze what they mean. You can do this in two ways: discrete analysis and continuous analysis.

Discrete analysis breaks down responses into groups, such as looking at where your users are from—like North America, Europe, or Asia—to see how different regions feel about features.

Continuous analysis measures how much users like a feature by giving each answer a score; the higher the score, the more influential the feature is, while a low score suggests it may not be necessary. After analyzing the results, you'll discover which features users love (and which they don't want).

Use this information to prioritize your work: start with must-have features, add the nice-to-have ones, and consider a few extra features that could impress users. This approach allows you to plan different delivery phases (like MVP, Release 1, Release 2) without overwhelm.

FRAMEWORK 5

R.I.C.E. method

The R.I.C.E. method is a prioritization framework used to evaluate potential features or initiatives based on four key factors: Reach, Impact, Confidence, and Effort. Here's how it works:



Reach

Estimate how many people or customers the feature will affect within a specific timeframe. This could be a percentage of your user base or a target market. The higher the reach, the more valuable the feature.



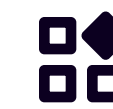
Impact

Evaluate the potential impact of the feature on your goals, such as customer satisfaction, revenue, or engagement. A higher impact means the feature will make a significant difference to the business or users.



Confidence

Assess your confidence in your estimates for reach, impact, and effort. This is typically rated as a percentage, where 100% represents complete certainty. Lower confidence means more uncertainty in your predictions.



Effort

Calculate the amount of time, resources, and team effort required to implement the feature. This is often measured in person-months or a similar unit. The less effort required, the higher the potential return on investment.



Score

To prioritize, multiply the reach, impact, and confidence, and then divide by the effort. This gives you a score that helps you rank features and determine which ones should be prioritized. Features with higher scores represent better opportunities for success.

Comparison of key frameworks

There’s no perfect tool or framework for deciding which features to prioritize. Each of these frameworks has its benefits and drawbacks. Product teams often rely on multiple frameworks and methods to help them strategize.

Framework	Pros	Cons
Value vs. Complexity Quadrant	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Helps prioritize projects by balancing implementation ease with potential customer and business valueUseful in agile environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Relies on subjective value, leading to potential biasesInconsistent prioritization among stakeholders
MoSCoW Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Simple to use for categorizing features into Must-Haves, Should-Haves, Could-Haves, and Won't-HavesFacilitates clear communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Subjective categorizations can lead to disagreementsOften lacks data-backed rigor in decision making
Weighted Scoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Offers a systematic approach to prioritization, making decisions more objective through assigned weights to criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Complexity in setting up the scoring system can be dauntingMay overwhelm teams without sufficient data or experience
Kano Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Focuses on customer needs and satisfaction, guiding teams to enhance the UX significantly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">May oversimplify decision-making by neglecting other critical factors like technical complexity and organizational constraints
R.I.C.E. Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Offers a balanced, data-driven approachSimple to calculate and scoreFocuses on maximizing ROI	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Relies on subjective estimates, which can introduce biasMay oversimplify complex product dynamics with its focus on four factors

Overcoming common challenges in feature prioritization

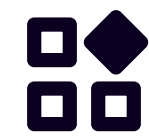
Some of the most common challenges in feature prioritization include:



Relying on guesswork and assumptions

While there's a place for intuition in product management, relying on guesswork and assumptions is highly problematic. The only way to know precisely what your customers want and need from your products is to collect their feedback and embed it in your work.

A data-informed approach lets you prioritize what truly resonates with customers and avoid pitfalls like listening to the loudest voice in the room or following a leader's whim.



Conflicting priorities

Different teams tend to have unique goals and priorities. Your customer success team might focus on delivering highly personalized experiences. As a product team, you may feel the highest priority is providing a streamlined interface with little to no friction. This conflict can lead to features that don't align and don't provide maximum value for your customers.

As an organization, working towards overarching business goals with aligned strategies is more important than department-specific goals.



A lack of data-led decision-making

Decisions should be grounded in accurate data and insights. Without this, overconfidence and confirmation bias can skew priorities, as stakeholders may rely too heavily on past experiences or personal opinions rather than the facts.

Data-led decision-making involves gathering key customer insights and incorporating them into your product strategy. Research methods like surveys, analytics, interviews, focus groups, usability testing, and A/B testing can be employed. Once analyzed, these insights provide actionable guidance, ensuring decisions rely on data rather than guesswork.



Unclear product strategy

Without a defined plan, teams may prioritize nice-to-haves and features that aren't meaningful, relevant, or impactful for customers. Instead, take action only once you've set key objectives that align with the product strategy and overall company vision.



A lack of continuous listening

The State of Product Leadership (2020) published survey findings from 600 product managers and SaaS executives. According to them, **the leading source (over a third) of their best ideas comes from customer feedback** (edging out team brainstorming, competitor research, and internal suggestions).

Continuous listening involves gathering customer feedback to understand their preferences, wants, and needs, enabling you to optimize, streamline, and improve your product offering.

The power of the 5 Ws and H in product management

The 5 Ws and H checklist is a valuable tool for keeping customers at the center of decision-making and addressing their needs with relevant solutions:

Who

“Who” involves understanding the impact of others in the decision-making process—your customers and other stakeholders.

Customers

To create truly satisfying experiences, you must deeply understand who your customers are. That involves researching their pain points, preferences, beliefs, values, wants, and needs to build better products.

Stakeholders

As a product manager, you must also understand critical stakeholders, including recognizing who influences product decisions and how to balance and manage different expectations and interests across the organization.

What

The “What” focuses on the product or features you’re developing—the specific solution you’re creating to address a problem or seize an opportunity. To define “What,” consider the scope, functionality, and purpose. This process helps determine market fit, clarifying whether your solution addresses an identified need and is likely to satisfy customer expectations.

