



**UNTANGLE  
THE USER  
FEEDBACK  
KNOT**



# Hello.

This ebook is brought to you by Userback, the visual user feedback platform that enables teams like yours to create awesome digital experiences that users love.

We created Userback because we saw too many product managers, developers and software teams struggling to collect, interpret and action feedback from their users, such as bug reports, feature requests and general comments.

Without the right tools and processes, their feedback loops were becoming tangled in what we call:

## **The User Feedback Knot**

When it comes to untangling this knot, we are super excited to be able to share some of our thoughts in this ebook, along with insights from other SaaS and web companies who face the same user feedback challenges that you may be facing.

**Discover more at**

**[Userback.io](https://userback.io)**

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PART 1

# Introduction





“ User feedback is the  
lifeblood of our own  
product development  
lifecycle.”

**Jon Tobin**  
Founder & CEO  
@ Userback





## Introduction

If you want to create great products with an awesome user experience — and continuously improve them — then user feedback becomes the lifeblood of your product development lifecycle.

However, many traditional user feedback loops continue to rely upon disconnected tools and unstructured processes to collect, organize, prioritize and action user feedback.

The loop can quickly become tangled and broken. It becomes almost impossible to manage and action user feedback as it starts to burden and slow down the project rather than enhance or add value.

You no longer have a user feedback loop...



**...you have a**





We spoke with five SaaS founders, product managers team leaders and developers to get their insights into what creates user feedback knots, along with their strategies for avoiding and untangling them:



**Karl Rumelhart**

**Chief Product Officer and Executive Vice President of Engineering @ Gainsight**

Leads product vision and execution for Gainsight, a comprehensive Customer Success platform. Previous senior product and marketing roles with VMware, Jive and Infer.



**Michelle Picoto**

**Product Management & Marketing Marketing Strategist @ Deepstar Strategic**

Over 15 years experience in product management and marketing, including 6 years with Red Hat. Helps SaaS organisations to align identity, product development, marketing and demand generation activities.





## **Bart Pilarczyk**

**Head of Product @ PeakData**

Over 15 years experience in roles including Product Manager, Program Manager, Delivery Manager, Product Leader and Developer. Has helped many start-ups to succeed and grow.



## **JP Strydom**

**Product Manager @ Sensei Project Solutions**

Combines a broad technical background with over 20 years experience to deliver and manage complex, large scale projects that transform businesses.



## **Jon Tobin**

**CEO & Co-Founder @ Userback**

On a mission to help software teams put the user in the center of product development by automating and streamlining the management of user feedback, from collection to closure.



|| Teams often find themselves in one of two situations: either they aren't getting much feedback or they are getting so much feedback that they struggle to make sense of it. They don't have clarity on what users 'think' versus what they 'want' and spend time debating it based on opinion not data."

**Karl Rumelhart**  
Chief Product Officer and Executive Vice  
President of Engineering @ Gainsight





PART 2

# 12 signs you may be tangled in a user feedback knot





## 12 Signs your user feedback loop may be tangled in a knot

- 1.** Feedback is open-ended, subjective and ambiguous.

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- 2.** No consistency in the capture, categorization, management and resolution of feedback.

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- 3.** Interpreting and managing user feedback is time-consuming and frustrating.

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- 4.** User feedback focuses on fixes, not enhancements.

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- 5.** You tend to only get feedback from highly passionate users — either full of praise or (more likely) upset.

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- 6.** Teams are arguing about the urgency and prioritization of user feedback.

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- 7.** User feedback does not get actioned or user-centric steps in product development lifecycle get skipped.

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- 8.** User feedback is considered a drag rather than an opportunity to create a better product experience.

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- 9.** Users are left in the dark not knowing if they've been heard as the feedback loop never gets closed.

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- 10.** Developers have to spend precious build time chasing user information from customers rather than building.

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- 11.** You respond to individual feedback without knowing the true benefit to the broader user base.

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- 12.** User feedback management is not integrated with other management platforms.



“Collecting and managing feedback is hard. The biggest challenge is consistency, both in the type of feedback being collected and the way that it is collected.”

**Bart Pilarczyk**  
Head of Product  
@ PeakData



PART 3

# How does a User Feedback Loop get tangled into a knot?





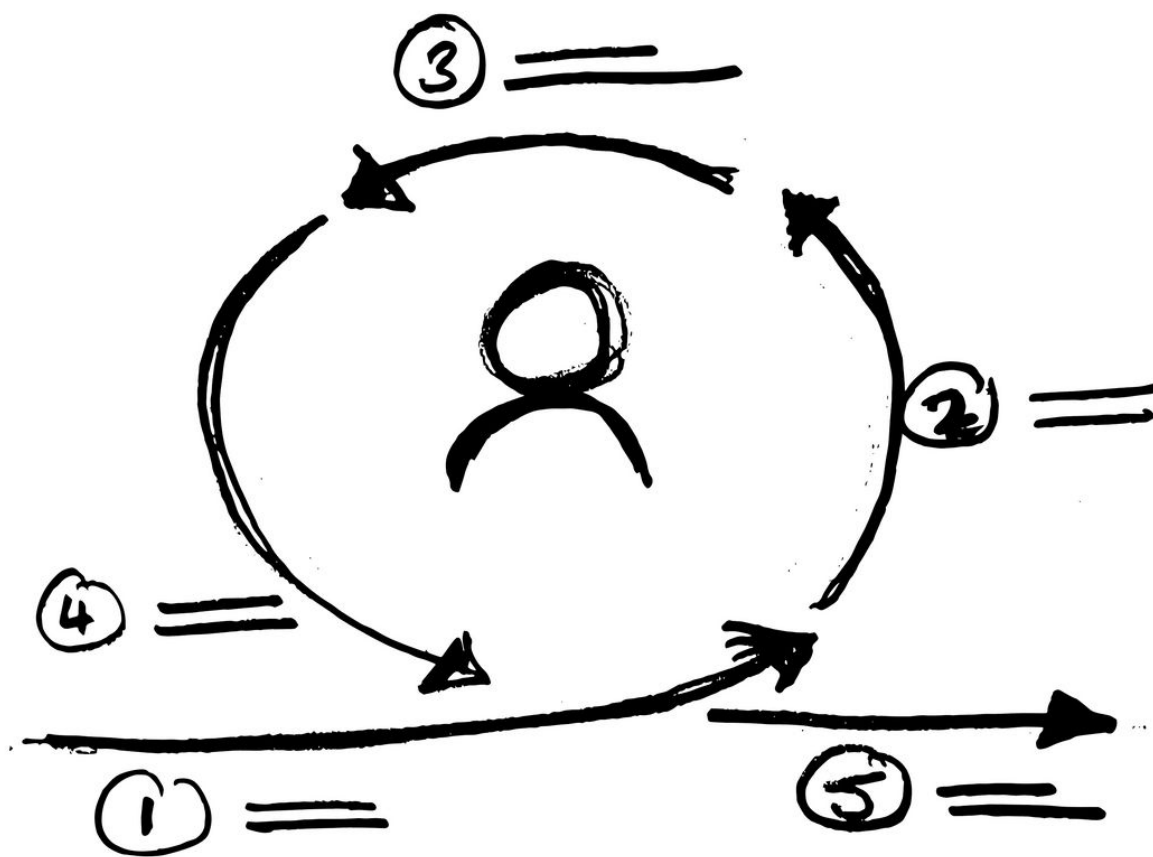
|| When feedback gets tangled in a knot then you lose focus. There is less synergy between items and you end up doing a lot of disconnected single item enhancements with little insight into what actual value it will present to the product experience as a whole.

