



Introduction to IBM Rational Focal Point Software.

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The IBM Rational Focal Point solution promotes value-based decision making, enabling you to pursue ideas that help increase revenue, improve quality and productivity, and lower risk while optimizing value to the customer.

Introduction

Whether you are responsible for managing a single product, a product family or perhaps a portfolio of diverse products, your overriding goal is to drive product direction based on factors like corporate strategy, the voice of the customer, emerging technologies, prevailing trends and competitive influences. With so much to consider, gathering ideas, requirements, and feature requests and deciding which should be included in your product roadmap is a critical success factor for your company. This paper explains how IBM Rational® Focal Point™ can play a pivotal role in the future success of your development efforts by improving collaboration within your internal organization and to other stakeholders, such as your customers and vendors.

With IBM's Rational Focal Point solution, you capture, collaborate, select and manage the product ideas, features and requirements, which increase visibility, understanding and traceability throughout your product development lifecycle. Further, IBM Rational Focal Point software promotes value-based decision making, enabling you to pursue ideas which increase revenue, improve quality and productivity, reduce risk and deliver more value to the customer.

Simply put, IBM Rational Focal Point helps you deliver the *right* products to the *right* market at the *right* time.

Some ways in which IBM Rational Focal Point may enhance your product and product portfolio management processes include:

- *Establishing a central repository for product and portfolio information.*
- *Providing access to product and portfolio information from anywhere in the world (without installing client software).*
- *Making it easier for your extended team to submit ideas, requirements and supporting information.*
- *Automating categorization of feature and enhancement requests with customer, market, persona or other attributes to facilitate quick analysis.*

Highlights

- *Applying workflow to the information for review/approval cycles— supporting whichever process you choose, such as Pragmatic Marketing, Stage-Gate and others.*
- *Allowing you to rank or score product or portfolio features based on any number of criteria, and from any number of perspectives.*
- *Providing decision analysis tools, such as “what-if” scenarios and sensitivity analysis.*
- *Supplying real-time, on-demand reports regarding the status of your development activities, along with providing personalized dashboards for each user and role.*

Rational Focal Point software is an easily adapted solution that scales from targeting a specific business issue for a core set of users, to addressing a broader array of your organization’s processes and stakeholders.

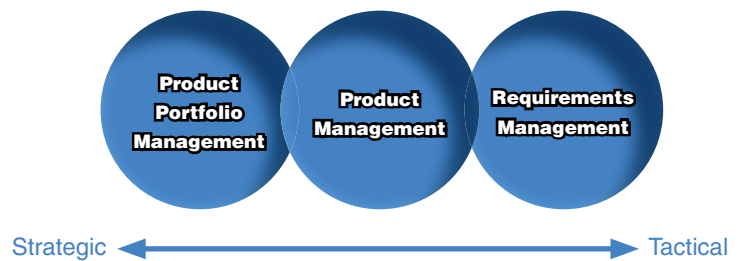
IBM Rational Focal Point summary

Rational Focal Point software is an easily adapted solution that scales from targeting a specific business issue for a core set of users, to addressing a broader array of your organization’s processes and stakeholders. IBM Rational Focal Point solution capabilities include:

- *A comprehensive decision support system that optimizes your efforts by enabling you to evaluate products and projects according to market demand, resources, strategic value, cost, etc.*
- *A uniquely visual product that provides a critical layer of prioritization, decision making, scenario analysis and planning capabilities that help organizations quickly zero in on what’s most important to their customers.*
- *A fully Web-based collaboration platform that helps stakeholders participate anywhere in the world through role-based user access without any client installation.*
- *A highly configurable environment, extensible with business rules.*

Highlights

As illustrated in the following diagram, IBM Rational Focal Point can be used to address any of the elements of product development individually, or it can be applied across the entire spectrum allowing you to ultimately link your strategic product planning processes with the tactical product delivery processes.



Capturing key information

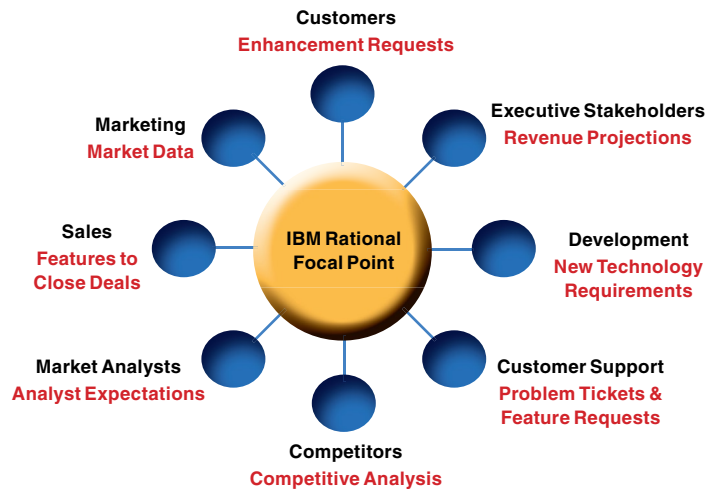
This paper highlights how the IBM Rational Focal Point application can help you capture, define, select and manage your product information.