When

“When” explores the right time to launch to align with events, seasons, or market trends. It also considers key milestones and timelines involved in launching the new feature. And, just because you have an ideal solution to a problem doesn’t necessarily mean your customers are ready. Perhaps your target demographic needs some education about how your feature solving your problem benefits them.

Where

Where your features get used can greatly impact the solutions you create. “Where” involves considering the demographics of your users, the specific contexts in which they will interact with the features, and the distribution channels for the features.

Why

Why are you developing your feature? This fundamental helps ensure that there’s a strong justification for the investment. Some key “Whys” for creating your feature could include:

- **Solving critical pain points for customers:** For example, adding a user-friendly search function to help users quickly find information or products they need.
- **Enhancing customer experience (CX), satisfaction, or loyalty:** For instance, implementing a personalized recommendation system that suggests features based on user behavior, leading to a more engaging experience.

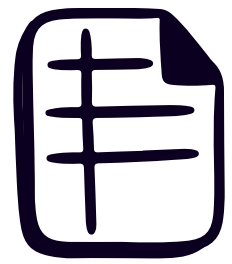
- **Aligning with your overall product strategy:** An example would be introducing a collaboration feature supporting your product's mission to foster user teamwork and communication.
- **Supporting specific business goals:** For example, adding a feature that allows users to share their achievements or milestones on social media can drive brand awareness and encourage user engagement.

How

Once you’re clear on the other aspects of the feature, it’s crucial to plan how your team will implement it effectively. Planning “How” should take into account several key factors:

- **Design and development:** Ensuring the feature is user-friendly and aligns with design standards.
- **Time, budget, and resource constraints:** Assessing available resources to set realistic timelines and budgets.
- **Testing and quality assurance:** Conducting thorough testing to identify and resolve issues before launch.
- **Feedback mechanisms:** Establishing ways to gather user feedback post-launch to inform future improvements.

- **Training and support:** Planning necessary training for your team and providing user resources.
- **Performance metrics:** Defining specific KPIs to measure the feature's impact on user engagement and satisfaction.
- **Go-to-market strategies:** Developing a clear approach for launching the feature to maximize visibility and adoption.
- **Stakeholder communication:** Developing a strategy to keep stakeholders informed and aligned throughout the implementation process.
- **Overall customer experience:** Ensuring the feature enhances the user journey and meets customer expectations.



Structuring feature requests and prioritization

When considering gathering feature requests effectively, your team needs a structured approach. Establish a standardized process for collecting information about each feature request.

Essential information to capture includes:

- **Title:** A concise name for the feature.
- **Requester:** Indicate whether the request came from an internal team member or an external customer.
- **Description:** A brief overview of the feature.

Additional details should include:

- **Problem and solution:** Clearly outline the problem or opportunity and how the feature addresses it.
- **Benefit:** Provide evidence, such as user feedback and insights, to demonstrate the expected benefits for customers.
- **Feasibility:** Assess the practicality of the proposed solution, considering time, budget, and resource limitations.
- **Urgency:** Evaluate the urgency of the request relative to other competing priorities.

How to gain customer feedback for data-backed prioritization

Customer feedback serves as your North Star, guiding your team to understand customers' wants, preferences, and pain points. By integrating their voice into your development process, you can create more meaningful features that enhance user-centricity, customer experience (CX), and satisfaction, all backed by data-driven decisions.

Collecting and analyzing customer feedback

Gaining customer feedback from diverse sources is essential for prioritizing new feature development that aligns with customer needs. Effective sources of feedback include:

- Surveys
- Interviews
- Social media listening
- Analytics
- Third-party reviews
- User testing

By leveraging advanced tools—such as analytics platforms, survey software, and customer insight hubs—you can efficiently collect and analyze this feedback, ensuring that your feature prioritization is efficient and focused on delivering maximum value to your users.

Using tools for gathering customer feedback

There's no need to rely on manual processes. In this day and age, using advanced tools can make this process seamless and efficient.

Tools and insight hubs can streamline your workflow to ensure you gain the critical insights needed to prioritize the right features for customers.

ONE

Analytics tools

Analytics tools gather data from various sources to build a picture of your customers, including real-time monitoring, data processing, and visualization. Google Analytics is a free analytics service that offers detailed information to provide data on customer behavior.

TWO

Survey tools

Surveys are a popular way to quickly gain insights directly from users. Surveys allow your team to gather structured feedback on customer satisfaction, preferences, and overall experience. SurveyMonkey is a streamlined platform with templates and AI capabilities that your team can use to gain customer feedback quickly.

THREE

User testing tools

Allow your organization to test your products' functionality, usability, and overall experience with real users. This means gaining critical feedback to improve your products and ensure they fit customer expectations. UserTesting offers access to diverse users with whom you can test your products. UserTesting unlocks key insights that can help you improve your ROI over time.

FOUR

Social listening tools

Help your teams understand and respond effectively to what your customers say on social media. With the right tool, whether your customers are talking about your organization on Facebook, Instagram, X, or TikTok, you can use that feedback to make positive changes. Hootsuite is a social media management platform that offers AI sentiment analysis to help your teams understand how people feel about your brand and AI analysis for insightful summaries of social media commentary.

FIVE

Customer feedback tools

Streamline the feedback process and gain key insights faster. **Medallia** is a customer feedback platform that gathers customer data from point of sale, emails, web interactions, third-party reviews, SMS, and digital behavior.

SIX

Customer insight hubs

A centralized hub to gather, store, and analyze feedback is essential for successful feature prioritization. **Dovetail** is an AI-driven customer insights hub that allows you to house customer data from multiple sources, analyze feedback, and gain actionable insights, enabling you to spot trends, understand your customers, and make accurate decisions fast.