**JP Strydom**  
Product Manager  
@ Sensei Project Solutions

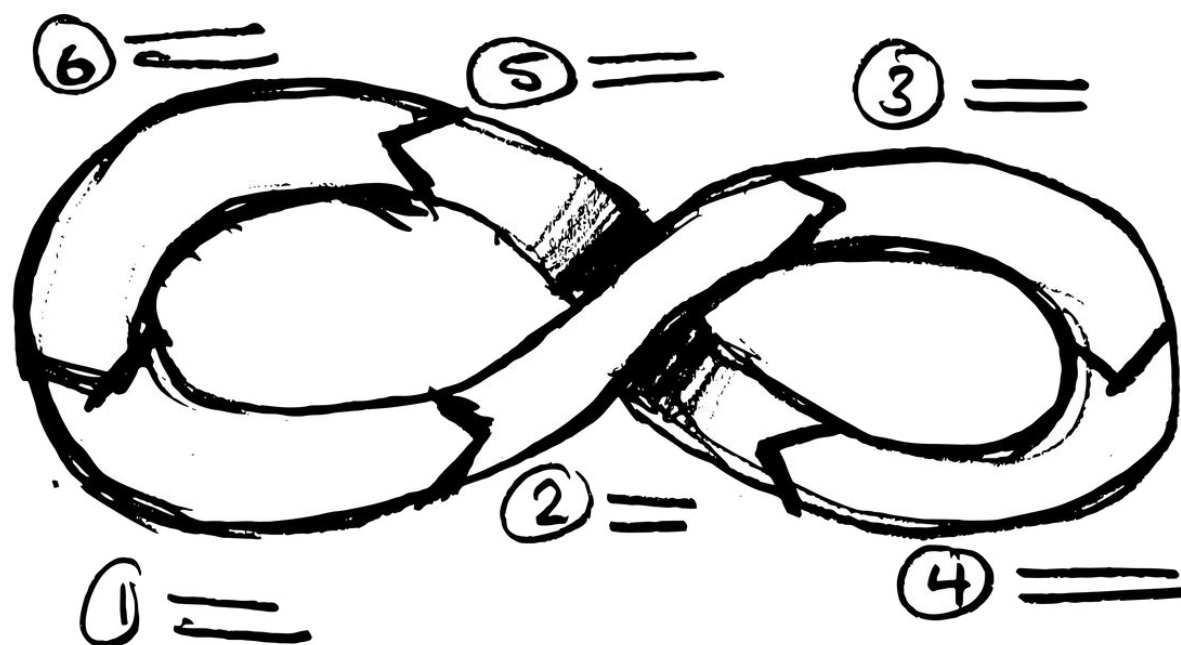


When you're building any kind of digital platform or product, understanding your users and actioning their feedback is critical to your long-term success.

Whether you're starting from scratch or looking to improve an existing website or application, to ensure you meet user expectations you need to be able to open and close the user feedback loop at every stage of the product development lifecycle. Your product development lifecycle might be a circular process that looks roughly something like this:

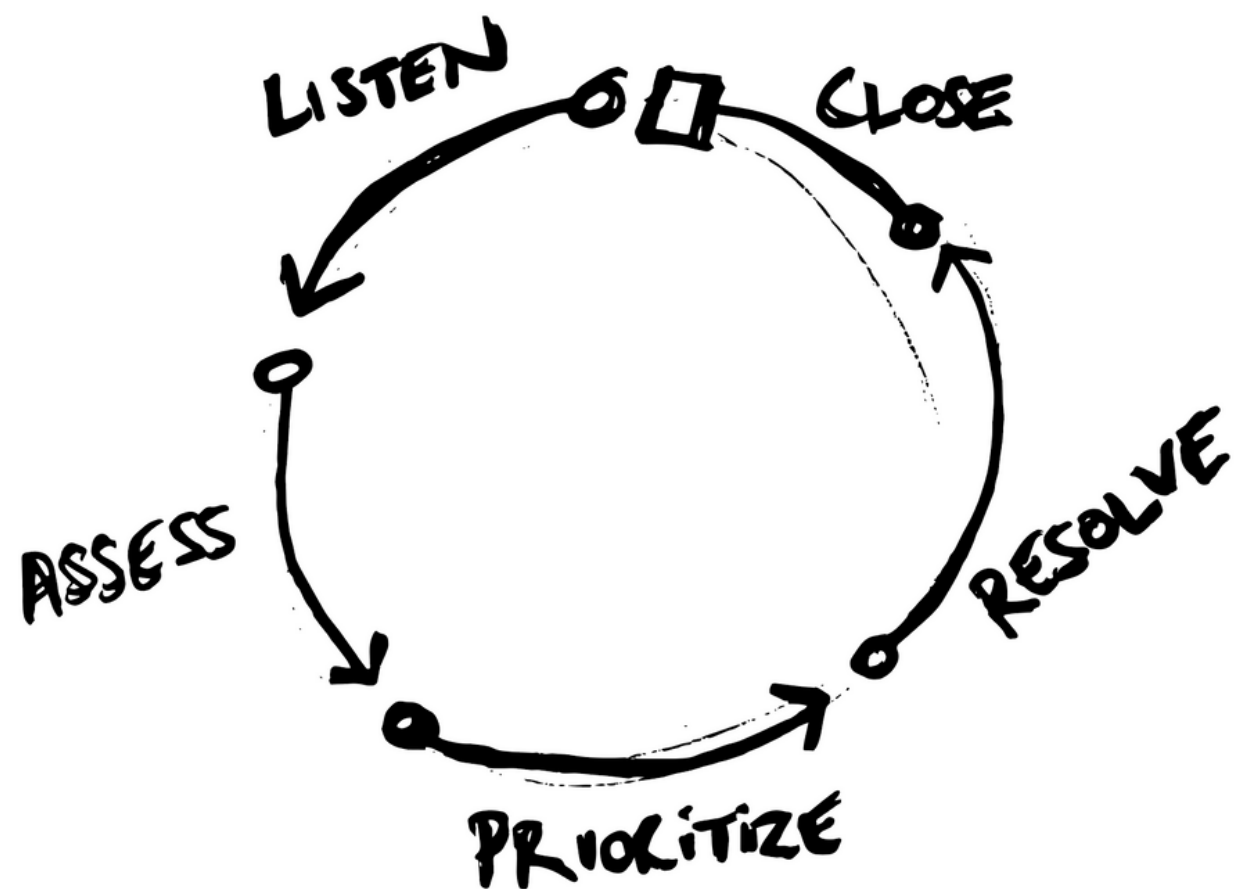


Or perhaps it's more like an infinity diagram:

