BUYER'S GUIDE
AGILE PROJECT MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

Executive Summary

The software-centric business model is quickly becoming pervasive in every industry, not just IT. As Jeff Gothelf, co-author of Lean UX, put it, "Software is eating the world."[1] Since the publication of the Agile Manifesto in 2001, the project management (PM) climate has experienced a gradual shift away from the traditional "waterfall" process and toward a more adaptive, Agile model. In the wake of this paradigm shift, many business managers and developers have begun searching both for knowledge of Agile and for practical Agile tools—whether to better manage the software development lifecycle (SDLC) or other non-IT projects.

This buyer's guide will define the methodology of Agile PM as well as the product market and compare four leading Agile PM solutions.

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Introduction

The rapid emergence of Agile software startups and corresponding business adoption has made the trend clear: people like Agile. Developers like it. Product owners like it. Customers don't know it, but they like it, too, because they reap its benefits every day.

A 2013 study by VersionOne stated that 76 percent of developers are using, or plan to use an Agile project management tool—a 9 percent increase from 2009.[2]

Agile actually isn't a project management structure per se, although it is often referred to as such. Agile is actually an overarching development philosophy that takes form in specific project management frameworks such as Scrum, Kanban, or Lean. It relies on cross-functional teams, adaptive planning rather than predictive, and progress made through short, repeatable iterations. Some key tenets of Agile development [3] include:

» Satisfying customers through continuous, early delivery of software

» Harnessing change to improve software

» Frequent delivery (from two weeks to two months)

» Frequent collaboration of stakeholders and developers

» Regular self-assessment and adjustment of teams and software projects

Though the word "software" is used frequently in these doctrines, Agile has long since breached the confines of development shops and is now commonly used in marketing, manufacturing, human resources, or wherever a business unit requires flexible organization to produce frequent versions of a product. A recent study by the Scrum Alliance revealed that 36 percent of organizations with active Scrum projects are using the Agile methodology outside of their IT departments.[4]

Agile development is made manifest in a variety of project management or development frameworks. The most popular of these are:

Scrum: self-organizing teams collaborate through daily face-to-face meetings and develop in time-boxed increments called "sprints."

Kanban: a change management and visualization method where progress is depicted with task cards on a public Kanban board

Lean: elimination of waste in development/manufacturing processes through even workloads and just-in-time delivery, so true value is made more apparent

Extreme programming: intended to improve quality of end products by developing in short cycles with frequent releases that constantly incorporate customer feedback and changing requirements

Most Agile management tools draw elements from more than one of these, which means the product market is broad and eclectic. This has led to increased use of Agile as an umbrella term encompassing all or most aspects of the four frameworks above. Agile advocates tout its ability to better manage changing priorities, improve visibility, reduce risk, speed up time-to-market, better align IT and business values, and simplify the development process.

Next, we'll show you four leading Agile project management solutions, provide examples of their use, and compare them on the basis of common features.

Four Agile PM Tools

JIRA Agile—Atlassian   *Average User Rating: 3.98/5*

JIRA Agile is an add-on for JIRA created by PM giant Atlassian. JIRA Agile targets development teams looking to implement Agile methodology with a smaller learning curve. It's one of the most comprehensive Agile products currently on the market, with a full range of Agile features including Scrum, Kanban, burndown charts, sprints, velocity metrics, and more.

The add-on's functionality consists of four key components which apply to the user's choice of either Scrum or Kanban-focused implementation: planning, estimating, prioritizing, executing, and evolving. Project managers and owners have access to detailed reports and analytics about the status of the product, such as the cumulative flow diagram, which shows the status and volume of project issues over time.

Some might the fact that you'll first need a subscription to the basic Atlassian JIRA as a drawback. But the monthly price for both is user-based, scalable, and affordable for a product of this caliber. Not only that, using Atlassian JIRA + JIRA Agile means you'll have access to sophisticated features that basic Agile tools don't offer, such as portfolio management, expense tracking, and a fully-stocked app marketplace. JIRA is available both as software-as-a-service (SaaS) or a traditional, on-premise installation.

Case Study: Puppet Labs[5]

Puppet Labs is a software company based in Portland, Oregon that focuses on IT automation and infrastructure. When they grew from a small start-up to a venture-backed company of 300 employees, they decided it was time to implement a better system for managing and connecting customer issues with development.