4 techniques for managing feature prioritization

While balancing competing priorities and proving ROI, it's easy to fall into common pitfalls. These techniques can help you avoid common challenges:



Balance both short and long-term goals

While it's tempting to focus on quick wins and features that offer immediate results, it's essential also to consider long-term goals. To effectively balance short-term and long-term objectives, align your product strategy with the overall business strategy. This approach involves identifying what can deliver immediate value while investing in features promoting long-term growth.



Avoid “shiny object syndrome”

Shiny object syndrome is the tendency to get distracted by new, seemingly exciting opportunities, often valuing quick fixes that require little investment. While these quick wins can be appealing, they may divert attention from more valuable long-term projects.

This focus on short-term ideas can lead to distractions for you and your team, steering you away from initiatives with greater impact. To avoid shiny object syndrome, it's crucial to prioritize long-term goals while balancing short-term wins with strategies for sustained success.



Rely on data, not loud voices

With numerous stakeholder priorities to juggle, it's easy to be swayed by the loudest and most passionate voices. However, the loudest voices aren't always reliable and can lead to suboptimal decisions. Validate any assumptions or opinions with data. This approach ensures that decisions are evidence-based and aligned with customers' needs. Data always helps you build a stronger business case and quiet competing opinions.



Avoid feature creep

While additional features can seem appealing, they may not provide significant value to customers. Feature creep refers to the tendency to add functionalities and capabilities that extend beyond the project's original scope, often without alignment with the overall project objectives.

Implementing structured prioritization and maintaining a clear product strategy is essential to prevent this pitfall and keep your team focused.

Key metrics for evaluating feature success

Measuring feature releases' success is essential to continually improve your decision-making capacity. This helps to improve, optimize, and refine your strategy to deliver the best possible experiences. It also prevents your team from continuing on problematic paths.

The key metrics to consider include:



Active users: Measuring daily or monthly active users (DAU/MAU) helps your team track engagement with new features to see how they perform over time. This can indicate user interest and benefit.



Time spent: Pinpoint how much time users spend using the feature to help assess the value offered.



Customer satisfaction score (CSAT): This measure asks customers to provide their level of satisfaction with a specific interaction or product to help identify particular areas for improvement in features you release.



User sentiment: Gathering qualitative feedback on features can help build a picture of how customers feel about your feature and where critical areas for growth are.



Churn rate: See how new features you release might impact the number of customers quitting your product.



Conversion rate: If a feature is related to purchasing, such as personalized recommendations, consider the impact on conversion rates.

Successful feature prioritization case studies

At Dovetail, we love helping organizations truly understand their customers. This way, they can make smart, data-driven decisions that boost customer satisfaction and drive ROI. Here are two of our success stories:

Canva

Democratizing access to insights

At Canva, the mission is to "empower the world to design," which involves deeply understanding customer wants and needs to deliver value consistently. To achieve this, Canva's researchers sought an effective way to prioritize projects aligned with the company's strategy and address knowledge gaps.

By adopting Dovetail, Canva created a central customer insights hub that transformed its approach to insights. Researchers and product team members now store research recordings and transcripts in one accessible place, allowing quick transcriptions, data tagging, theme identification, and thorough analysis.

Dovetail has democratized access to research across the org, enabling all teams at Canva to understand their customers better. As a result, they can prioritize key projects and features more effectively, ultimately delivering the best possible experiences.

eucalyptus

Continually growing customer understanding

Eucalyptus builds and operates digital healthcare companies trusted by over 250,000 patients across their five healthcare brands.

To enhance their customer research efforts, the team at Eucalyptus adopted Dovetail to gather, manage, and analyze insights more efficiently. This shift has allowed them to understand their customers' needs better.

The feedback collected is instrumental in shaping their product strategies through data-backed decision-making. As Eucalyptus expands, Dovetail is a single source of truth for insights and reports, supporting ongoing product development and growth.

Learning from past decisions and adjusting strategies

Your decision-making process should not be static. Iterative improvement means you aren't satisfied with the status quo but continually enhance your decisions to provide the best possible customer experiences.

Learning from past mistakes can help your team refine the decision-making approach to align more closely with customer needs.

Some best practices include:

- Conducting retrospectives to analyze the decision-making process
- Using key metrics, such as usage data, to measure success
- Gathering customer feedback post-release to capture customer reactions
- Evaluating the trade-offs that were necessary to make the decisions
- Adjusting the process, including the framework, to make improved decisions in future

