Productside | IATA

How IATA Created a Shared Product Language to Power Its Next Era of Innovation

Company Snapshot

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) is the global trade association for airlines, representing around **350 member airlines** worldwide. IATA's mission is to Represent, Lead and Serve the airline industry to shape the future growth of a safe, secure and sustainable air transport industry. When most people think of IATA, they think of safety, and global aviation standards.

But IATA also offers a a diverse portfolio of **Products and Services** **(**from financial settlement systems, data products, training, consulting to publications) used by airlines, airports, and aviation stakeholders worldwide.

By 2023, this portfolio had expanded significantly. Competition intensified. Customer expectations rose. And with more than **40 Product Managers** spread across Europe and North America, IATA faced a moment of truth:

If it wanted to keep delivering high-value solutions in an increasingly complex market, it needed a **unified, strategic Product Management discipline,** not a collection of individual approaches.

As Assistant Director of Learning & Development **Raquel Montejo Sagardia** put it:

> *"We needed a provider specialized in Product Management to help us introduce a standard methodology and baseline. And we needed a program that could be customized to speak the IATA language."*

That search led IATA to Productside.
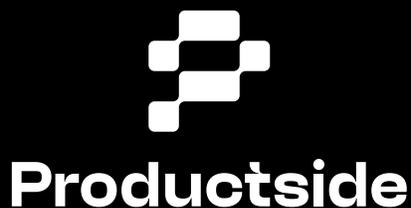
Before State:
Strong Execution, Weak Alignment

Before the engagement, IATA's Product Managers were competent, committed, and well–versed in execution. But organizationally, several patterns kept resurfacing: patterns that slowed innovation, muddied launches, and held back adoption.

Product Management Meant Different Things to Different Teams

Product Managers operated with varying styles, tools, and philosophies. Some were trained elsewhere, some self–taught, some convinced they already knew everything.

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David Wall (Global Director, Cargo & Safety Solutions at IATA) described the gap clearly:

> *"This was about establishing a framework and a baseline so we all have a common understanding of product management and can build upon that. We needed constant improvement and learning"*

Without a shared approach, IATA was facing some talent challenges, not being able to easily mobilize PMs between portfolios or onboard new hires into a consistent method.

Launching Products Without a Repeatable Go-to-Market Model

Many launches followed a familiar pattern: build the product, write the press release, and hope adoption followed.

This wasn't due to a lack of effort. It was a lack of structure. Marketing and Sales were often brought in too late, messaging varied, and sales enablement was inconsistent, resulting in slower adoption.

Kim Wee, Director Marketing & Commercial Performance, summarized the challenge bluntly:

> *"We had a tendency to launch without significant preparation. Sometimes adoption never happened, or was very slow. We wanted to stop launching by chance."*

Solutions Were Defined Before Customer Problems Were Understood

Product development too often began in the solution space, rather than with a clear understanding of customer needs.

Ideas were formed internally first. Only afterward did teams attempt to infer or attach a problem those solutions might address. Market & Consumer Insights was brought in late, not to explore unmet needs, but to validate whether an already-formed idea made sense.

This led leadership to question the process itself: were teams discovering real customer problems, or retrofitting problems to justify solutions?

Kim explained the shift they wanted to make:

> *"We needed to stop developing a solution and then searching for a pain to attach to it. That was wasting time and resources."*

IATA needed to move from solution-led development to a problem-first approach, where customer needs, pains, and context drive what gets built.

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"We needed to stop developing a solution and then searching for a pain to attach to it. That was wasting time and resources."

Core and Commercial Teams Created Value (But Not Leverage)

IATA's core activities (advocacy, standards, data initiatives) and its commercial products and services served important but largely separate purposes. Operating independently wasn't inherently wrong.

The challenge was that the two sides weren't consistently anchored to the same customer needs or outcomes. Each could create value in isolation, but insights and momentum weren't compounding across the organization.