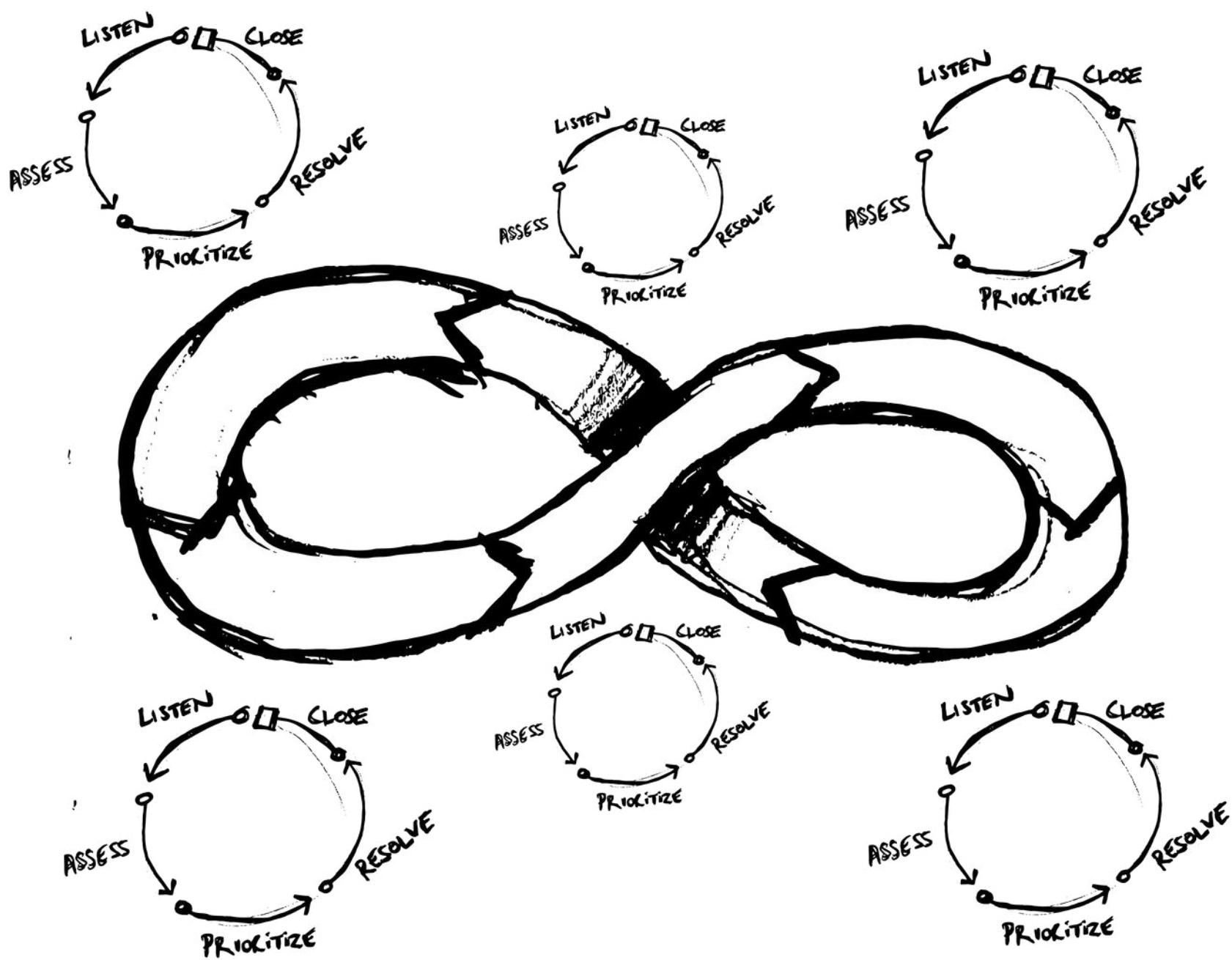




At each stage you may be implementing some kind of user feedback loop to listen to what users have to say and let them report bugs and make feature requests.

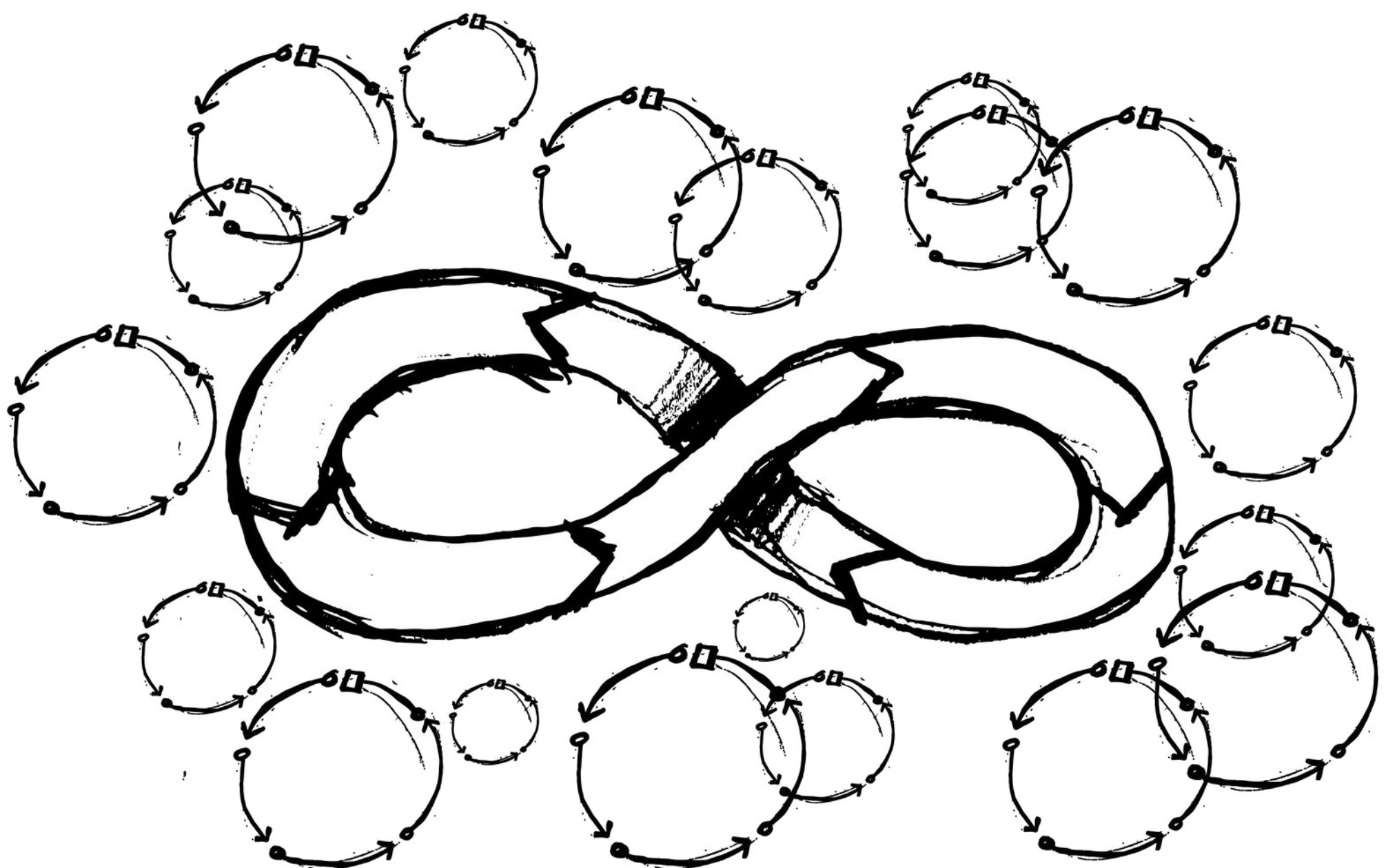


This informs the product development lifecycle, allowing you to move to the next stage with greater confidence that what you are building meets their needs.