Finding the next big thing to build with Dovetail

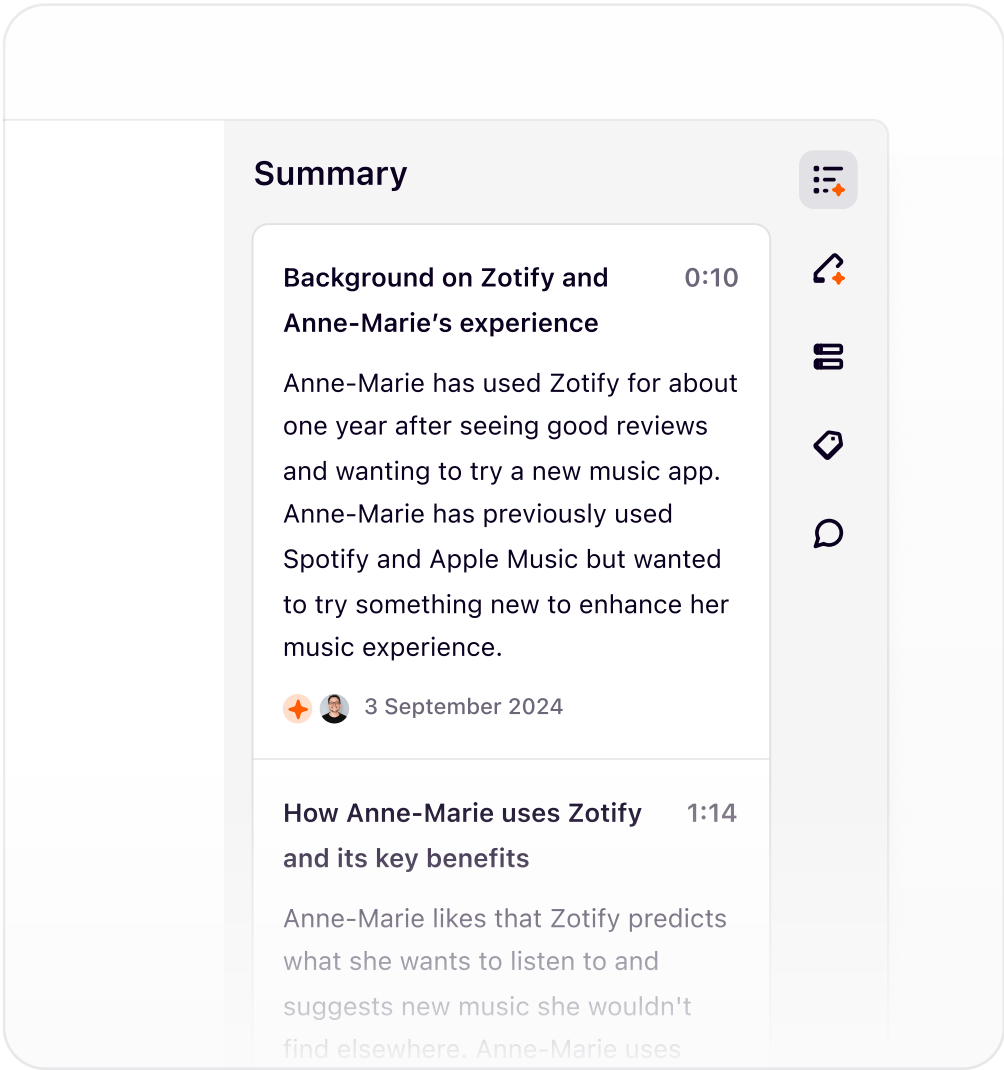
Gone are the days when researchers were the only ones who could gather feedback and analyze it to extract actionable insights.

Uncover insights and turn user feedback into action fast

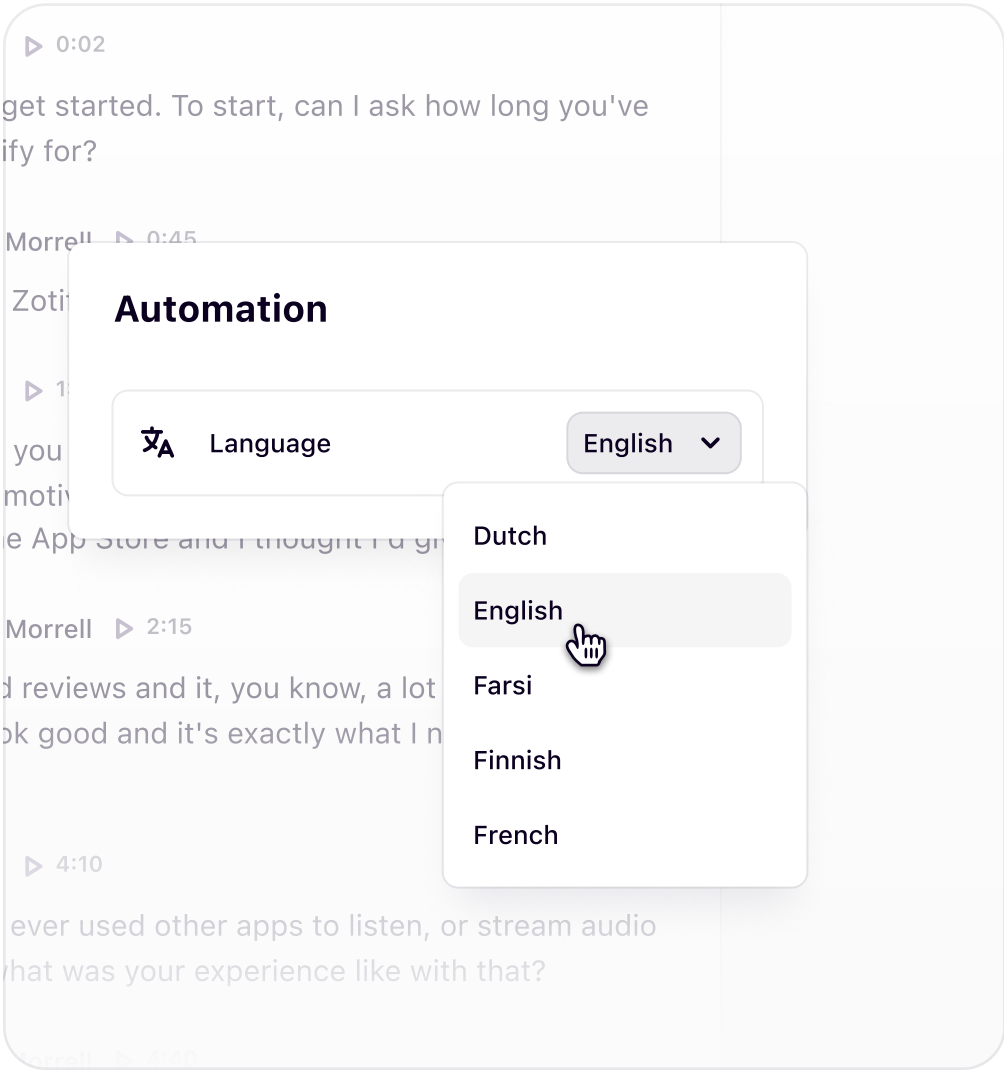
With Dovetail, anyone can analyze data in minutes and put the customer at the heart of every decision. **AI-powered analysis** quickly turns videos, interview transcripts, and feedback notes into shareable customer insights.



