

The Forrester New Wave™: Feature Management And Experimentation, Q2 2021

The Seven Providers That Matter Most And How They Stack Up

by Christopher Condo

June 3, 2021

Why Read This Report

In Forrester's evaluation of the emerging market for feature management and experimentation, we identified the seven most significant providers in the category — AB Tasty, ConfigCat, Featureflow, LaunchDarkly, Optimizely, Split, and Unleash — and evaluated them. This report details our findings about how well each vendor scored against 10 criteria and where they stand in relation to each other. AD&D professionals can use this report to select the right partner for their feature management and experimentation needs.

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by [Christopher Condo](#)
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June 3, 2021

Feature Management And Experimentation Modernizes Software Delivery

Compared with other DevOps technologies such as continuous integration (CI) and continuous delivery (CD), commercial feature management and experimentation products are relatively new, having come onto the market in the past half decade or so. This market sets itself apart from traditional (and more well-known) experimentation platforms by targeting software development teams (vs. marketing teams) and by enabling feature management and experimentation of the full software stack — not just the client side of the user experience. This gives product-minded teams two major pieces of capability that are not otherwise easy to recreate — the ability to code and deploy features to production with code only exposed to a select audience. This enables testing in production and testing of different user experiences with similar audiences in production under very controlled and monitored circumstances.

The evaluation showed a clear delineation between larger and smaller vendors. Vendors with a larger market presence provide offerings with a broad set of capabilities that play well with enterprise clients such as integrated approval processes, workflow automation, and multiple compliance certifications. In comparison, smaller vendors focus on offering core capabilities of feature management, augmented by experimentation. However, each vendor offered compelling features that enable development teams to switch to single trunk development, reduce software release headaches, and enable true testing in production. Moving forward, expect feature management and experimentation products to be the latest must-have DevOps tools to help teams not only create faster release cycles but also do so while staying completely connected with the customer.

Feature Management And Experimentation Evaluation Overview

The Forrester New Wave™ differs from our traditional Forrester Wave™. In the Forrester New Wave evaluation, we assess only emerging technologies, and we base our analysis on a 10-criterion survey and a 2-hour briefing with each evaluated vendor. We group the 10 criteria into current offering and strategy (see Figure 1). We also review market presence.

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We included seven vendors in this assessment: AB Tasty, ConfigCat, Featureflow, LaunchDarkly, Optimizely, Split, and Unleash (see Figure 2 and see Figure 3). Each of these vendors has:

- **An application-level feature management offering.** This includes the ability to wrap code inside if-then-else logic and control the exposure of this code using a remote service.
- **An application-level experimentation offering (A/B testing, multivariate, etc.).** This includes the ability to compare two or more versions of code in production at the same time against similar audiences to find a winning result.
- **Central management of experiments.** The vendor offers experiments based on feature management and/or experimentation (A/B testing, multivariate, etc.) that a central control application manages in real time.
- **A commercial offering that is generally available to all its customers.** The product offering version being evaluated is the default version users will have when they purchase this product.
- **The ability to provide a customer reference.** This includes the ability to provide a commercial customer reference that is using this product in a substantial manner to facilitate software development.
- **Market presence/interest from our clients that may warrant inclusion.** Vendors may be selected based on client interest or market presence, i.e., users would expect to see their offering in such an evaluation.

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FIGURE 1 Assessment Criteria: Feature Management And Experimentation, Q2 2021

Criteria	Platform evaluation details
Feature management	How well does the vendor's solution enable developers to create and manage feature toggles in source code to combine that capability with audience targeting? How well does it enable engineers to adopt single trunk development, testing in production, beta testing, or management of progressive releases?
Experimentation	How well does the vendor's solution enable developers and product teams to create and manage experiments such as A/B tests, multivariate tests, and other forms of feature experimentation?
Audience targeting	How well does the vendor offering provide audience targeting? How sophisticated is it? How well does this complement feature management and experimentation? What other capabilities differentiate it from competitors?
Security and privacy	How well does the vendor's solution support enterprise security and data privacy? What capabilities does the solution provide, and how well do those capabilities enable enterprises to carry out best practices for user access and data privacy?
Analytics and UX	Does the vendor offering include a dashboard or graphical UI, and if so, how well does it enable the management and understanding of feature flags and experiments? Which analytics are included in the UI, and are they customizable? How well do they compare with other vendor offerings?
Technical debt	How well does the vendor offering help users manage the feature flag and experimentation lifecycle and the technical debt that arises naturally from the use of such technologies? What features set this offering apart from others?
Architecture	How well does the architecture of this solution provide a resilient, higher-performance platform for managing feature flags and experimentation at scale across multiple geographies? How well does it work with continuous integration and continuous delivery pipelines? What capabilities differentiate this offering?
Vision	What is the vendor's long-term vision for feature management and experimental development? What type of investments are being made for long-term innovation? How well does the vendor's vision align with customers' future needs? How innovative is this vision, compared with its industry peers?
Roadmap	How comprehensive is this roadmap, compared with peers in this market? How well does it address top concerns of customer references, and what types of innovations are being planned to serve future needs?
Market approach	What tangible evidence exists to demonstrate a successful go-to-market strategy (e.g., customer growth and regional expansion and support)? To what degree has the vendor raised awareness of the importance of feature management and experimentation in product development?