However, managing user feedback can be tedious, time consuming, and isn't always as simple as the diagrams.

Additional feedback loops get created out of sequence, or feedback loops require their own internal feedback loops so software teams, product managers and other stakeholders can have their input.



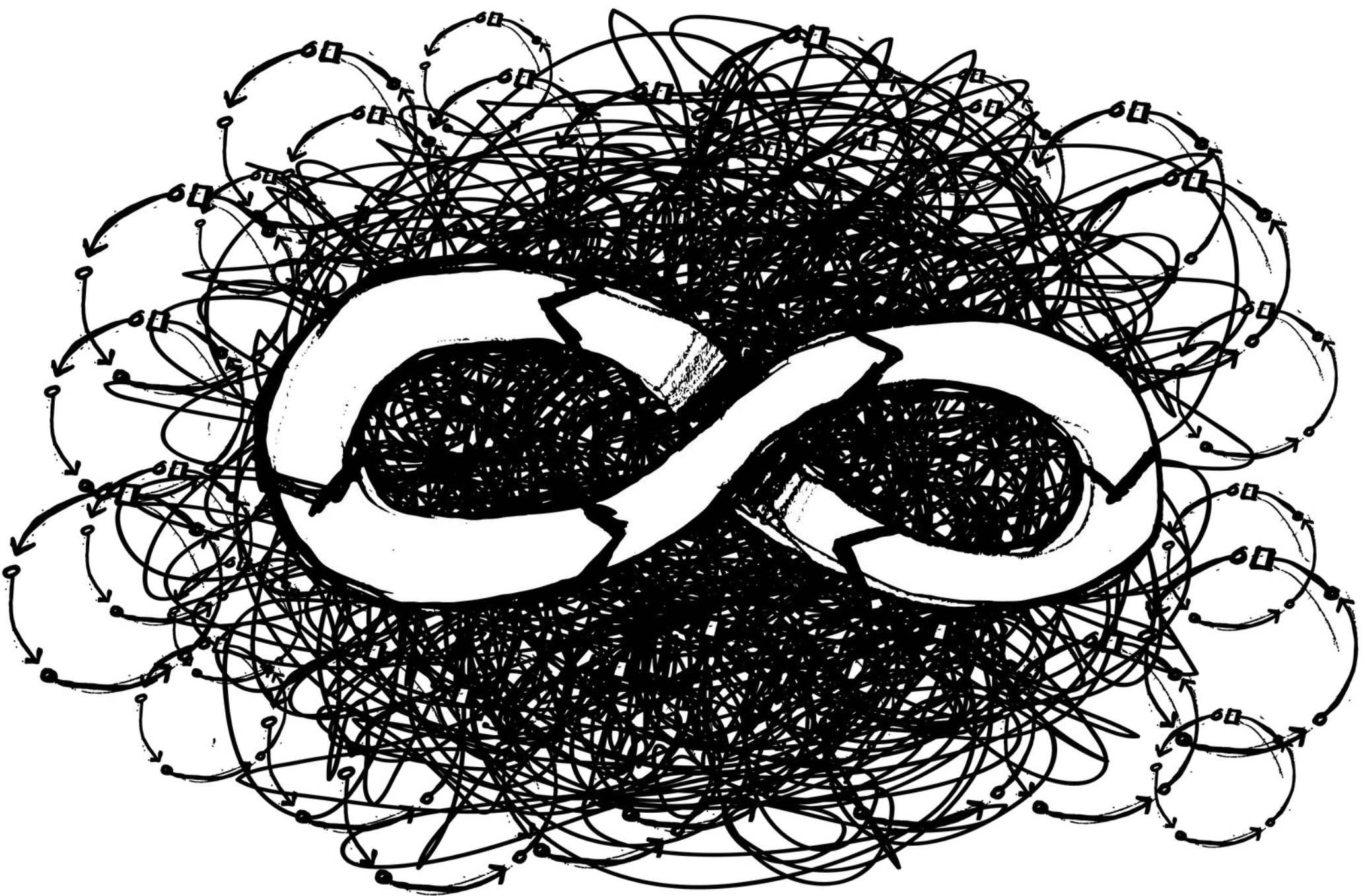
Many organizations do not have a structured approach to managing user feedback loops.

Instead they rely on a number of disconnected channels and manual methodologies where each piece of feedback received may get treated differently depending on how it is received and who who is responsible for it.



User feedback loops can quickly become tangled, losing both structure and value.

Without the right process for opening and closing user feedback loops the Product Development Lifecycle loses its integrity.



**The challenges are amplified when working across multiple projects or teams.**

If you are collecting user feedback across disconnected teams and tools, it quickly becomes almost impossible to manage.

The inability to efficiently manage and action user feedback starts to burden and slow down the project rather than enhance or add value.

“ When you have a feedback knot, the product team reacts to feedback rather than deeply understanding user requirements. This can result in deviation from product strategy, customer churn and building products that don't actually solve user problems.”

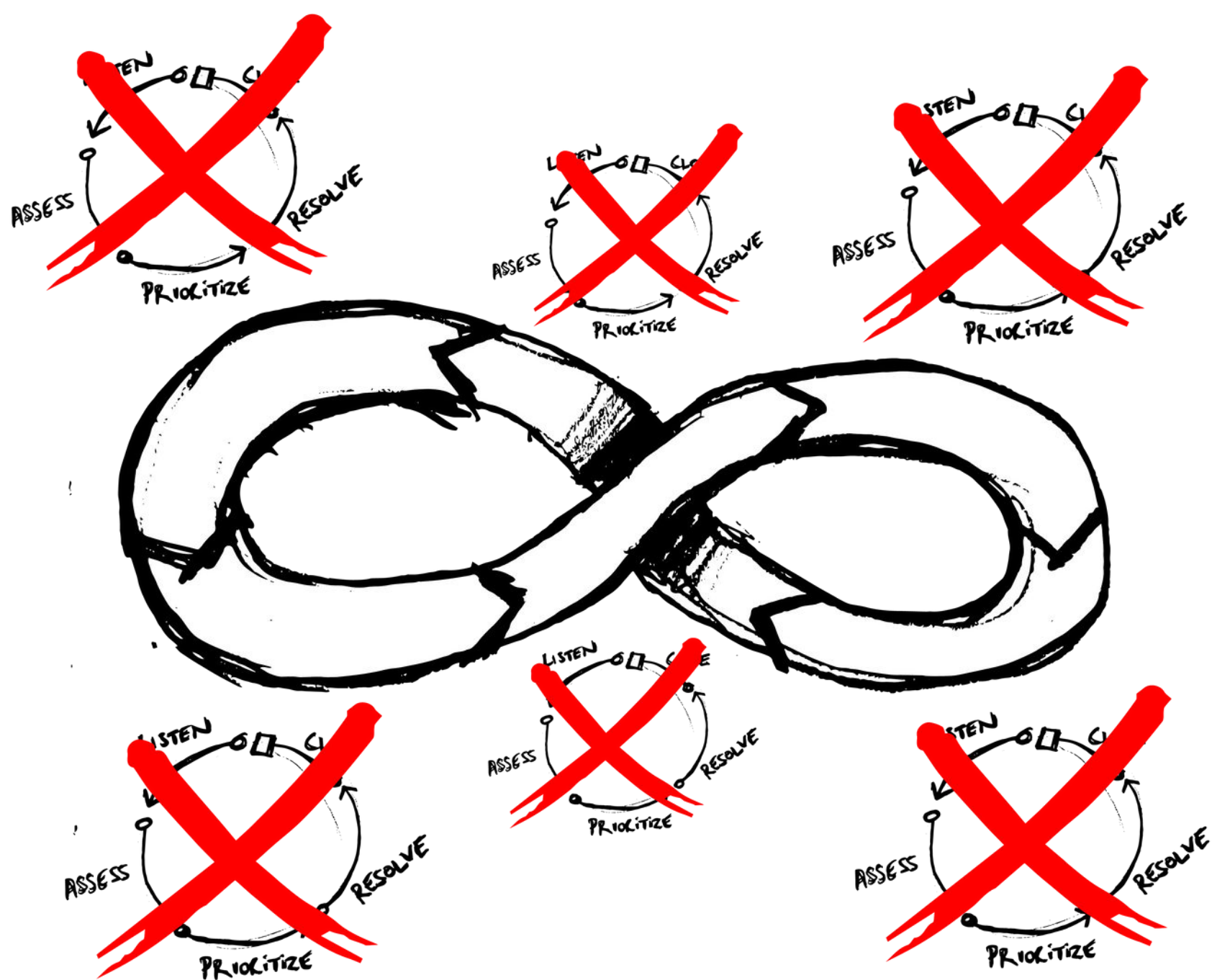
**Bart Pilarczyk**  
Head of Product  
@ PeakData