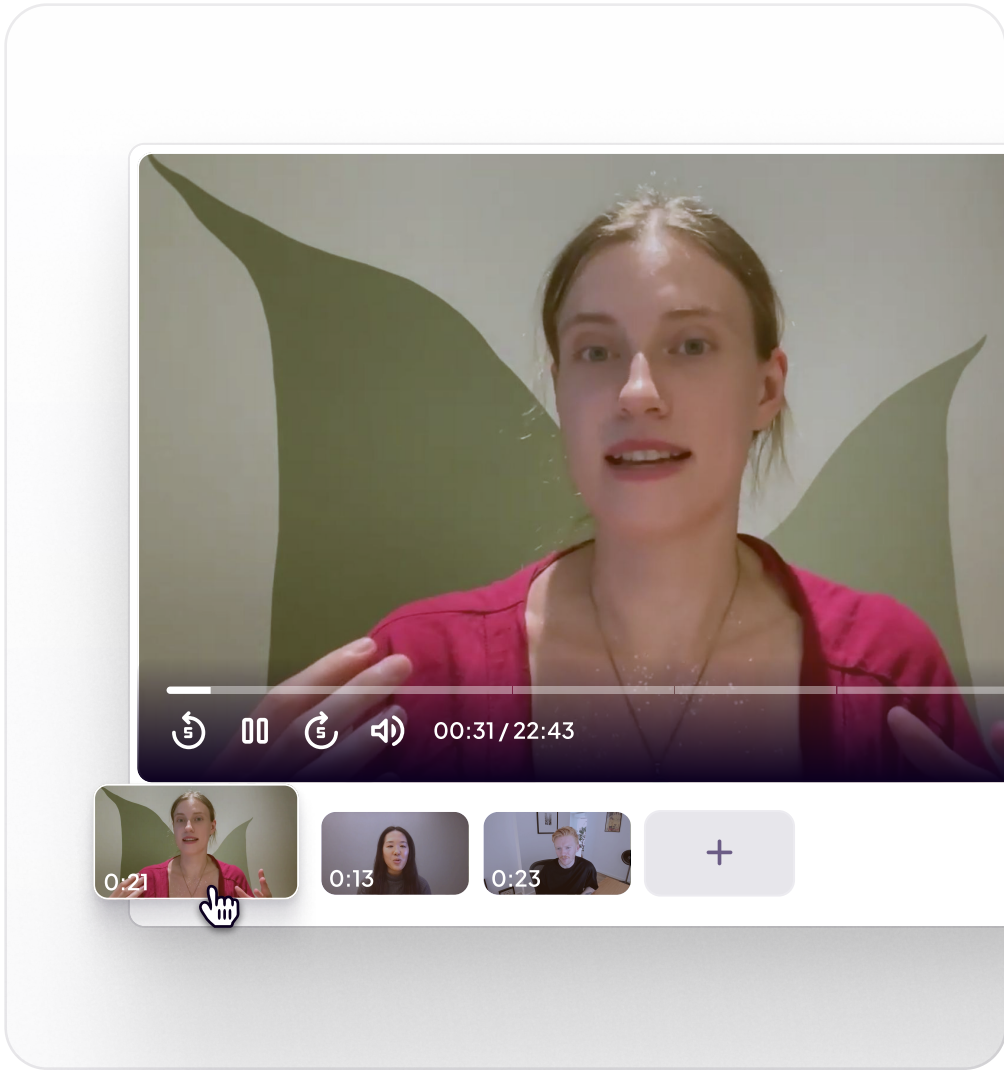
Data to insights like magic



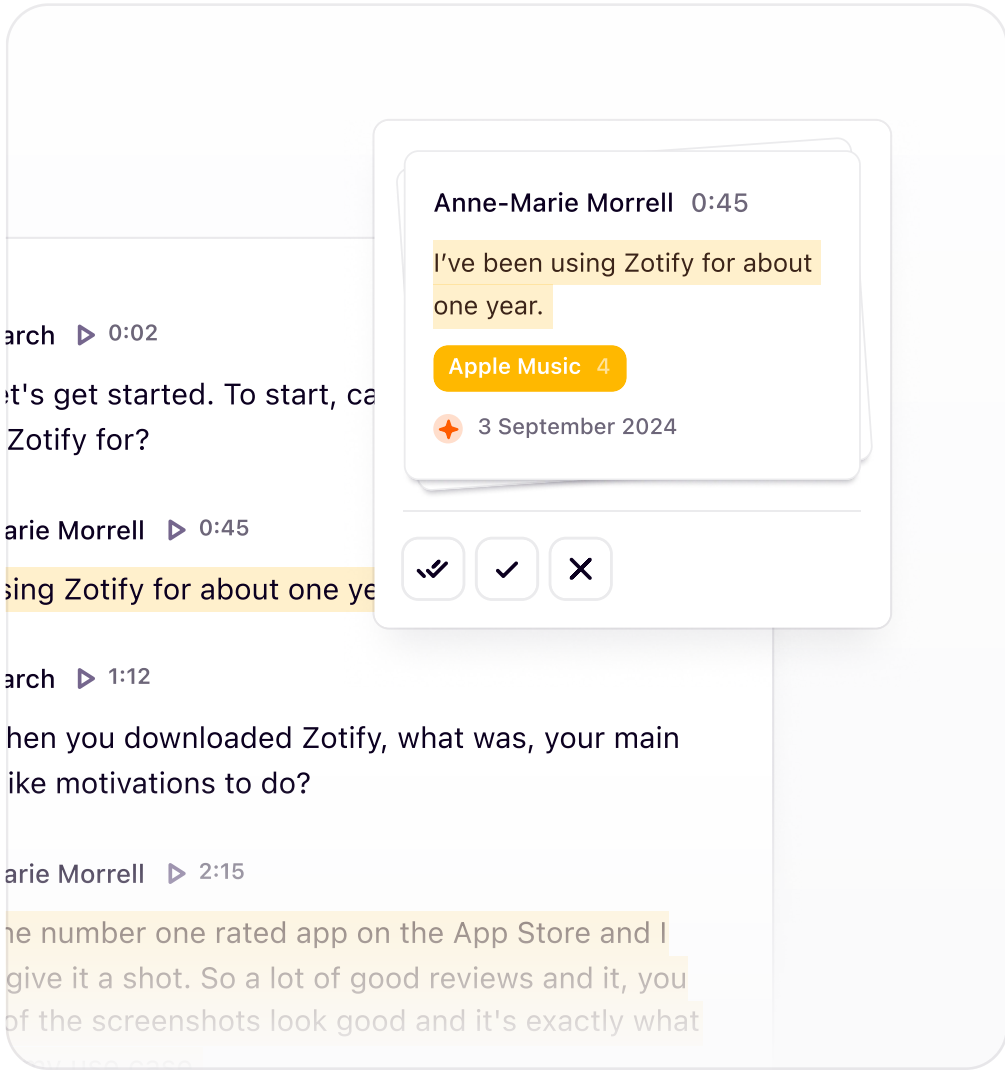
Magic summarize
Instant, accurate, and timestamped summaries of video calls.