Consolidate diverse information sources and formats to a single, unified view that can be shared with stakeholders to facilitate more informed decision making.

Capturing information

A big step in successfully capturing and managing information on ideas, requirements and feature requests is to reduce the number of information sources and formats. Ideas, requirements and feature requests typically come from a variety of sources, usually in a variety of formats, such as spreadsheets, documents, e-mails, phone calls and meeting notes. How then, do you ensure that you and your stakeholders have an up-to-date, consistent view of what is needed and what you plan to deliver? IBM Rational Focal Point software helps you replace chaos with order.

Highlights



Focal Point software features an intuitive Web-based interface that enables team members to input information in a consistent format from any networked location.

Simply and elegantly, IBM Rational Focal Point software enables you to gather and manage this once disparate collection of information in a central repository. Through a Web browser interface, Focal Point enables your team, wherever they're located, to easily enter key information in a consistent format. Using a security-rich, role-based approach, the Focal Point solution gives you complete control over who has access to the data and functionality, and under which circumstances they receive access.

Entering information into the Focal Point application could not be easier. Simple forms prompt users for the specific information needed—forms do not include fields that are needed by users later in the process. In addition to attributes to hold your content, Focal Point also allows you to apply any number of attributes to help you “classify” your information. This could include such things as associated persona, release status, product line, targeted geography or market, status and importance. This data will be useful later as you view, manage, analyze and report on your information.

Rational Focal Point software simplifies the collection of requirements and enhancement requests by allowing customers and other stakeholders to e-mail their requests directly to the application which then intelligently categorizes the request to relieve you of a time-consuming, tactical activity.

Highlights

Configurable forms and role-based access helps ensure that users only need to enter the information relevant to their specific roles.

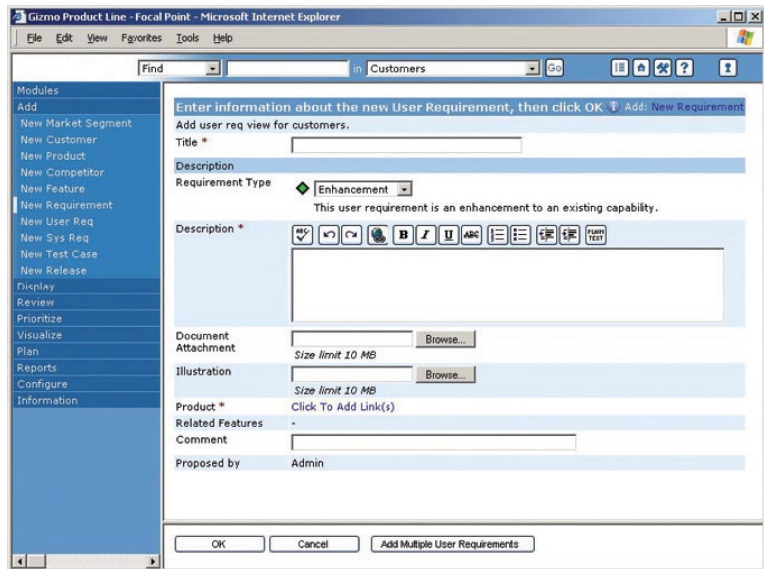


Figure 1: Configurable forms prompt users for only the needed information based on their role.

To simplify data entry, users with a larger quantity of information can import it from any spreadsheet or standard document. This capability is particularly convenient when you have a list of customer requirements to input.

Information can be imported from spreadsheets and project plans to help avoid tedious manual re-entry of forms data.

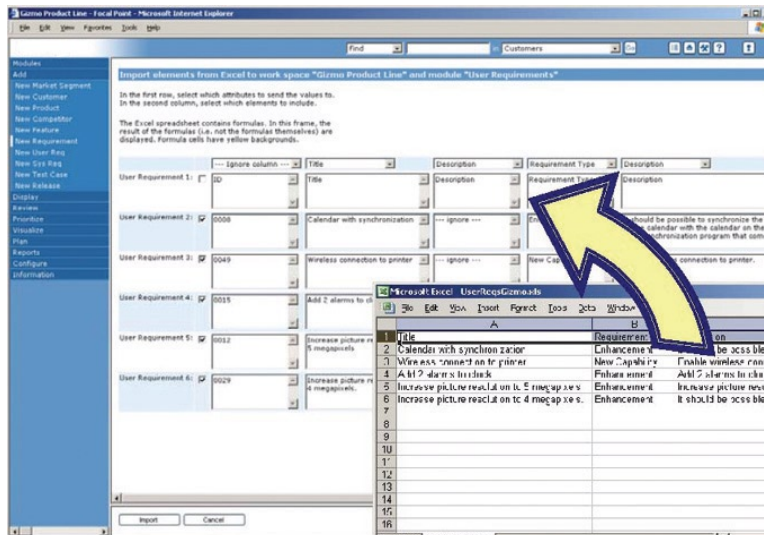


Figure 2: Import — Users can import information from Microsoft Excel, Word, or a Microsoft Project plan, with full control over the mapping of the data into Focal Point.