## User feedback itself is often the first casualty of the user feedback knot.

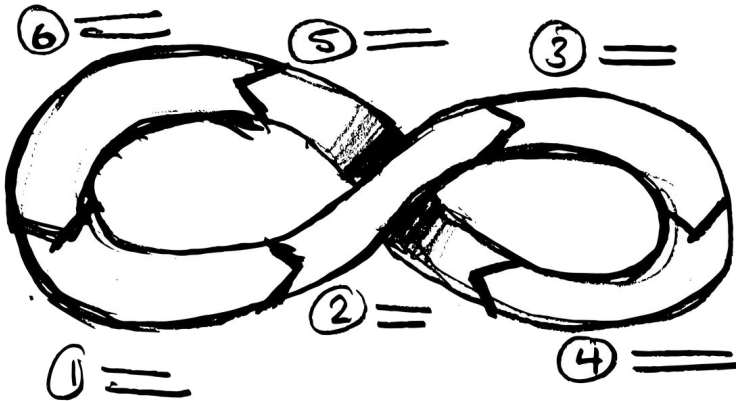
In many situations, the default solution when the user feedback loop becomes too tangled or too broken is to bypass it altogether, or to significantly reduce its impact on the product road map to get timelines and delivery commitments back on track.



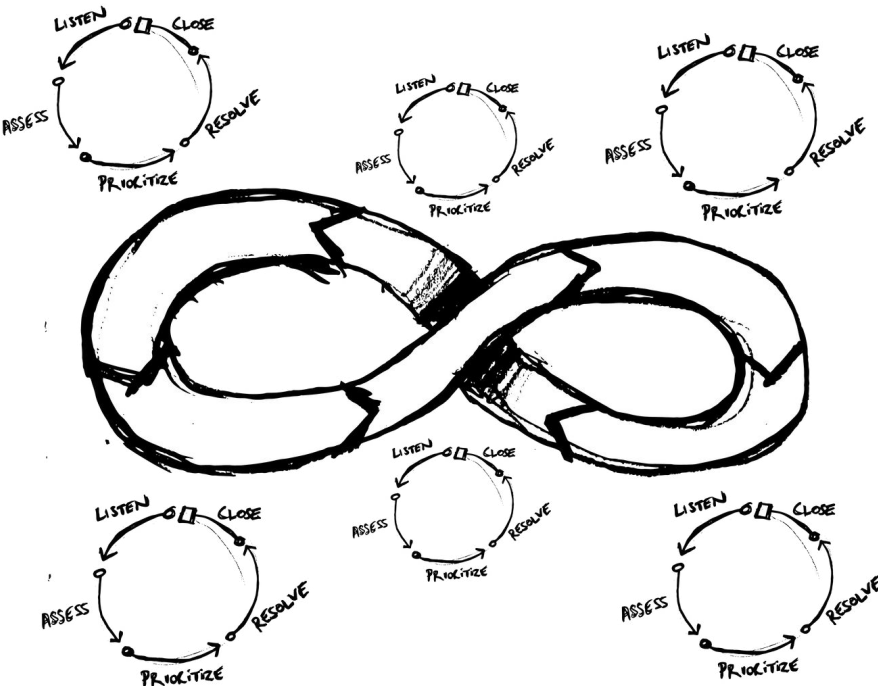
This is a common fate for that lovely theoretical user feedback loop — when it becomes too tangled it gets deprioritized and often decommissioned!

Product teams turn into feature factories rather than solving problems for their users, and products no longer meet real needs.