David Wall saw Product Management training as an opportunity to change that dynamic:

> *"We wanted to break the historic barriers between core and commercial. We needed a shared understanding of the customer, the pain points, and the value we're creating."*

By introducing a unified Product Management framework, **IATA created a shared language that allowed both sides to align around common priorities** and reinforce each other's impact.
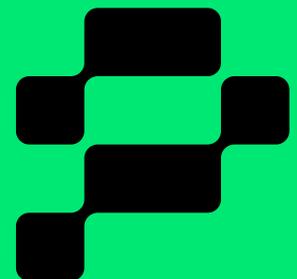
Why Productside

IATA didn't just need training. It needed a partner that could help the organization **understand where product work was breaking down**, establish a **shared baseline**, and support real, lasting behavior change across teams.

Raquel described the two defining criteria:

1. *"We needed a provider specialized in Product Management."*

2. *"We needed an off-the-shelf program that could be customized for IATA."*

Productside stood out not only because it offered a proven Product Management program, but because of how that program is designed to be applied. The engagement began with understanding IATA's specific context and capability gaps, then shaping the Optimal Product Management course to reflect the realities of IATA's products, teams, and markets.

Rather than stopping at theory, Productside focused on helping IATA turn best practices into day-to-day ways of working. Frameworks were tied directly to real decisions, real products, and real launches, and reinforced through skills assessments, checkpoints, and applied tools that teams could continue using long after the training ended.

For IATA, this meant Productside was helping the organization **build a repeatable, scalable product management system:** one that could align teams, support mobility across portfolios, and create a shared language for discovery, planning, and go-to-market execution.

That combination of specialization, customization, and implementation focus is what made Productside the right partner.

The Engagement: A Tailored Optimal Product Management Program

IATA and Productside co-designed a customized, 18-hour version of the Optimal Product Management course, focused on the capabilities IATA needed most urgently:

Key Areas Covered

Defining the role of a Product Manager
Outcome-based thinking (vs output-oriented)
Customer discovery and personas
Framing problems and validating opportunities
Solution hypotheses and success metrics
Outcome-based roadmapping
Go-to-market planning and launch readiness
Lifecycle management and End-of-Life
Applying the Productside Blueprint & Playbook

Supporting Components

1   Individual Skills Assessments

2   Pre– and post–engagement capability baselining

3   3-month checkpoints with planned 6– and 12-month follow–ups

4   Collaborative customization with NPD, Marketing, and Insights
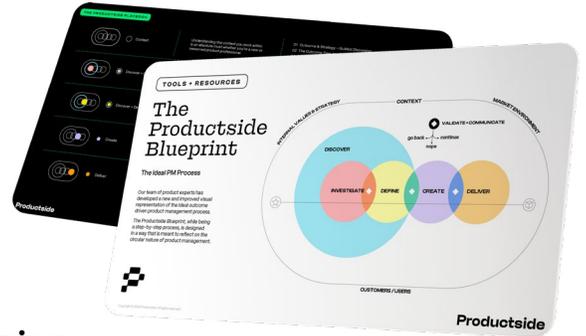
David emphasized why the customization mattered:

> *"We wanted a real focus on new product development and lifecycle management, and Productside tailored the program exactly to those priorities."*

The Shift: From Training to Transformation

The engagement didn't stop when the training sessions ended. In fact, that's where the real work began.

For IATA, transformation came from **applying the frameworks in real situations**, reinforcing them through new ways of working, and using them to change how teams planned, collaborated, and launched products. Training provided the foundation. Implementation is what turned it into impact.

NPD Became the Glue of GTM

Before Productside, teams collaborated inconsistently.

Afterward, NPD emerged as the connective tissue between Product, Marketing, and Sales.

David called this a turning point:

> *"Seeing Sales, Marketing, and NPD working together as a true three-legged stool...
> That was the moment. If one leg is missing, the launch falls over."*

From Ad Hoc Launches to Cross-Functional GTM Task Forces

One of the most visible shifts was how IATA approached product launches.

Instead of relying on late-stage coordination (or hoping adoption would follow a press release) IATA began forming **structured go-to-market task forces** early in the product lifecycle. These teams now work together from the outset to align on personas, messaging, positioning, pilot strategy, and success metrics.

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Kim Wee saw the impact immediately:

> *"The quality of content for product marketing improved instantly.
> With the teams aligned earlier, everything became more coherent."*

By embedding these practices into how launches were planned, go-to-market stopped being an afterthought and became a shared discipline.