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FIGURE 2 Forrester New Wave™: Feature Management And Experimentation, Q2 2021

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FIGURE 3 Forrester New Wave™: Feature Management And Experimentation Scorecard, Q2 2021

Company	Feature management	Experimentation	Audience targeting	Security and privacy	Analytics and UX	Technical debt	Architecture	Vision	Roadmap	Market approach
AB Tasty	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
LaunchDarkly	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Optimizely	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Split	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
ConfigCat	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Unleash	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆
Featureflow	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆

⬆ Differentiated
 ⬆ On par
 ⬆ Needs improvement
 ⊘ No capability

Vendor QuickCards

Forrester evaluated seven vendors and ranked them against 10 criteria. Here’s our take on each.

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AB Tasty: Forrester's Take

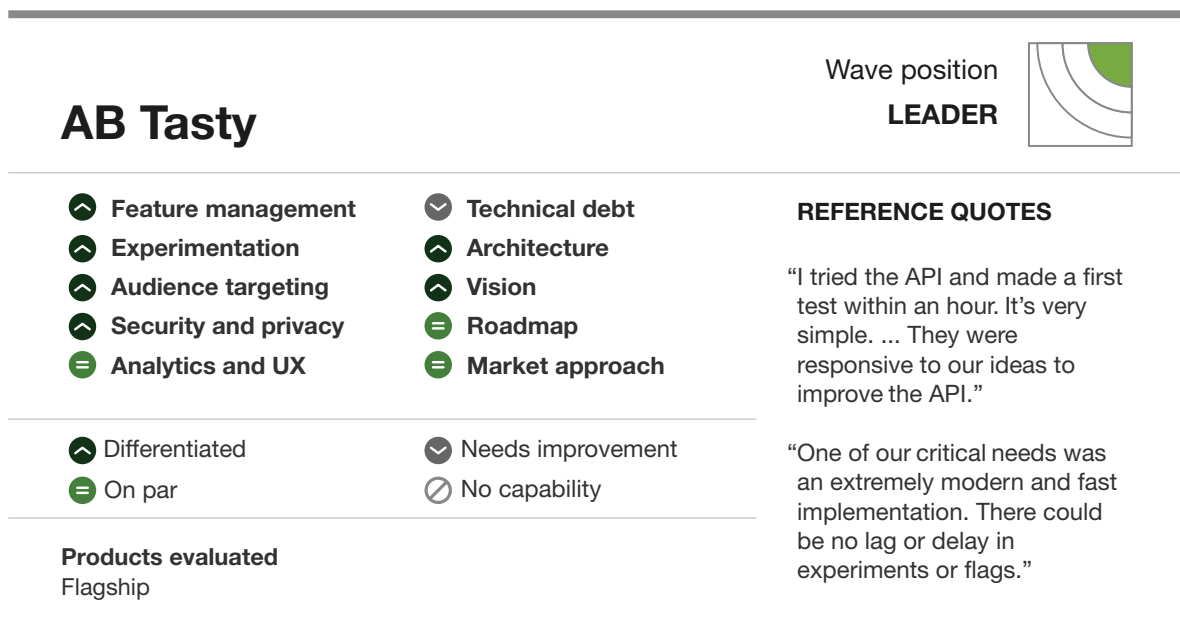
Our evaluation found that AB Tasty (see Figure 4):

- **Offers the strongest balance of feature management and A/B testing capabilities.** AB Tasty's cloud-native architecture balances feature management and A/B testing capabilities, serving app dev and product leaders equally well. It also has robust security featuring independently verified penetration testing and certifications.
- **Must improve technical debt capabilities.** A natural outcome of inserting feature flags into source code is the accumulated technical debt that comes from it. An automated system for tracking/organizing technical debt and linking it with agile planning would be welcome.
- **Is the best fit for enterprise companies that need advanced targeting capabilities.** AB Tasty's audience targeting capabilities are sophisticated. They incorporate multi-armed bandit and AI to execute experiments with a variety of audience-targeting demographics/scenarios.

