



# Alcon: Tips for Proactively Managing Your MedTech Vault

Staying on top of new Veeva Vault releases allows medtech teams to capitalize on the latest features and functionality, helping them streamline internal operations and speed time-to-market. However, it can be challenging to evaluate and implement updates without a continuous improvement process.

Alcon maximizes the value of its Vault investments and maintains business team engagement by continually honing its release management and validation processes. As a result, the DevOps and IT teams have collaborated to deliver more than 350 Vault enhancements across clinical, regulatory, quality, commercial, and medical over the past four years.

A 'configure not customize' approach to new Veeva Vault release cycles — coupled with a strong support structure and agile processes — has served Alcon's users, increased risk transparency, and strengthened its partnership with Veeva.

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## Alcon Inc.

### COMPANY SIZE

25,000+

### HEADQUARTERS

Geneva, Switzerland

### VEEVA SOLUTIONS

Vault Clinical Operations

Vault CDMS

Vault Medical

Vault PromoMats

Vault Quality

Vault RIM



## Challenges of multi-Vault release management

Alcon's large Veeva footprint requires the team to coordinate across multiple applications and business units, each with differing needs and capabilities. Business needs change, and resource levels fluctuate from year to year. Yet, maintaining updates while adhering to compliance standards remains a priority, says Justin Janda, Alcon's director of R&D IT clinical systems.

He explains that Alcon implemented Veeva Vault PromoMats and Veeva Vault CDMS in 2019. Since then, the team has set up three more Vaults with additional capabilities. "Release management requires continuous evaluation of what makes sense for our businesses today and tomorrow."

Todd Steppick, director of DevOps, integrations, and application management systems at Alcon, adds, "Before 2021, we were in a 'release it, fix it, build it, keep it running, get implemented' stage. We realized we could not control the system if we did not implement a process. We recognized we had to put guardrails around the governance process."

Still, creating the proper support structure for releases and validation is challenging. The responsibility for critical tasks crosses service, IT, DevOps, and internal business partners. Steppick says, "In the beginning, we met as five different Vaults. That prevented us from clearly articulating which updates were important to business partners."

**"Deciding how your team will handle Veeva Vault releases is important. Don't leave updates or enhancements hanging on the vine."**

**Todd Steppick**  
Director of DevOps,  
Integrations, and  
Application Management  
Systems, Alcon

## Alcon's release management strategy

Veeva delivers general Vault releases three times a year, and that predictable cadence allows Alcon to create a tailored strategy and align resources accordingly. However, a release management strategy is not one size fits all. Janda and Steppick recommend starting with a clearly defined yet flexible process that accommodates team demands.

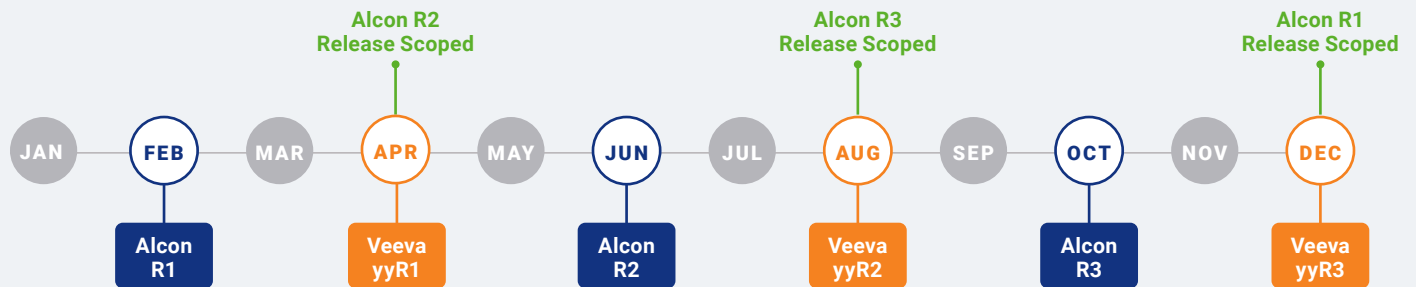
For example, some of Alcon's teams with mature Vault implementations can sustain 15 yearly enhancements. He explains that others undergo five to six updates because they hit a resource ceiling.

First, the team implemented a robust governance process for the timing and operations of releases, basing it on Veeva's release schedule. Steppick says, "We are always working on a release, preparing for release, gauging teams' demands for updates."

Next, the team chose to configure but not customize Vault releases. "We take the auto updates but not new functionality at Veeva release time. That allows us to absorb the release with little documentation and overhead." Immediately following a Vault release, the team begins on an Alcon outcome release (**Figure 1**).

Finally, process evolution is vital to Alcon’s success in managing releases. Janda says, “It took time to get here. We worked with our business teams to help them understand how long it takes to go through the development cycles.”

**FIGURE 1** Alcon’s complete release schedule



**SCHEDULED RELEASES**

**Veeva yyRX** Calendar year + release number

**Alcon Releases** 2 months after Veeva release based on scope to allow for development on newest Veeva RX

**Alcon Release Scoping** Around Veeva releases to prioritize new functions with innovative backlog

**OFF-CYCLE RELEASES**

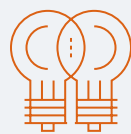
**Alcon Releases** that occur off-cycle due to scope or impact

## Leading practices for release management

Whether your organization has one Vault or many, the team at Alcon recommends these four release-management guidelines:



**Release Process**



**Adopting New Features**



**Release Cadance**



**Continuously Evolve**

## ESTABLISH A RELEASE PROCESS

- Establish clearly defined and consistent guidelines for impact assessments, pre-release activities, and production deployment.
- Build flexibility into your process to accommodate off-cycle releases, new project work, etc.
- If you have multiple Vaults, expect each to have unique factors that affect your processes.

## ADOPT NEW FEATURES

- Create a governance process for determining whether/how you will adopt new features in Vault releases.
- Use continuous demand refinement to identify priorities.

## DEVELOP A RELEASE CADENCE

- Determine the number of organizational releases you will undertake annually.
- Decide how you will align the delivery of organizational releases with Veeva Vault releases.

## CONTINUOUSLY EVOLVE

- Establish ongoing review and improvement processes and seek to improve control mechanisms continuously.
- Be transparent about risks and issues to strengthen partnerships with users and stakeholders.

## Delivering business and IT benefits

Incorporating features across multiple core business processes and business units positively impacts Alcon's operational efficiencies and speed to market. By treating Vault as a major pillar system, Alcon is able to simplify and standardize their tech stack while maintaining high standards and ensuring compliance. As Steppick describes, "With this strategy, we've been able to consistently implement functionality and capability changes to enhance our business experience."



To learn more about how Alcon handles Vault releases, **watch the full recording of their session from Veeva MedTech Summit.**