Magic transcribe
Enhanced with better speaker recognition and increased accuracy.

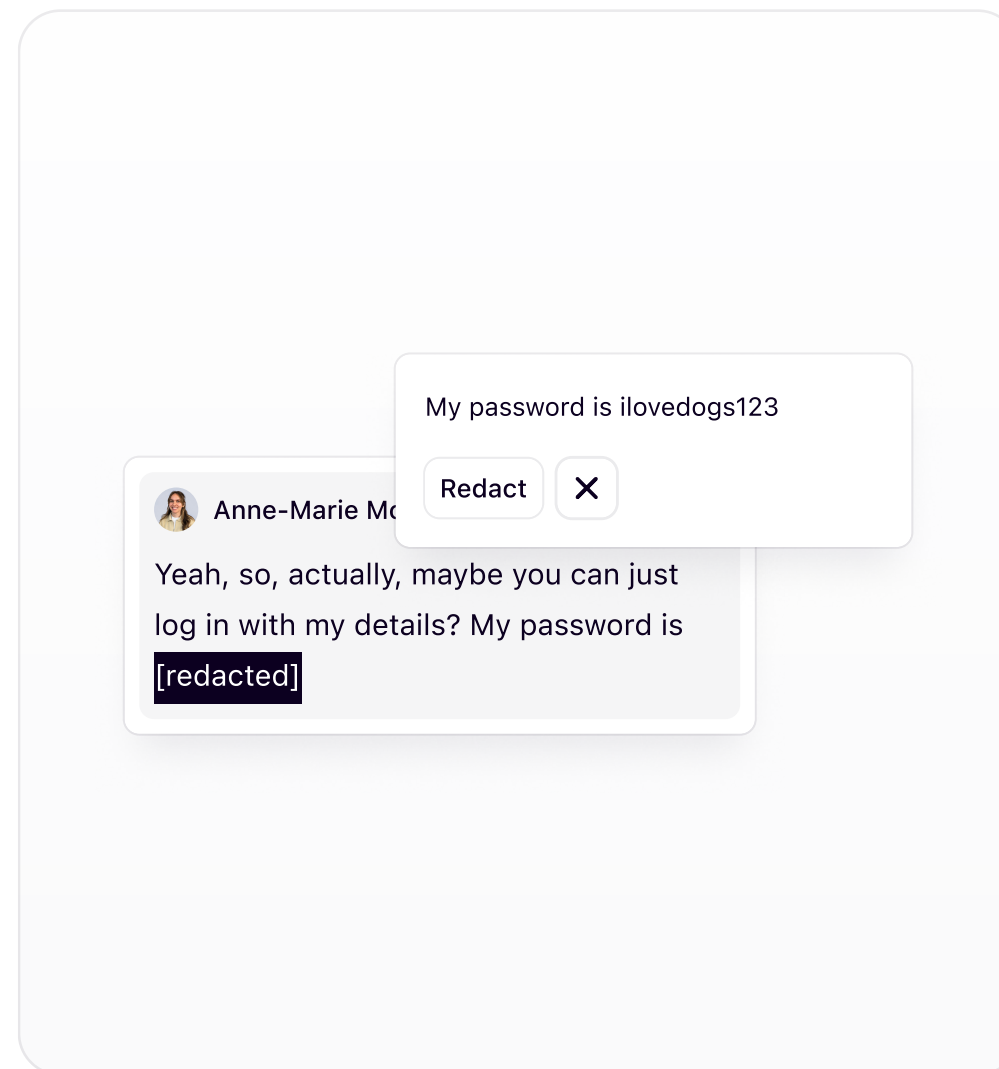


Magic reels
Customer calls' best moments and highlights condensed for clarity and sharing.