Highlights

Forms also accept drag-and-drop input for faster, easier transfer of information from non-standard formats.

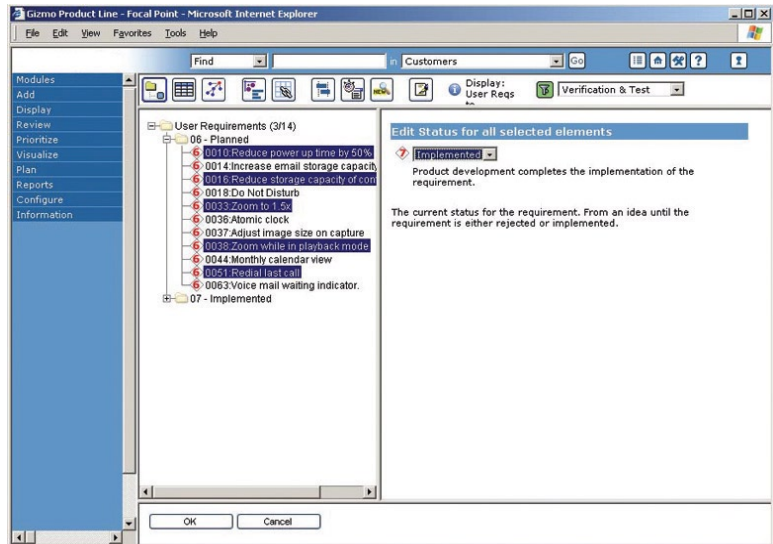


Figure 3: Multi-Select enables users to drag-and-drop information for reordering or modification.

As IBM Rational Focal Point software is a Web-based application, you can access it from anywhere, at any time. Product managers meeting with a customer or waiting at the airport can access their information directly and immediately. For ease of use, Focal Point software minimizes clicks and Web browser refreshing by using multi-select and click-to-edit capabilities.

Collaborating with your team

IBM Rational Focal Point can flexibly facilitate collaboration within popular workflow strategies or within your established organizational processes.

Once you've captured your key information in the Rational Focal Point software, your team is free to collaborate. Whichever workflow you decide to follow—the popular Stage-Gate or Product Management frameworks, or a process specific to your organization—Rational Focal Point product flexibility helps your organization's processes to mature and evolve, while maintaining consistency. The software will make sure that the right people have access to the right information at the right time via configurable, role-based views of the database.

Highlights

If you regularly deliberate over product priorities, the review capabilities of the Focal Point application can improve your product release planning processes. With the software, each stakeholder can submit his own priorities based on the value offered by a feature or requirement. With this information, you can weight the needs of your stakeholders, perhaps giving greater emphasis to the CEO rather than to technical support, or key customers over smaller markets, to create a prioritized list of product features.

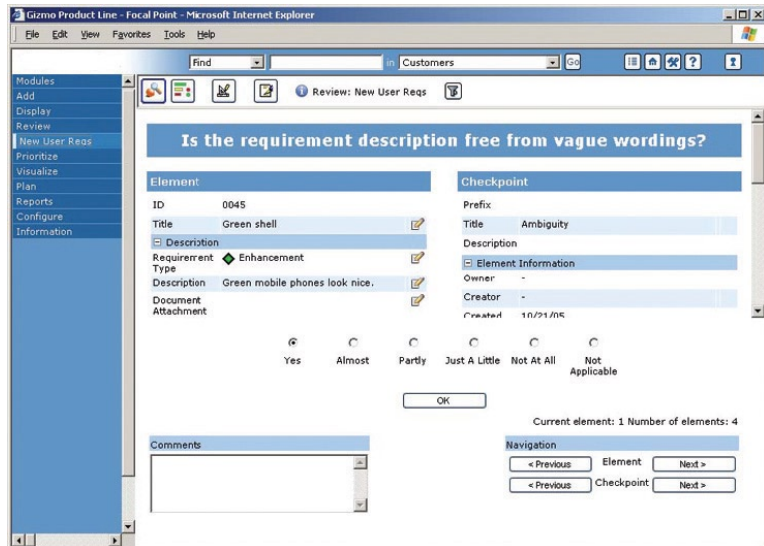


Figure 4: Review — Use the review feature to support requirements and Stage-Gate reviews.

Customizable dashboards make it easy to track progress by allowing users real-time progress tracking and status updates relevant to their areas of interest.

As your key product or project information comes together and progresses through your workflow, you are able to track their area of interest via a tailored Web page “dashboard” that provides immediate access to the real-time information and status important to them. Using hyperlinks, you can quickly drill down into the underlying data for further investigation.