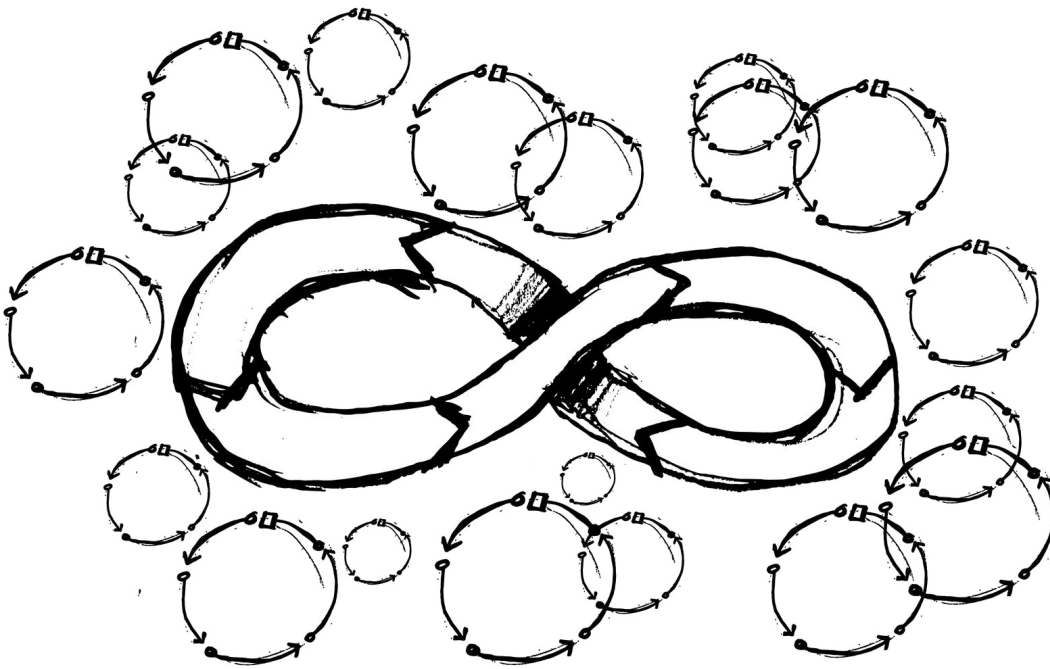
# User feedback knot recap



1. Start with a typical Product Development Lifecycle

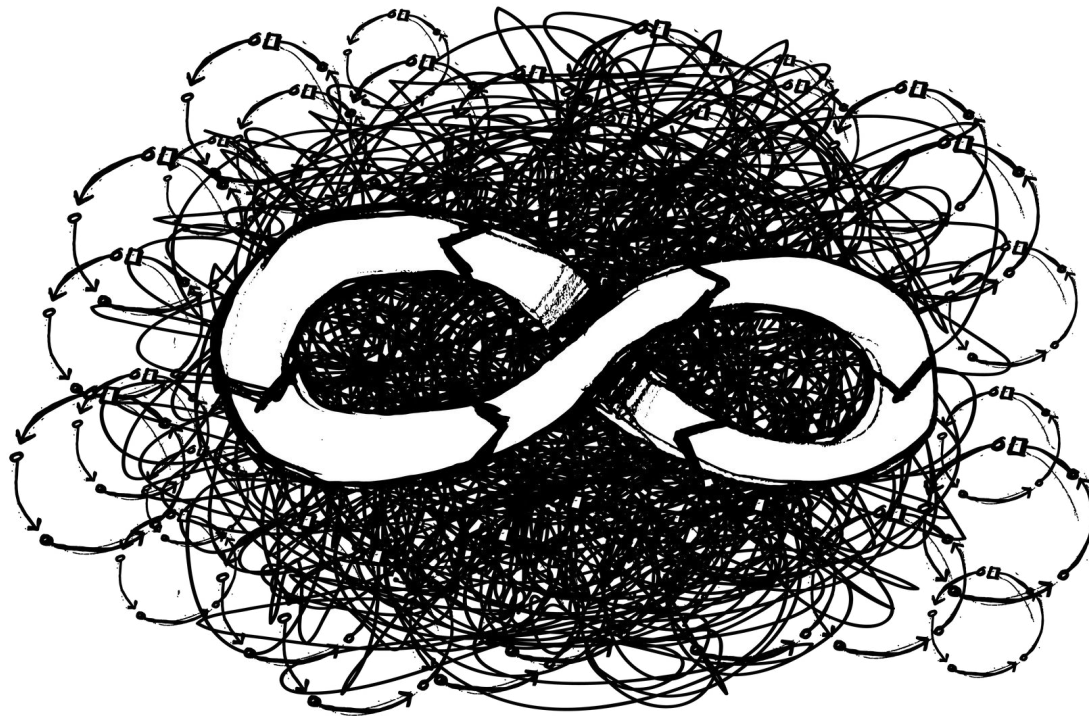


2. Add the required User Feedback Loops to ensure product is 'awesome'

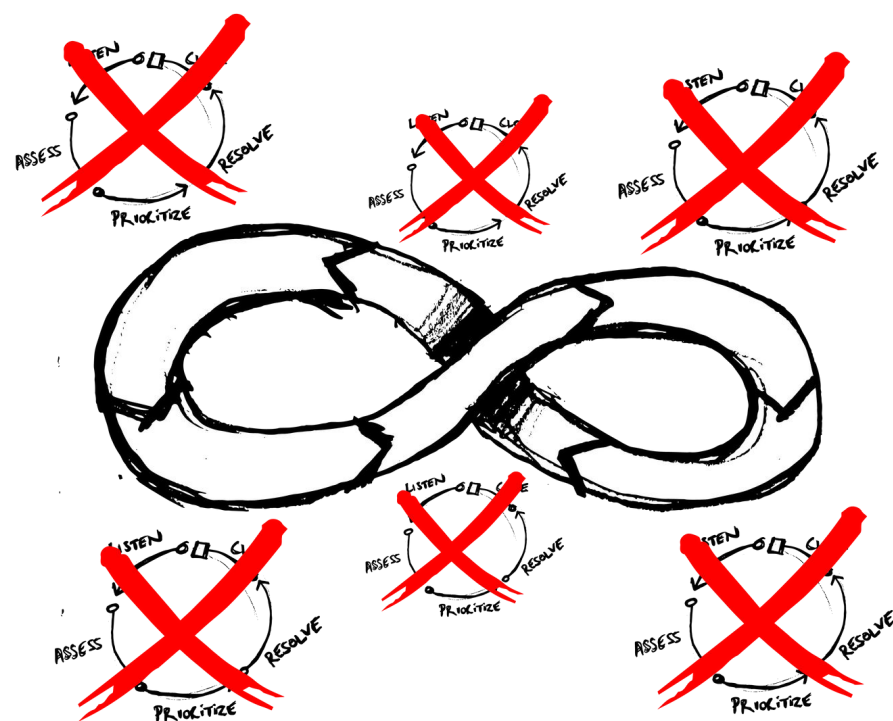


3. Limited process and standardization cause loops to unravel and tangle

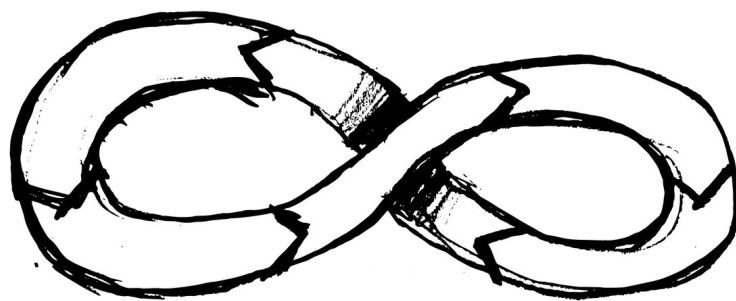




4. Unraveled and tangled user feedback loops quickly become knots.



5. Decide whether to try to make the impossible work or to 'forget feedback, focus on features'



6. Return to traditional product development lifecycle with low-to-no user feedback to help determine future direction, relevance and value.

|| When user feedback gets in a knot the velocity of your product development can be impacted because you lose clarity on user preference. Much worse is that you may build the wrong things. Product teams need to become focused on driving customer outcomes. Failure to deeply understand users means that R&D investment isn't aligned with customer outcomes. This is a profound business risk."

**Karl Rumelhart**  
Chief Product Officer and Executive Vice  
President of Engineering @ Gainsight





PART 4

# How you can untangle the user feedback knot.





It may sound obvious, but if you can shorten the user feedback loop and reduce as many 'loose ends' or variables as possible, then you immediately reduce the opportunities for feedback to unravel and become tangled in itself.

If you can make it easier for users to provide a broader range of feedback they can become an extension of the project team, giving you the insights you require to focus on what they actually need, rather than relying on your own guesswork or assumptions.



## SIMPLIFICATION

Make it easy  
for users  
to submit feedback.

“ Don’t force or expect users to leave your app to say what they want to say.”

**Michelle Picotot**  
Product Management & Marketing  
Marketing Strategist @ Deepstar Strategic





When it's too hard to submit user feedback, you don't get a true reflection of what the majority of users need.

If user feedback is important to building a better product or accelerating development, then you need to listen to all kinds of feedback. The easier it is for people to provide feedback, the more valuable and insightful the feedback becomes.