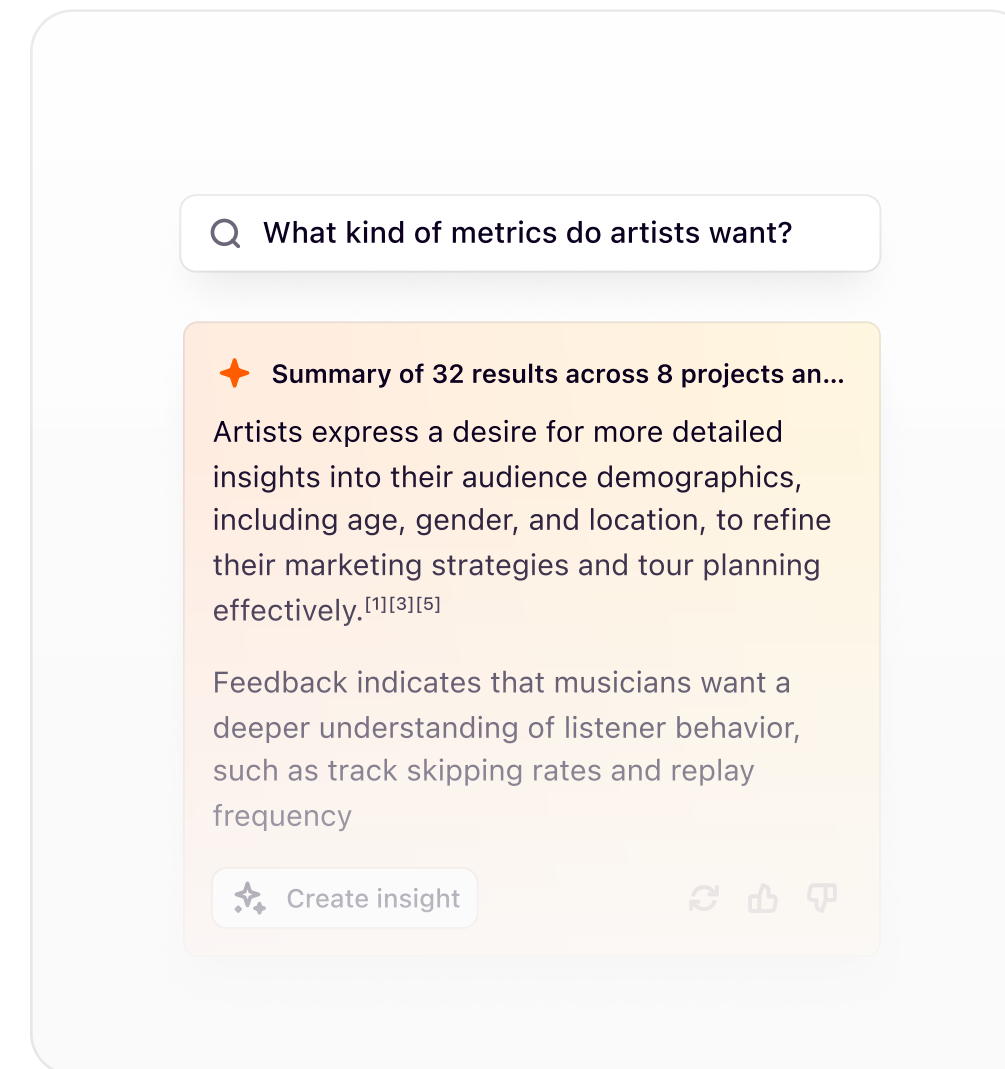
Magic highlight
Automatic suggestions for important moments during video calls.