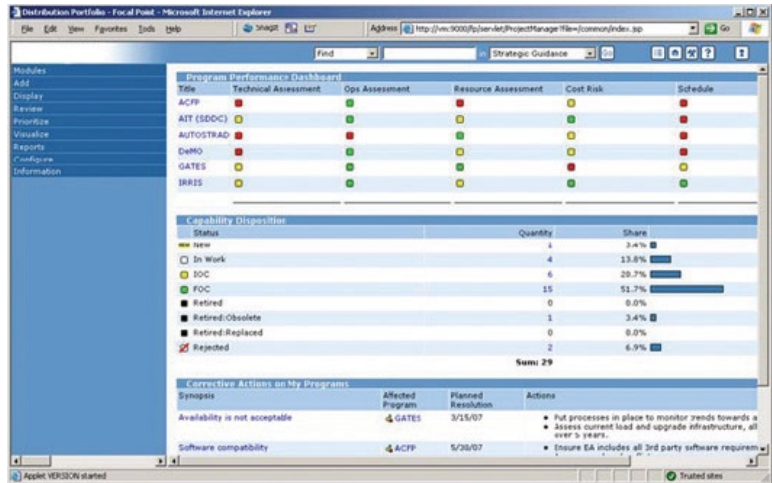


Figure 5: Dashboards — Each user can be given a role-based dashboard or personalize their dashboard to provide quick visibility to metrics and status, with the ability to drill down to the details.

As you collaborate with your team on the information, discussion threads (see below) can capture the rationale of key members, helping you understand later why certain decisions were made.

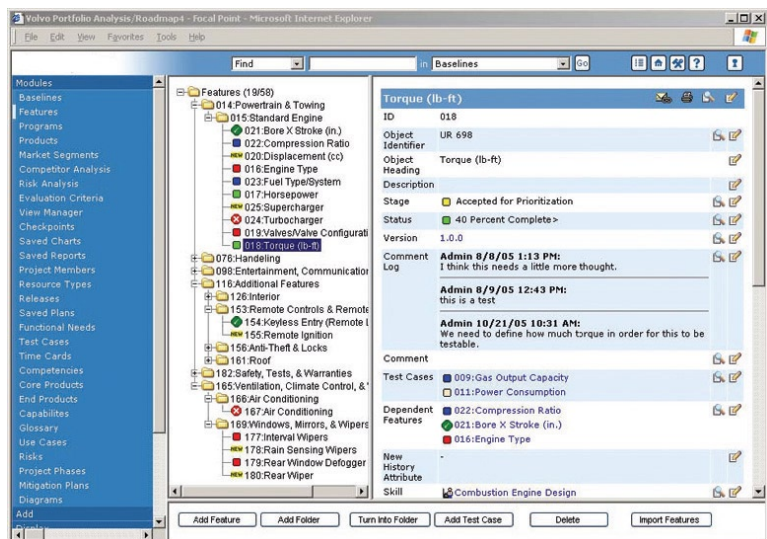


Figure 6: Discussion Threads — Capture the dialogue and thoughts of those collaborating on requirements.

Highlights

The prioritization feature utilizes a pairwise comparison algorithm to help sort and refine development priorities based on complex qualitative and quantitative criteria.

Selecting and managing requirements and features

When asked for their input, customers typically respond that everything is high priority. Collectively, your customers have a wide range of requirements and priorities that all compete for your development budget. But is it possible to develop everything your customers are asking for? How do you select the right things to build?

IBM Rational Focal Point software's unique prioritization feature, based on a pairwise comparison algorithm, allows you to intuitively create a sensible list of priorities, even for 'intangible' criteria such as customer value. Once your stakeholders have ranked the requirements or features according to the criteria important to them, you can roll up the results in a summary view to help make product decisions that deliver the most value to your business and customers, while minimizing potential negative consequences.

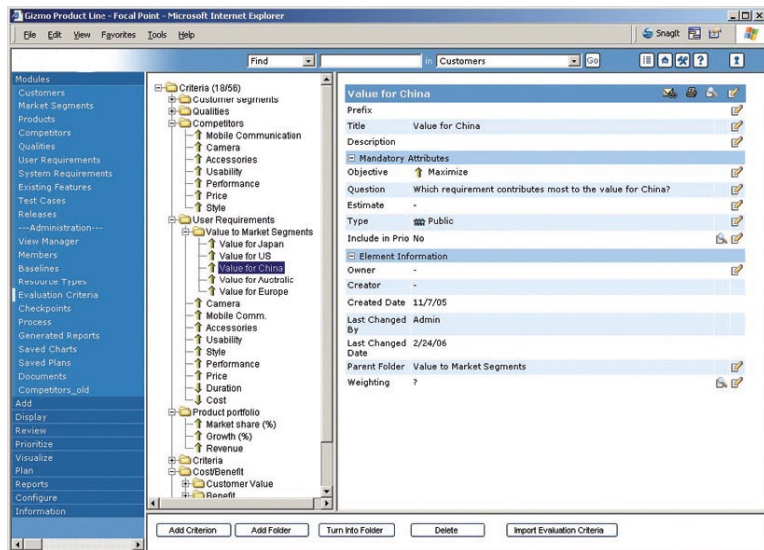


Figure 7: Decision criteria — Define qualitative and quantitative criteria to be used by stakeholders in prioritization exercises.