A Real Use Case: A Product Launch Transformed

One of the clearest examples of this shift in action was the launch of **LAR Verify**, IATA's digital solution for compliance with Live Animals Regulations.

In the past, a launch like this would likely have followed a familiar pattern: build first, announce later, and hope the market responds.

This time, Productside's frameworks were applied from day one. Product, Marketing, Sales, and NPD collaborated early to align on customer pain points, personas, value propositions, and a coordinated pilot strategy.
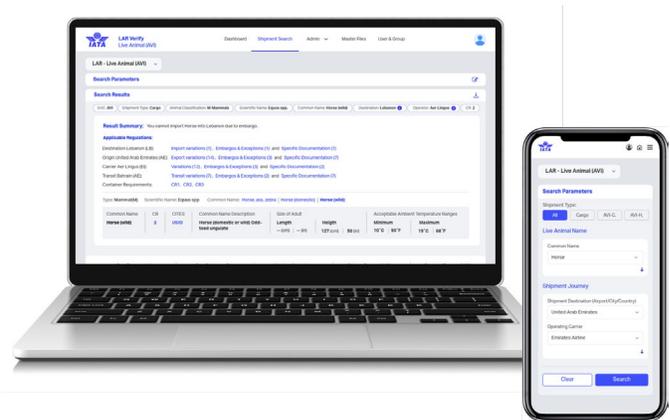
The result was a fundamentally different launch experience:

- The product entered pilot with **eight leading aviation organizations**
- Customers understood the value quickly and clearly
- Internal confidence in the offering increased significantly

David described it as a genuine "lightbulb moment":

> *"People who weren't usually glued together became glued together. Customers got it more easily. That coherence wasn't there before."*

The Playbook: Turning Learning Into a System

To ensure the changes would last, IATA focused on turning training into a **repeatable system**.

Using Productside's frameworks as a foundation, the team created a comprehensive internal Product Management Playbook that blended Productside tools with IATA's own processes, NPD insights, and governance mechanisms.

Kim sees the playbook as a cornerstone of the transformation:

> *"We now have the tools and guides to help product teams perform better. The playbook is becoming the handbook for how we work."*

The playbook has been shared broadly (not only with Product Managers, but across the entire Products & Services division) extending the impact beyond the original training cohort.

David added:

> *"We want a simplified, visual version as well. Something that helps people flow through the concepts naturally. It's already a big step forward."*
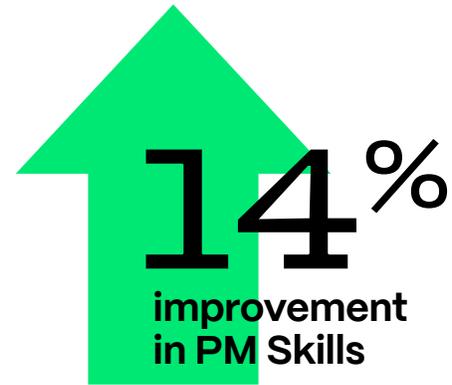
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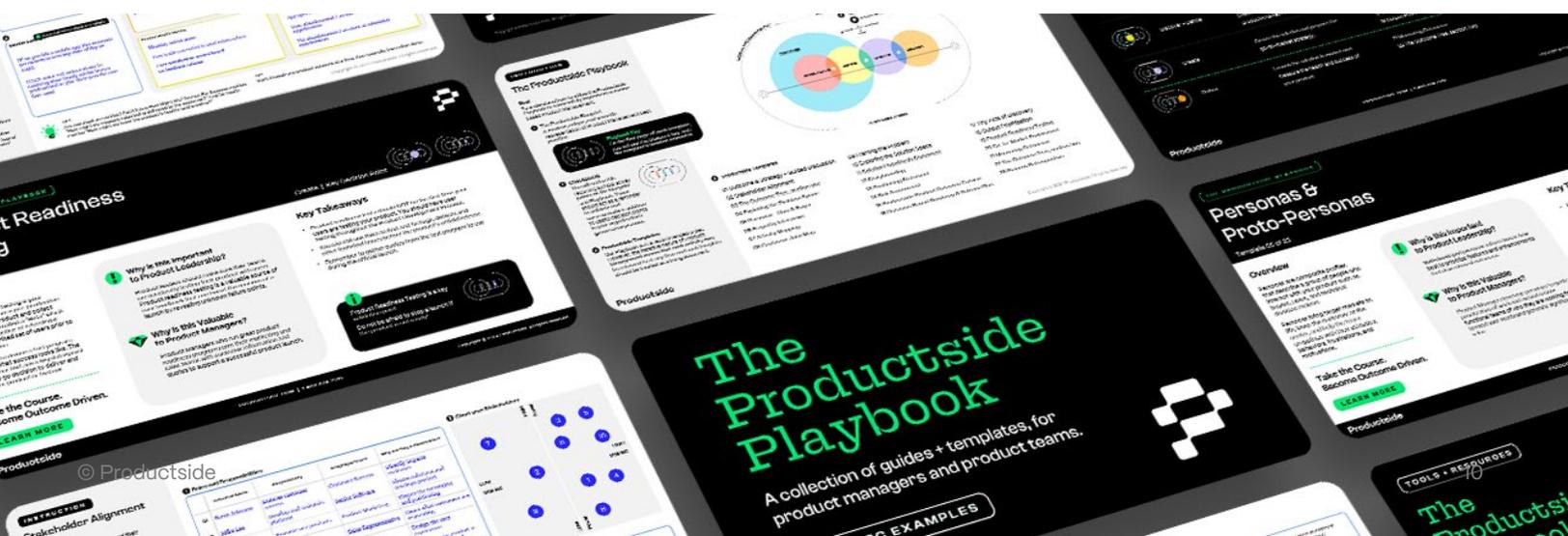
Measurable Impact