They turned to Atlassian, implementing a stack of products including JIRA Agile, JIRA Service Desk, Confluence, and HipChat.

- Deployment took only six weeks, and Puppet Labs saw immediate results.

- Resolved tickets increased by 67 percent

- Puppet Labs increased user adoption to all 300 employees by staying in one system

- They streamlined maintenance processes and reduced total system cost

- Customers can now serve themselves and search for documents using the self-serve option

Axosoft   *Average User Rating: 4/5*

Axosoft is a Scrum-specific project management tool for product developers that provides access to an essential PM toolkit, as well as bug-tracking, help desk operations, and developer collaboration wikis. Axosoft has serviced over 11,000 teams, including some at noteworthy companies like Cisco, Boeing, and NASA. Their software can be purchased in modules or as a complete product suite, which is available in both on-premise and cloud-hosted versions, depending on your needs.

Axosoft takes developers through the process in three phases, aligned with the methodology of Scrum: backlog management, process definition and visualization, and product "shipment." Unlike some vendors that place a cap on projects per month, Axosoft lets you create and tackle unlimited projects, subprojects, stories, and epics with user-specific access.

The drag-and-drop interface lets you manage your backlog, sprints, user stories, and releases with ease, and includes helpful prioritization tools and work-in-progress indicators to keep your team running smoothly. Like many Agile vendors, Axosoft takes a mixed approach to the methodology, giving users Scrum and Kanban tools, including a fully interactive Card View mode. Axosoft only has a few pre-built integrations, but they do offer API access for further integration with third-party systems. The product suite's pricing is comparable to JIRA, however, if you only need one or two of the modules (e.g. Scrum and the free bug tracker), you could see considerable savings.

Case Study: Dapper Gentlemen[6]

Dapper Gentlemen is a development shop, based in Phoenix, Arizona, that has built award-winning apps such as Ugly Meter, which scans users faces and ranks their "ugliness" on a scale of 1-10. Dapper Gentlemen has, thus far, garnered over 30 million downloads of their apps. In the wake of this sudden success, the company started experiencing difficulties, such as frustrations with creating accurate estimates.

Dapper Gentlemen soon discovered Axosoft's Agile PM solution and decided to give it a try.

Since then, Co-Founder Jo Overline says:

• Time and cost bids have been dead-on

• They've been able to visualize their progress and gauge momentum via burndown charts

• The team uses foresight provided by Axosoft to operate much leaner projects than they had before

Planbox   *Average User Rating: 4.17/5*

Planbox was originally created in 2009 as an in-house solution for tech sponsorship company, Bolidea. Since then, the Agile project management tool has created its own brand, servicing start-ups and Fortune 500 companies like Starbucks, Phillips, Stanford University, and the University of Michigan.

Unlike our first two products, Planbox is only available in a cloud version, which the developers believe is the best way to provide constant access to updated versions, new features, etc. Planbox is geared toward a more general audience than some of its competitors; it's a good fit for marketing teams, IT, developers, and Agile novices and pros alike. The work hierarchy is broken down into four essential components: initiatives, projects, items, and tasks, with real-time updates, notifications, time tracking, velocity charts, storyboards, deadlines, and reporting to help you and your team manage it all.

One unique feature Planbox offers is a built-in customer feedback loop, which helps more closely align your decision-making process with customer values. While the system doesn't explicitly implement Agile tools like sprints or Kanban boards, it does embody the flexible, iterative framework of Agile project management.
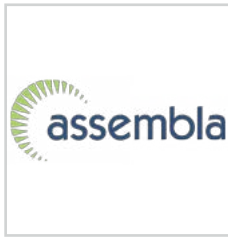
Case Study: Neuralitic[7]

Neuralitic is a leading provider of mobile intelligence solutions based in Montreal, Canada. They help communication service providers (CSPs) in North America, Eurpoe, and Asia exploit the value of their subscribers' data. Before Planbox, they were using AtTask for their project management needs, but were having issues with team adoption, which lead to inefficiency, manual sharing, and information silos.