However, if the user feedback process is too hard or complicated for your users then you tend to end up only hearing from people who are really passionate about what they have to say... in which case they are usually:

- Really passionate about the product (positive)
- Really upset about the product (negative)

**And if people are 6x more likely to engage with a complaint than with a compliment, is that a true representation of the 'average' user?**

You may have average users who want to have their say, but if they need to use multiple applications to do things like replicate steps, take screenshots and email through their comments, then they may simply not bother.

Not only might you be missing out on the opportunity to add some awesome functionality that people genuinely want, you may also be missing a valuable opportunity to collect additional data to validate feedback from more vocal (and less typical) users — feedback that may be further tangling your feedback knot!

## Don't fuel further frustration.

If users want to report a negative experience, and the process of providing that feedback is also a negative experience, that can add further fuel to their frustration! This may cloud their desire or ability to provide feedback that's constructive or considered, which in turn can add extra layers of complexity — extra tangles in that feedback knot — to what they have to say.

### **Give them the power to say what they need to say, when they need to say it, without leaving your app.**

To ensure you get a good cross section of feedback... the good, the bad and the ugly... you need to make sure people can say what they want to say within your platform.

You need an environment that allows users to provide feedback without actually leaving your app by being able to natively take screenshots, record usage videos and make notes.

You can also reduce the volume of information that the user needs to provide by collecting technical information in the background (like console logs, operating environment, user information) so all the user has to do is focus on the issue or suggestion they want to raise.



## CONSISTENCY

Collect consistent  
and valuable  
feedback,  
without ambiguity or  
subjectivity, first time,  
every time.

|| Trawling through feedback, extracting the vital points, and then disseminating this information among the team gets harder as more feedback comes in."

**JP Strydom**  
Product Manager  
@ Sensei Project Solutions





Eliminate any uncertainty and reduce the need for developers to talk to users about issues.

We have all had or heard about these kind of conversations with users:

- *“It doesn’t work.”*
- *“What doesn’t work?”*
- *“The form thing.”*
- *“What were you doing when it stopped working?”*
- *“Filling it in.”*
  
- *“I don’t like it.”*
- *“What don’t you like about it?”*
- *“It’s blue. I don’t like blue.”*

Needless to say, this kind of dialogue can make a significant contribution to tangling the user feedback knot:

- It frustrates the user because they are not always clear about what is expected from them; and
- It frustrates the software teams who then have to investigate further to get to the source of the issue... and there is a good chance there may not be an issue if they’re actually dealing with a misguided opinion.

To untangle the knot, you need to guide your users through an easy-to-use platform and process that removes any loose ends of ambiguity and subjectivity that could dilute the value of their feedback, or require the gathering of additional information.

## Categorize, prioritize and utilize.

This in turn makes it easier for your teams to categorize, prioritize and utilize the user feedback in order to improve the overall product experience, for example:

- Is the feedback a bug report, a feature request, or simply a general comment?
- How important is it — not just to us as the product developer but also to our users?
- How much time and effort will it take to resolve?
- How will we know it has been addressed?



|| When they provide feedback some users want to tell us their life story and others just want to use single words. As soon as we standardized the way we collected and managed feedback it removed all the irrelevant subjectivity and personality.

Plus, as soon as we made it easier for users to submit feedback we started to get more and more great ideas from them!"

**Jon Tobin**  
Founder & CEO  
@ Userback



## USER CENTRICITY

Don't just keep the  
user in the loop,  
put them in its center.

|| To untangle feedback knots you need to create a culture of customer-centricity within product teams and give them the tools they need to make it a reality. You need listening posts directly facing both customers and internal teams (especially Customer Success) and they need to process feedback inputs and contextualize them in relation to the business, such as the size and health of customers.

**Karl Rumelhart**  
Chief Product Officer and Executive Vice  
President of Engineering @ Gainsight





## Turn feedback into an open up two-way dialogue with users.

Many organizations see user feedback as a one-way street where users take the lead and submit feedback in the form of a bug report, feature request or they just want to make a general comment.

This can contribute to a one-dimensional user feedback knot. To open things up it's important to gather user feedback proactively — not only does this allow you to get valuable suggestions, it can also help to validate or negate issues that are raised.

Where possible have a button that invites feedback and create prompts during the user journey asking for comments and suggestions.

### **Then close that loop or continue until resolved.**

Once an issue or suggestion has been raised it's important to ask the users if what has been done meets their expectations.

This not only improves the product, it also improves the relationship with the user base who see that they have been listened to and involved in the process.

At this stage you may choose to 'close' or 'continue' until the user is satisfied with the solution.

## Ask users to help prioritize issue resolution and feature enhancement.

If you are struggling to know what issues or features to prioritize it can help to open up the discussion to the beneficiaries of your actions — your users.

Giving them visibility of what you plan to do and giving them the ability to upvote and de-prioritize items on your product road map can strengthen the dynamic of your relationship and help to build long-term loyalty.

By engaging them in the process they become invested in it and are therefore more likely to become advocates for your products and what you do as they start to take ownership, even if it's simply by upvoting a functionality request.

When you open up things like your product roadmap and encourage users to come and take a look and to have a say in what they think should be done first — that can become a very powerful conversation.

**AUTOMATE & INTEGRATE**

# Streamline the user feedback lifecycle

by automating workflows  
and integrating with  
existing systems.



|| You need to educate the entire organization on the value of truly understanding your users. For that you need to collect both qualitative and quantitative feedback, which can be time-consuming, so you need a centralized and consistent way to collect, process and action that information."