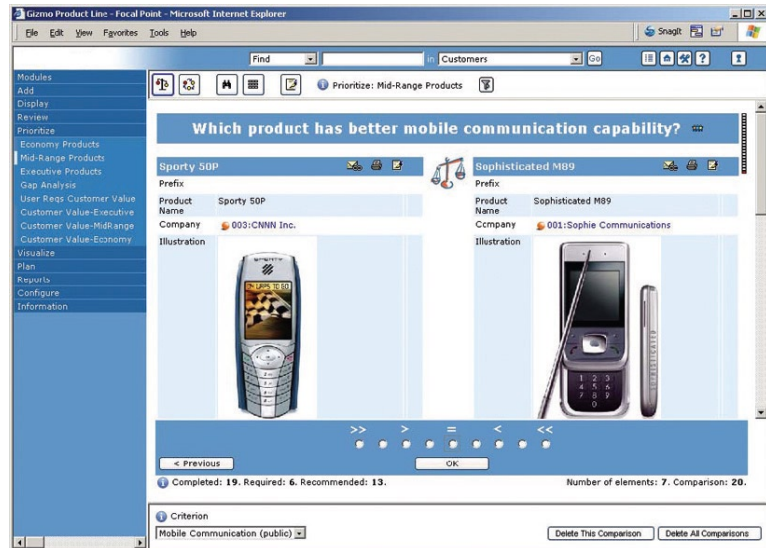


Figure 8: Pairwise comparison — Allow stakeholders to evaluate the merits of the requirements in pairs, taking advantage of algorithms that minimize the number of needed comparisons.

Once the Rational Focal Point application determines that a sufficient number of comparisons have been made, the built-in graphical capabilities enable you to dynamically view the results from different perspectives, giving you a quick overview and the ability to access details on demand. You can use the checkboxes in either the list of elements being considered, or in the list of criteria to essentially “take them out of the picture” and see what the effect would be.

Highlights

Stakeholder preferences can be represented visually to create a composite, at-a-glance view that shows which priorities are most important for the most stakeholders.

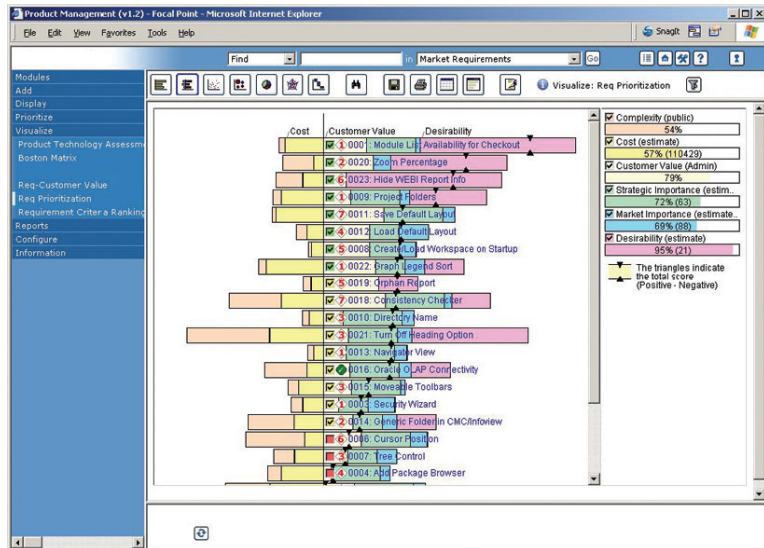


Figure 9: Visualizations — Use IBM Rational Focal Point to visualize rankings and the value to various stakeholders and facilitate what-if cost/benefit analysis.

You can perform further what-if analyses by using the scenario analysis feature shown in the next image to adjust the relative weighting of the criteria and observe how the ranking of the elements might change. This shows how sensitive your decisions might be to changes in criteria, which, for example, might represent outside influences or the opinions of stakeholders—things that can very likely change over time.

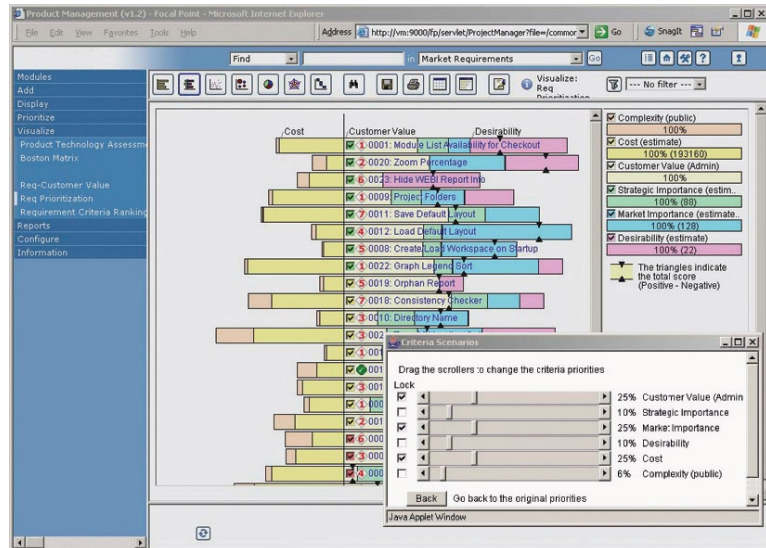


Figure 10: Scenario analysis — Analyze various requirements scenarios, based on various criteria weightings and include/exclude checkboxes.