Quantitative Results

Within three months: **14% improvement** in Product Management skills (based on Productside's Individual Skills Assessment)

14% improvement in PM Skills

Uplift spanned all major competencies:

STRATEGY	MARKET RESEARCH	COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS	PRICING

FORECASTING	PM PROCESS	CUSTOMER UNDERSTANDING

Behavioral & Cultural Shifts

Across teams, leaders observed:

- PMs spending more time in the **problem space**
- Healthier, earlier challenge of assumptions
- Consistent use of tools and shared vocabulary
- Clearer stakeholder communication
- Earlier involvement of Sales and Marketing
- Stronger confidence in defining outcomes and metrics
- New humility and openness to learning

Organizational Shifts

- A common framework now enables PMs to **move between portfolios** more easily
- GTM planning is **structured, coordinated, and strategic**
- Customer insights are used earlier and more deeply
- The transformation strengthens **recruitment**, especially for senior PM roles
- Internally, the case study helps anchor **customer–first thinking**

Kim highlights one of the biggest mindset changes:

> *"We're shifting from IATA–first thinking to customer–first thinking. That's the journey we're on."*

Sustaining the Momentum

IATA is committed to making the transformation stick:

- **6– and 12–month transformation checkpoints** with Productside
- Continuous reinforcement of the playbook
- Embedding the framework into **onboarding** for new roles
- Leadership modeling the right questions and behaviors
- Exploring internal **"ambassadors"** to champion the methodology

David sees this as essential:

> *"We need to hold each other accountable to using the framework. It's how we'll sustain the gains we've made."*


Conclusion

IATA's transformation illustrates what happens when a global organization shifts from fragmented practices to a unified, customer–centered product discipline.

With a shared framework, cross–functional GTM, and a growing internal playbook, IATA is not only building better products, but also reshaping how aviation solutions are conceived, launched, and adopted across an entire industry.

And as David put it:

> *"Let's meet again in 6 and 12 months and see how far we've come. This is just the beginning."*
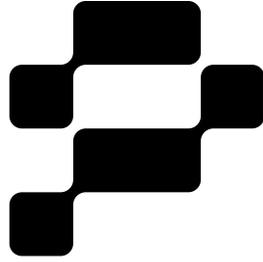
Productside

Your Partners in Product.

When you partner with Productside, you get a wealth of experience from some of the largest and most recognizable brands in the business – precisely the people you need to drive results.

Not to mention, our team is dedicated full–time to helping companies deliver products their customers are delighted to buy.

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