When they made the switch to Agile methods, a team member suggested Planbox, and "Bam! We all fell in love with it," says Neuralitic Scrum Master Marco Langford. "I've never seen an adoption as fast as this one. The whole adoption took 3 days." Neuralitic currently uses Planbox to manage its two-week development iterations and also for more general project management. Some of the key benefits they've experienced include:

- Improved communication and cross-team visibility

- Pervasive adoption

- Transparency into iteration status, progress, and bottlenecks

- Ability to use Planbox for multiple teams and departments across the company

Assembla   *Average User Rating: 3.6/5*

Assembla specializes in providing Agile, online project collaboration solutions for distributed teams, with an emphasis on task management and issue tracking. The company itself is still relatively young —founded in 2005— but they've already achieved major success and carved out their place in the PM market, boasting over a million users in 100 different countries, and contracts with companies like Ebay, PayPal, Intuit, and HTC.

The product itself is all about driving continuous delivery with a robust, but intuitive set of Agile tools: Kanban, testing workflows, task management, sprint planning and execution, backlog management, burndown charts, bug tracking, and many others. Assembla's cloud platform and strong collaboration features allow teams to work together regardless of location, keeping everyone focused on the big picture. Another core feature is unlimited software configuration management (SCM) and deployment through Subversion, Git, or Perforce, for which most other vendors require a separate add-on.

In order to ensure faster development and less stress, CEO Andy Singleton has vowed that Assembla experiments with all software releases on their own team before making them available to the public. As a result, they've moved from releasing every two weeks to ten times per day.

Case Study: The Garrigan Lyman Group[8]

The Garrigan Lyman Group (GLG) is a Seattle-based digital marketing agency that develops custom apps, websites, ecommerce solutions, and social media widgets. Their services are geared toward helping clients achieve greater customer loyalty. In 2010, GLG was concerned about the loyalty of its own customer base in the wake of company expansion. They had visibility issues, tracking issues, and resource management issues. The team received client feature requests via email or through extranet, and clients had no visibility into the status of their requests.

it wasn't long before everyone at GLG had turned to Assembla. Now they use the ticketing feature to receive feature requests within the system, prioritize them, and keep clients informed.

Key Benefits:

- Clients can categorize requests and suggest priorities

- GLG teams can manage service level agreements (SLAs)

- Discussion threads and files kept up-to-date and available in one place

- Better tracking of task progress (development, QA, staging, DevOps)

- Save money by avoiding more expensive systems
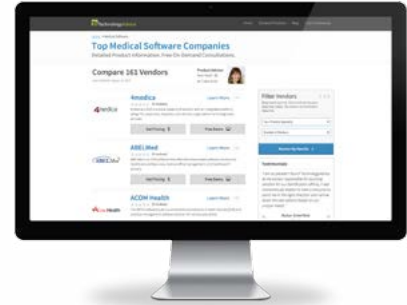
Product Comparison Chart

	JIRA Agile	Axosoft	Planbox	Assembla
Collaboration Tools	✔	✔	✔	✔
Budgeting/Expenses	✔	✔		
Cloud Platform	✔	✔	✔	✔
On Premises Available	✔	✔		✔
Time Tracking	✔	✔	✔	✔
Analytics	✔	✔	✔	✔
Kanban Boards	✔	✔		✔
Scrum Tools	✔	✔		✔
Portfolio Management	✔		✔	✔
Visual Resource Planning	✔	✔		
Burndown Charts	✔	✔	✔	✔
Reporting	✔	✔	✔	✔
Bug Tracking	✔	✔		✔
App Marketplace	✔			
Sprint Management	✔	✔		✔
Native Mobile App	✔		✔	✔
Product Backlog	✔	✔	✔	✔
Capacity/Velocity Metrics	✔	✔	✔	✔
Customer Feedback Loop			✔	✔

How to Choose a Product

That's where we come in. Even after looking at these four solutions, you may not be sure which is best for your company. At TechnologyAdvice, we specialize in matching businesses with the software that suits them best. It could be one of these four, or it could be something else entirely.

We've compiled product descriptions, reviews, case studies, features lists, video walkthroughs, and research articles on hundreds of leading software products, and it's all at your disposal, free of charge. Use the Product Selection Tool on our website to get a personalized project management recommendation based the features important to you, or call one of our Technology Advisors for a no-obligation consultation.

Have Questions?
Our team of experts is ready to help!

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