By enabling the “disagreement indicator” in the stacked bar chart, you can determine whether your stakeholders are in agreement, or identify areas where opinions differ, as revealed by the point of the jagged red line next to an item being further to the right. With this information, you can investigate the discrepancy before making a decision.

Highlights

The disagreement indicator can help you quickly spot conflicting directives—areas in which the client stakeholders are in disagreement.

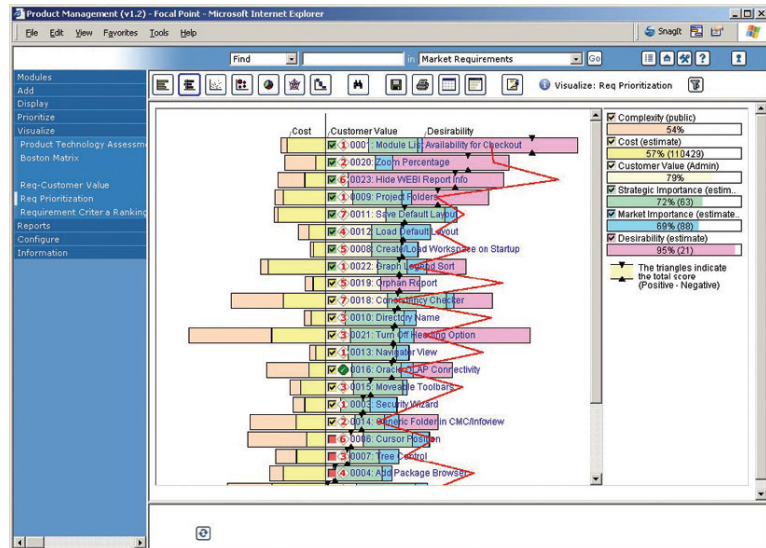
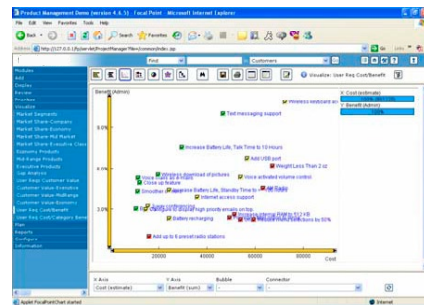
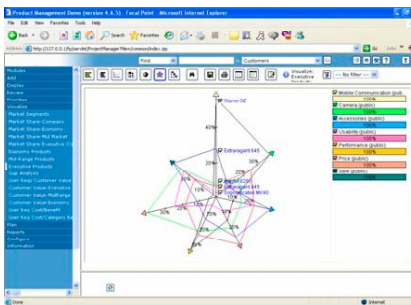
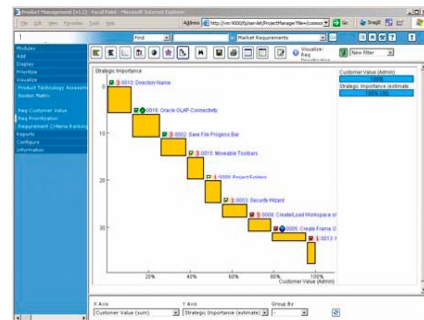
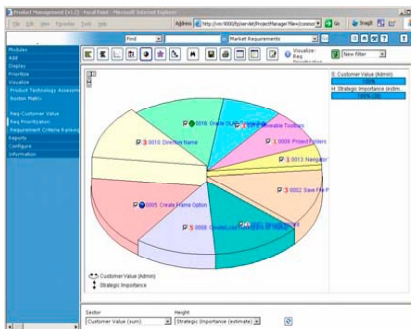


Figure 11: Disagreement indicator — Visualize the level of variance between responses.

IBM Rational Focal Point software provides you with many ways to visually analyze your real-time data, including pie chart, waterfall charts, radar diagrams and bubble scatter diagrams. Using the drop-down menus at the bottom of these charts, you select which portions of the data to view, providing a near endless number of perspectives from which to analyze your information.

Highlights

Chart variety enables users to visualize information in a number of intuitive formats.



Additional IBM Rational Focal Point software strengths

IBM Rational Focal Point software is a highly flexible solution which scales to your needs as your process matures and your culture evolves. It is easy to add new data types and links among those types as you expand the reach of your application. Likewise, through simple configuration changes, you can access more of the underlying functionality to meet your evolving needs and address other areas of your product development process. This section summarizes some additional uses of IBM Rational Focal Point software, beyond those of information capture and management, for product, project and portfolio management.

Highlights

Competitive analysis helps you compare your development project or existing product to competing offerings.

