Making the Hard Call: A Practical Guide to Retiring Legacy Products

Legacy products are often a trap for SaaS and other recurring revenue businesses. They drain EBITDA, consume resources, and slow innovation. Yet they linger, often because companies fear sacrificing the revenue tied to them.

I've killed a lot of products in my career. In most cases, product exits were based on small subscriber lists, minimal revenue, negative P&Ls, and

Not every exit I've managed has gone perfectly, but each one has taught me something. Often, the hardest part isn't the mechanics of migration, but the emotional and operational inertia. Because product termination often faces emotional opposition, I've found that focusing on logical exit criteria and long-term strategic fidelity reduces the short-term friction.

Here are eight strategies I've used to minimize risk and maximize impact when retiring legacy solutions.

Legacy Products
THE TRUE COST

Sales Focus — Legacy distractions reduce time spent on strategic deals.

Brand Strength — Outdated offerings dilute market perception

Support Time — High ticket volume for low-value products

Development Hours — Bug fixes and updates consume roadmap capacity.

1. Develop and Enforce Product Viability Criteria

One of the first portfolios I inherited included multiple solutions generating less than $ 10,000 in annual revenue. The Product Manager resisted cutting them—worried about optics and short-term metrics. But once we aligned on clear viability

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Sidebar: Internal Alignment Is Non-Negotiable

Retiring legacy products is most successful when it's a cross-functional play. Engage finance early and show them the full picture: not just lost revenue, but support costs, margin drag, and opportunity cost. It is critical that they both understand and back the move.

Next, assess your SEO and demand strategy. Are legacy pages driving traffic? Are outdated keywords cannibalizing strategic positioning? Marketing needs to know what's being retired so they can pivot messaging, update campaigns, and reinforce the brand's direction.

Most importantly, demonstrate that product and marketing are aligned. This isn't a turf war, it's a shared opportunity. When both teams approach legacy

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criteria, it became easier to make the call. Yes, his portfolio numbers dipped for a month. Then it was forgotten. Meanwhile, the resources we freed up were reallocated to growth initiatives that moved the needle for both of us.

Lesson: If you don't define viability, everything becomes viable. Clutter is a threat to a viable portfolio strategy.

2. Assign a Human Contact Point—and Tie It to KPIs

Legacy transitions stall when no one owns the conversation. Assign a human— a CSM, account rep, or even support lead—and make it part of their KPIs. A small commission or quota credit goes a long way. Outreach matters too: a letter or personal email often triggers action far better than a generic notice. Customers are more likely to explore alternatives when they feel seen and supported.

Lesson: Migration is part of a relationship, not a transaction. Treat it accordingly.

3. Offer Multiple Migration Paths

Not every customer needs the Cadillac upgrade. Start with fair. Keep generous and defensive options in your back pocket. The goal isn't to squeeze every dollar, it's to preserve trust while moving forward. Some customers will surprise you with their willingness to evolve. Others need a nudge, or a safety net.

Lesson: Flexibility beats perfection. Design for choice, not control.

4. Make Your Move Before Your Hand Is Forced

Legacy products rarely die quietly. If you wait too long, you risk compatibility issues, renewal giveaways, and lock-in tactics from behemoths like SAP or Oracle. Suddenly, you're offering discounts to retain the customer, or scrambling to support outdated integrations that no longer align with your roadmap. Proactive retirement gives you control. If you choose the timing, the messaging, and the migration path, you avoid being cornered by external forces or internal panic.

Lesson: Legacy exits are easier when you're playing offense.

5. Segment the Customer Base

Heavy users require a different approach than those who haven't logged in for months. Don't treat them the same. Power users may need white-glove migration support, while dormant accounts might be better served with automated outreach and sunset incentives. Usage data should inform your messaging, your offer, and your urgency.

Lesson: One-size-fits-all migration plans fit no one.

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6. Plan for Customer Data Migration

One of the best defensive moves you can make is to reassure customers that their existing data will be preserved. Better yet, show them how it will migrate with precision. Whether it's a seamless import or a guided setup, this creates a moat, especially if they're considering competitors. Data continuity builds trust and reduces friction.

Lesson: If you control the data path, you control the conversation.

7. Preserve Customer Momentum

When customers stall on outdated products, their own progress slows. They miss out on new features, integrations, and efficiencies. Helping them migrate isn't just about your roadmap—it's about theirs.

Lesson: Migration is a chance to re-energize your customer's journey.

8. Personalize Support Resources

Migration is a moment of vulnerability for customers. If your only offer is a link to web resources, they'll read it as indifference. Instead, provide **dedicated support**—even if just for a short period. Offer live training, named contacts, or priority access to onboarding specialists. These gestures don't just ease the transition—they signal that you care about their success.

Even a 30-day concierge window can make the difference between churn and loyalty.

Lesson: Migration isn't just technical—it's emotional. Show up with support that feels personal.

Legacy retirement isn't just about cleaning up your product catalog—it's about clearing the path for what's next. Done right, it sharpens your brand, refocuses your teams, and strengthens customer relationships. It's not easy. It requires clarity, courage, and coordination across functions. But the payoff is real: fewer distractions, better margins, and a portfolio that actually reflects your strategy.

If you've been staring at a list of outdated offerings, wondering when to make the call—this is your moment. Don't wait for the market to force your hand. Lead the transition. Own the narrative. And build the kind of product portfolio that earns attention, not apologies.

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