**Bart Pilarczyk**  
Head of Product  
@ PeakData

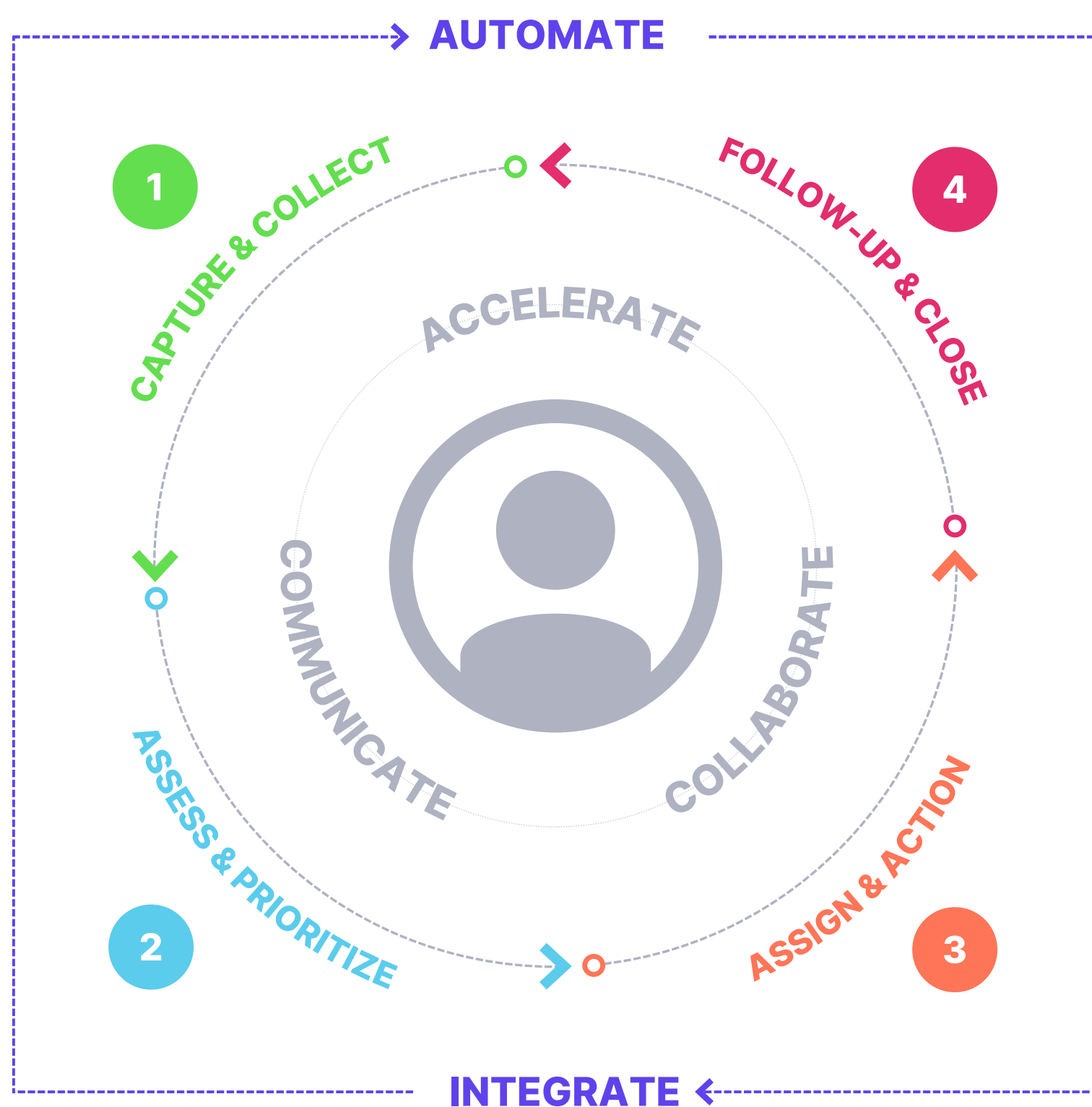


Ultimately you need a user feedback platform that can automate as much of the collection and management of feedback as possible, while seamlessly integrating with the way you currently work — or the way you need to work moving forwards.

There are four key stages in the user feedback loop, each of which can be automated to some degree:

1. **Capture & Collect**
2. **Assess & Prioritize**
3. **Assign & Action**
4. **Follow-Up & Close**

This might look a little bit like this:



## Capture & Collect

First you need to gather feedback which you may have asked for, or it may come in unsolicited.

In addition to the details about a specific issue or request, when you can automatically collect user and session information then that can save significant time when the developer, product manager or customer services team need to investigate.

## Assess & Prioritize

Once you receive or collect feedback, it needs to be categorized and assessed: what is it, how important is it, to what extent might it impact the current roadmap and how much time and effort are required to do something about it?

Having a consistent approach to this and a set of standardized consideration criteria makes it easier to understand what is truly important.

There is also an opportunity here to loop in your users to get their input and opinion in terms of what should be prioritized. You can guess and assume what should be done, but if you want to be certain then you should ask them to vote.



## Assign & Action

Once you know what needs to be done and by when, you can schedule and implement the necessary changes.

This is perhaps where the most amount of time can be saved. If developers immediately receive complete and actionable information then they can focus their time on fixing or building what is required, rather than chasing up background information (and most developers really don't like having to talk to users to get this!).

## Follow up & Close...

As the feedback has been actioned or resolved, looping the original user back in ensures that their expectations have been met.

When this can be automated it reduces the workload on customer service teams and product managers, as well as accelerating closure.

...or Continue

If expectations have not been met, then you need to create a new feedback loop (it's an iterative process).

Automating the user feedback process can significantly improve communication and collaboration within your project team, as well as accelerating the product development lifecycle.

### **Communicate**

Throughout this process the user should be kept up-to-date on what's going on, from acknowledging their initial feedback, feature request or bug report through to getting them to check any work or updates that have been made to check that their expectations have been met.

### **Collaborate**

In addition to allowing users to become part of the broader project 'team', it's critical to ensure that internal teams can work closer together too, because all too often the tangles in the user feedback loop are an inside job!

### **Accelerate**

Ultimately, when you pull all of these activities together in a streamline and automated way, you shorten your user feedback loops, which in turn shortens the overall product development lifecycle and allowing you to get to market faster with products and features that you know your users will love.

## Choose the solution that best meets your needs.

When it comes to managing user feedback, many organizations still rely on manual processes, emails and unintegrated project management platforms.

There are a number of specific user feedback solutions available today. These typically fall into two types:

- Collection of user feedback through things like questionnaires and in-app surveys.
- Bug tracking and resolution

It's important to look for the solution that best meets your needs, for example:

- If giving your users a voice is important to you then you need a platform that has features that enable users to upvote and downvote on issues.
- If you want to minimize the amount of time your developers have to spend talking to users who may have had a problem, then having automated session records on your domain can significantly reduce the amount of time required for back-and-forth conversations on how and when a bug was triggered.



## Flow with your existing workflows, without adding to them.

If you already have existing systems and workflows in your product development lifecycle, then you need to be able to integrate user feedback into these, rather than having something that stands alone.

This can be done using simple integrations with popular platforms for issue tracking, project management, messaging and more.

|| It's very easy to quickly find yourself with a user feedback knot... and that can be more dangerous than not having any user feedback at all, because when you get ambiguous feedback or you misinterpret information you can negatively impact the quality of your product and user experience.”

**Michelle Picotot**  
Product Management & Marketing  
Consultant @ Deepstar Strategic





PART 5

# Conclusion





## Conclusion.

Whether you are building a product from scratch or enhancing an existing platform, user feedback is critical to ensuring you create that something that creates real value for your users... value that keeps them coming back for more and value that gets them to tell their friends and peers.

But without the right structure or process for managing user feedback your loops can quickly tangle into unworkable knots that can hold production back. Many businesses are forced to ignore, bypass or de-prioritize user feedback in order to meet other goals and timeframes. The only way to untangle user feedback knots is to change the way that user feedback is managed by:

- Making it easy for users to submit consistent, valuable feedback;
- Removing any opportunity for ambiguity or subjectivity in the collection of feedback;
- Automating the process of managing and implementing that feedback at every stage of the product development lifecycle;
- Giving users a voice when it comes to prioritizing and successful resolution of issues.

The first step, and a very important one, is to choose the best user feedback management platform that meets the needs of both your end-users and developers alike.

## About Userback.

Designed for product managers, software teams and developers, Userback is a powerful-yet-simple platform that streamlines and automates the collection, categorization, prioritization and implementation of user feedback such as bug reporting, feature requests, suggestions and general comments.

- In-app screen capture, video recording, annotation and session replays make it easy for users to submit contextual and visible feedback, along with system data.
- The Dashboard makes it easy to review, organize, plan, execute updates;
- Feedback Portal allows users to upvote and downvote enhancement, bug fixes requests and other requests

Discover more at

[Userback.io](https://userback.io)

### About the author

Tom Hutton is an interactive and user experience designer responsible for developing websites, applications, ecommerce, communities and other digital platforms for a wide range of organizations, from established household names to startups.



“It’s really easy to get tangled in a user feedback knot. But the good news is that it’s also really easy to untangle it! When that happens you can start to build better products that users love...”

**Jon Tobin**  
Founder & CEO  
@ Userback





Thanks for reading.