Competitive analysis

Which product development decision would be complete without considering what the competition is up to? You can bet they are keeping an eye on you! IBM Rational Focal Point software allows you to easily add competitive information as just one more facet of your requirements assessment process. You decide whether you want to consider your competitors feature-by-feature or by differentiating strengths and weaknesses. The Rational Focal Point solution enables your team to more clearly understand how the competition should influence your product direction.

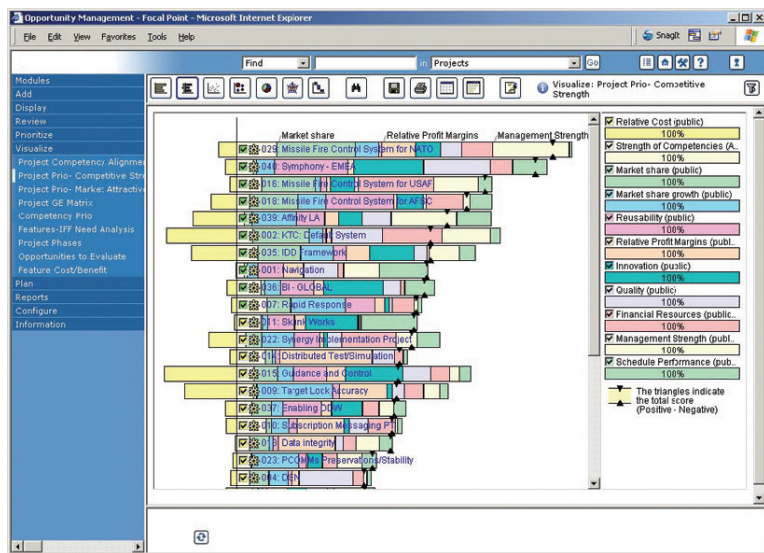


Figure 12: Competitive analysis — By documenting competitive intelligence, IBM Rational Focal Point can pinpoint which features will give you an edge in the market.

Additionally, you can include win/loss reports to collect information from each encounter with a competitor so you can understand their evolving strategy, strengths and weaknesses, as well as how they position their products against yours. With this additional information, you may generate new requirements, personas or product ideas that you had not previously considered. With the software's linking capability, you can keep track of all of the relationships between these different pieces of information.

Highlights

Rational Focal Point maintains relationships between all information stored in the repository, making it easy to decompose and trace requirements and impact.

Decomposition and traceability analysis

IBM Rational Focal Point software supports relationships between all information stored in the repository, so you can decompose higher-level requirements into one or more lower-level requirements, while maintaining and reporting on traceability. For example, you could decompose a user requirement into system requirements for various subsystems being developed.

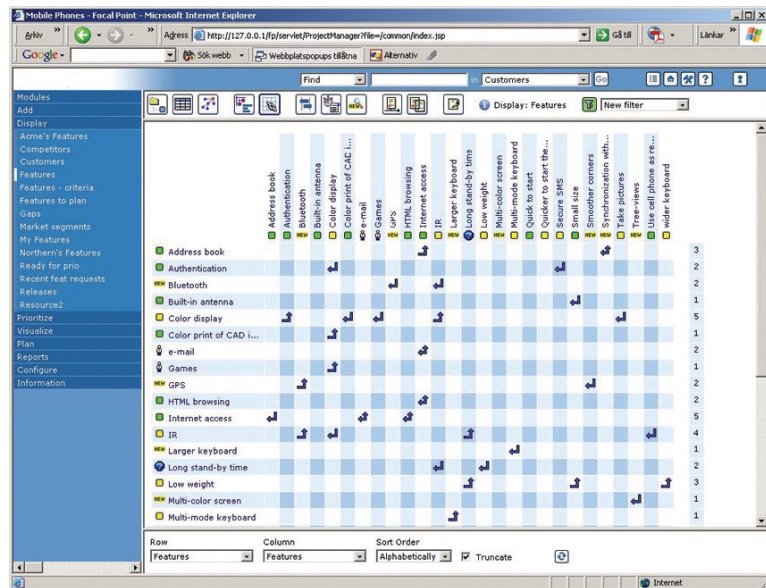


Figure 13: Traceability — Focal Point allows you to link various elements, creating relationships that can be visualized, such as traceability with just a single mouse click.

Release and project planning

Once you have determined which features and requirements to pursue, you can optimize the allocation of requirements (by rank) across any number of releases or iterations you might be planning with the software's planning feature, which enables you to consider not only the availability of resources, but also the required skills.

Highlights

IBM Rational Focal Point can help you baseline, track release versions and plan release schedules.

