

AI Makes Building Cheap; PM Judgment and Discovery Set the Bar

PM Daily Digest

2026-09-18

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By PM Daily Digest • September 18, 2026

A concise PM digest on the shift from AI-driven delivery speed to discovery quality and product judgment, with practical gates for agents, product validation, marketplace cold starts, and career growth.

Big Ideas

AI makes building cheap; PM judgment is the scarce layer. Sachin Rekhi says specs still sharpen thinking, but prototyping is a stronger forcing function because building surfaces implementation trade-offs faster. [1] *Run the Business* sees the operating risk: AI-heavy teams that measure prototypes and features rather than outcomes create UX clutter and feature bloat; meaningful reps are evidence-based changes that move the product toward PMF, measured by how quickly the team moves from uncertainty to confidence. [2] Aha's Builder team makes the same shift: building the right thing is harder, so strategy and customer understanding increasingly determine PM value. [3] Use AI to prune obvious ideas cheaply, then spend the saved capacity on deeper discovery—not on shipping every prototype. [2]

Tactical Playbook

Put an agent through a task-level gate. Decompose a workflow into tasks and label each deterministic, AI-assisted, or agentic; compare the human cognitive load with the engineering, evaluation, and failure-handling cost. One PM estimates that roughly 70% of their workflows should remain deterministic. [4] For structured manipulation, use ordinary logic; reserve AI for large volumes of unstructured data, pattern extraction, or transformation, and inspect where

users export data or continue working outside the product to find higher-value opportunities. [5]

Use evidence gates before a new product. Aha’s five-part process is: spark, picture-based concept validation, proof of concept, invite-only early access, and general availability. The concept test targets at least 30 significant customers in no more than 20 slides and asks about willingness to pay and adoption timing; early-access customers commit to usage and recurring meetings. [3] For AI-enabled products, prototype the experience before designing the schema and back end: Aha reports that this phased order produces better outcomes than an open-ended prompt and can still complete in five or six minutes. [3]

Case Studies & Lessons

PMF before sales scale. A pre-seed B2B founder reports paying customers after eight months of redevelopment but says PMF is unproven; advisers are urging heavy sales, while the founder fears acquiring customers whose staff will not use the product. [6] The thread’s proposed operating plan is to model the current team, a sales hire, and sales plus a fractional CMO against runway and milestones such as retention, usage, expansion, and repeatable acquisition. [7] Stage spend in batches: watch activation, retention, and feedback before increasing acquisition, or risk proving only that leads can be bought. [8]

For marketplaces, seed the constrained side first. Five days after launch, Coloca had organic demand from room seekers but no available-room listings, no ad budget, and a strategy focused on existing renters rather than landlords. [9] An experienced marketplace operator recommends one-city focus, manual seeding of the hard side, then marketing to fill the easier side; founder, family, friends, or multi-room units may be needed to create the first supply. [10] Supply acquisition should therefore be an explicit product milestone, not an assumption behind the launch.

Career Corner

Move from PO throughput to PM judgment. A nearly 13-year PO already uses AI agents and Claude prototypes but asks how to progress into leadership. [11] The recommended skill stack is stakeholder influence and negotiation, “context engineering” for product/user/problem/strategy documentation, and rapid discovery through personas, hypotheses, and prototypes; the AI-era differentiator is connecting people, process, and product while deciding what should happen, why, and when. [12]

For a portfolio, show the product as a story rather than a static case study: user lens for the problem, founder lens for why and how to build, and the research–iteration–testing loop. A dual view—a four-to-five-minute skim plus a detailed build journal—serves both hiring managers and deep readers. [13]

Tools & Resources

A lightweight bot-evaluation worksheet. Hiten Shah suggests starting with work completed this week that will recur; promising jobs include monitoring changes, assembling customer evidence, and turning signals into a brief. [14] Before delegating, write down failure modes and the success bar, then give competing bots the same job and input for one attempt and score pass/fail. Useful-looking output is not enough to justify autonomous operation. [15]

Sources

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