Data to insights like magic



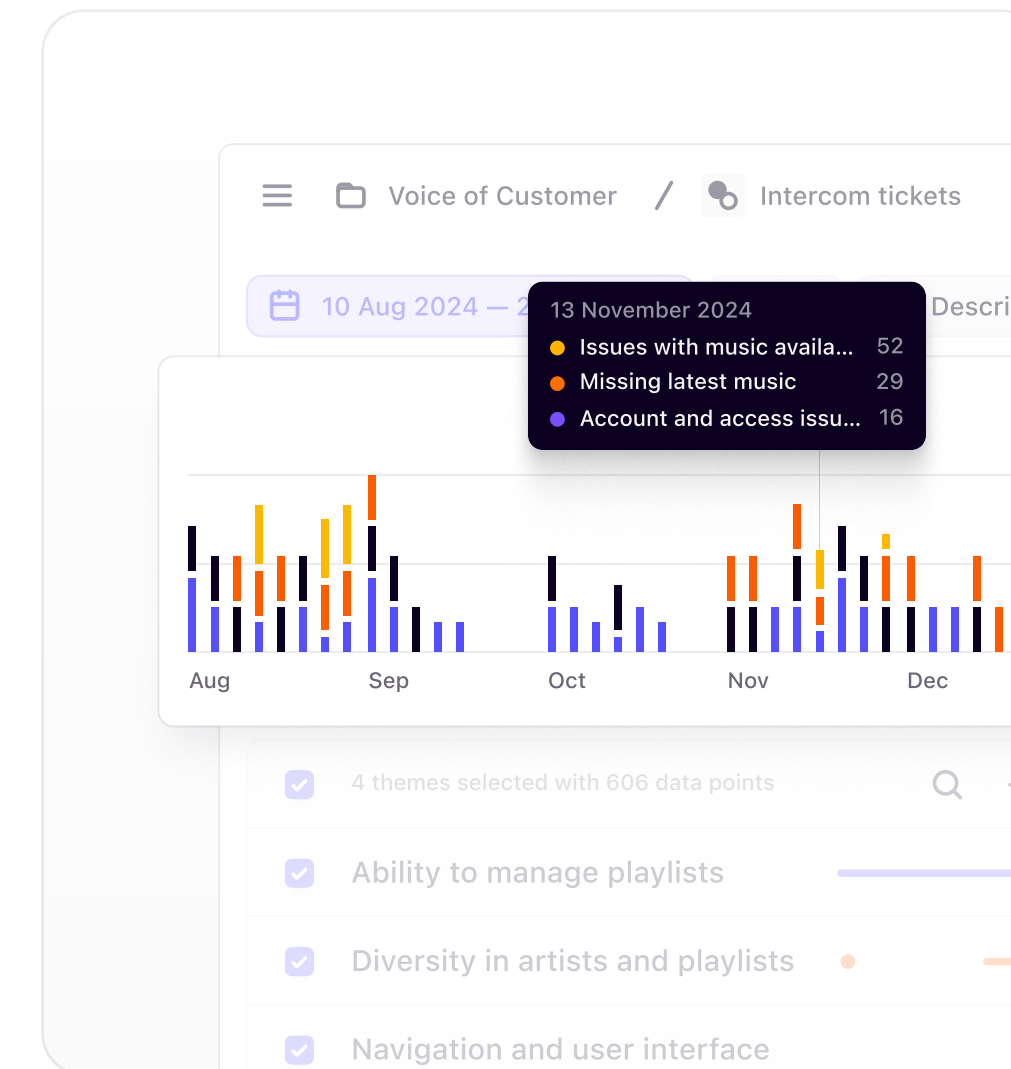
Magic redact

Removal of private information through the redaction of text, audio, and video content.



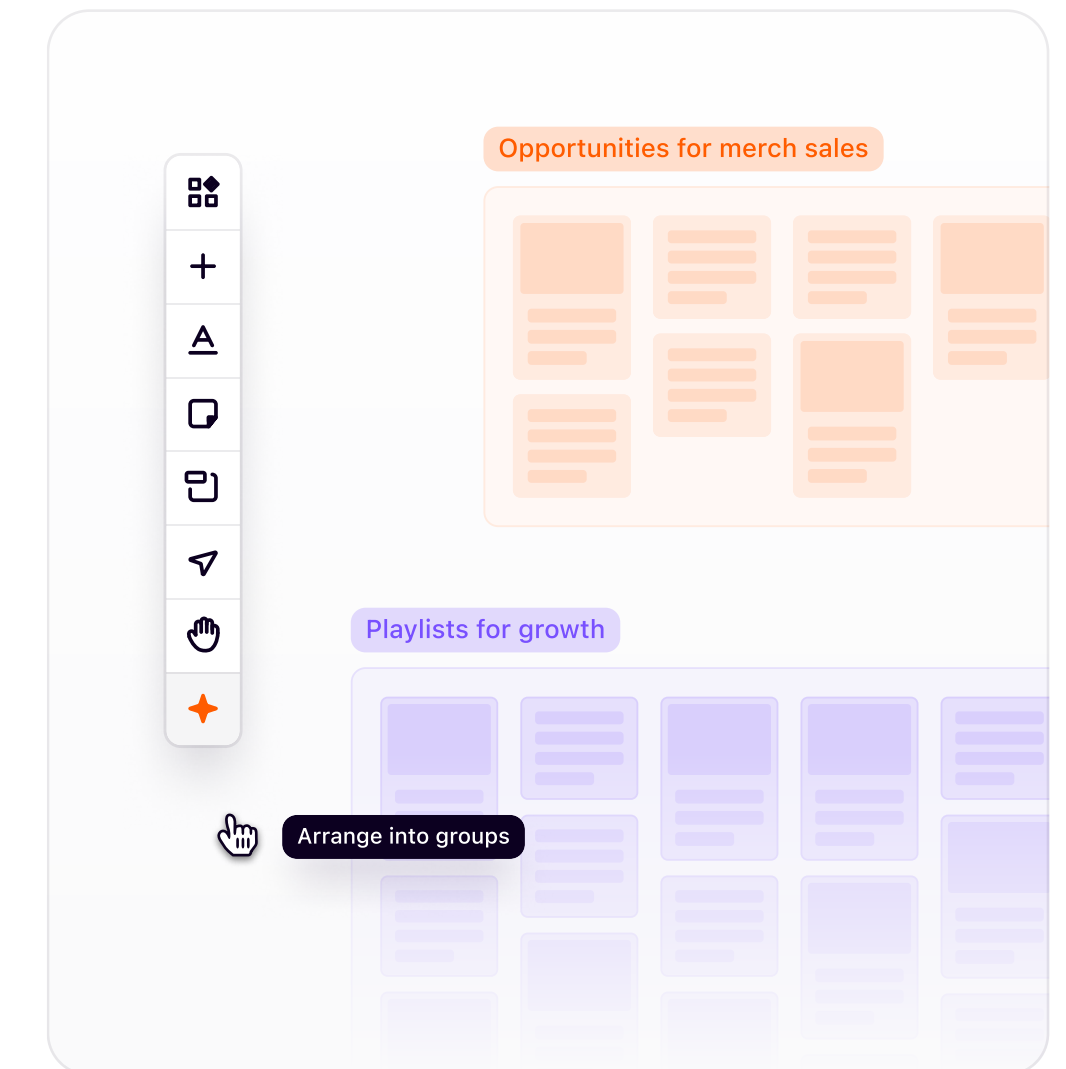
Magic search

Search by topic, ask questions, and receive summarized answers.



Channels

Analyze themes in reviews, support tickets, feedback, and more.



Magic cluster

Instantly categorize highlights on a canvas with one simple click.

Conclusion and key takeaways

Feature prioritization is essential for delivering high-value products that meet customer needs and business goals.

Key points to remember

- **Customer-first approach:** Ensure that customer needs, preferences, and values are central to prioritization.
- **Clear objectives:** Set measurable goals that align with the overall business strategy to guide feature prioritization.
- **Feedback-driven insights:** Gather and analyze customer feedback using various tools to validate assumptions and inform decisions.
- **Using decision-making frameworks:** Decision frameworks, such as the Kano model and Value vs. Complexity, help make strategic, informed decisions. These are just two examples—other frameworks may be relevant to your needs and context.
- **Continuous improvement:** Post-release monitoring is crucial to refine features and incorporate real-world feedback to improve future iterations.

Turn raw data into actionable insights

Simplify and streamline your decision-making process today with Dovetail.

Uncover insights today