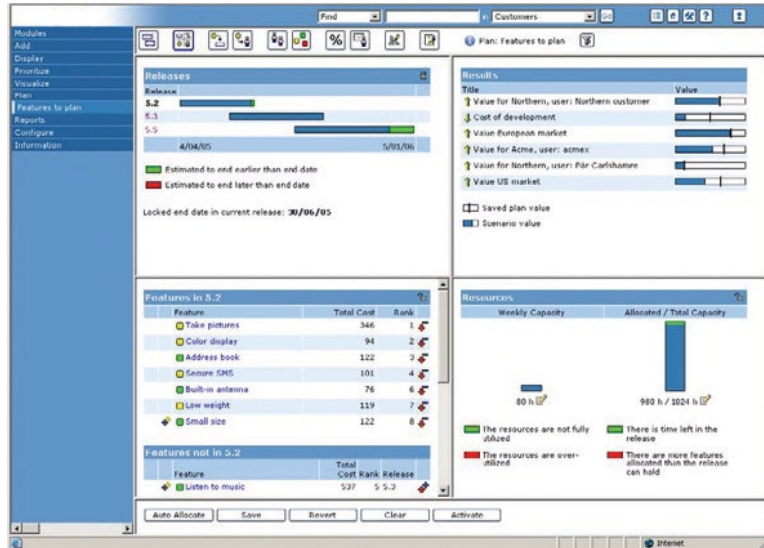


Figure 14: Release planning — The planning feature helps to optimize the allocation of requirements across product releases, allowing you to optimize the value of a release based on resources and skills.

Highly detailed Gantt charts are available for fine-tuning your development roadmap while monitoring resource loading, so project managers can analyze whether a release slip impacts other projects and pushes resource demand above capacity.

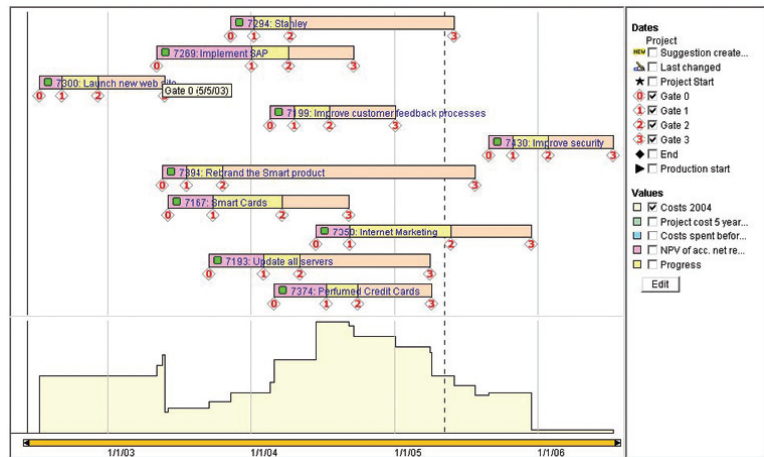


Figure 15: Roadmap — IBM Rational Focal Point allows you to perform high-level scheduling, visualizing your entire product development lifecycle.

Versioning and baselines

Depending on your product or your organization's demands, you may be required to keep versions of product information or requirements, so you can compare and audit decisions and changes that were made. With IBM Rational Focal Point software versioning, you can take snapshots in time and visualize how the demands on your business are changing—possibly spotting trends that can help your product direction stay ahead of the market and your competition.

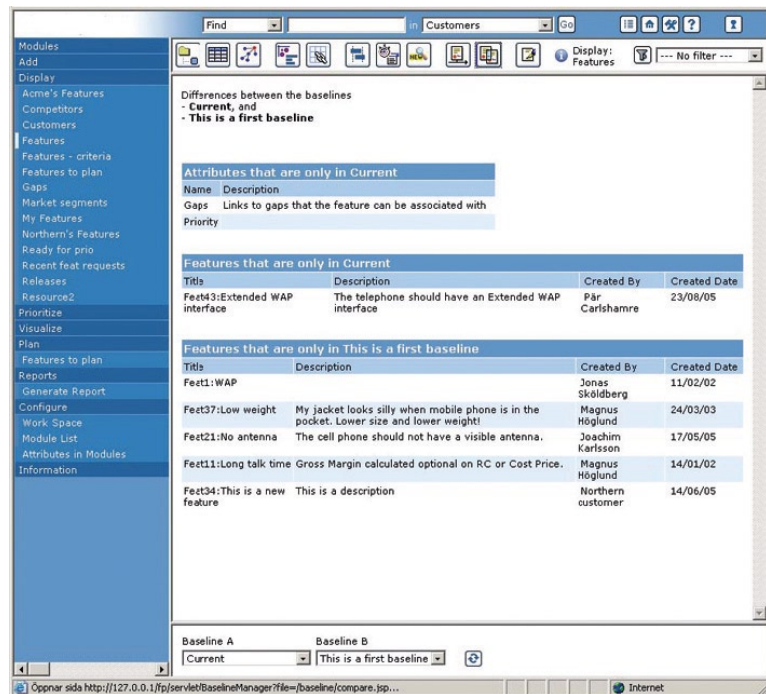


Figure 16: Baselines — Focal Point keeps track of all versions of your information so the ability to create and compare baselines is a natural extension.



Conclusion

Over time, there can be further benefit to expanding the IBM Rational Focal Point solution to other stakeholders, and to other areas of your product development process, such as competitive analysis and release planning. As a flexible solution, Focal Point implementation can scale to meet your needs as your process and organization evolve. IBM Rational looks forward to discussing how we can assist with the continuous improvement of your development process.

For more information

To learn more about IBM Rational Focal Point software, contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit:

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July 2009
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