AB Tasty Customer Reference Summary

AB Tasty has a highly responsive cloud-native architecture that enables teams to quickly get started with feature management. It combines that with complex targeting and experimentation capabilities for advanced feature experimentation.

FIGURE 4 AB Tasty QuickCard



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LaunchDarkly: Forrester’s Take

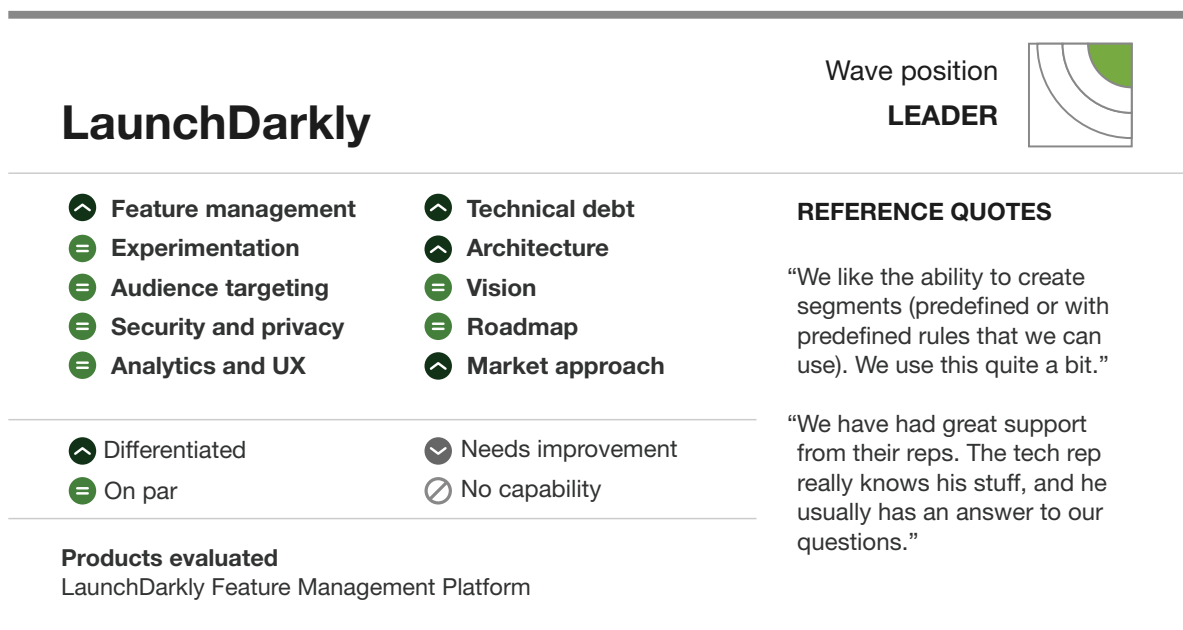
Our evaluation found that LaunchDarkly (see Figure 5):

- **Offers strong feature management, security/privacy, and tech debt management.**
LaunchDarkly is a Leader in the feature management space, offering highly performant and scalable feature flagging capabilities. Setting it apart is its strong enterprise governance capabilities, which include an integrated workflow and approval engine. It also scored highest in managing feature flag technical debt.
- **Improves its strategic vision by investing more in experimentation capabilities.** While experimentation is nascent for many dev teams, users overwhelmingly tell us their plans include the ability to run experiments such as A/B and multivariate tests. Adding more weight to experimentation investments will better align it to users’ future needs.
- **Best suits enterprises that want solid feature management, governance, and compliance.** LaunchDarkly’s plans to further improve its governance and compliance capabilities should place it squarely on every enterprise’s evaluation short list, especially those operating in regulated environments.

LaunchDarkly Customer Reference Summary

LaunchDarkly has been extremely reliable and responsive. Its customers appreciate this as feature management and experimentation expand further into their software delivery strategies.

FIGURE 5 LaunchDarkly QuickCard



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Optimizely: Forrester’s Take

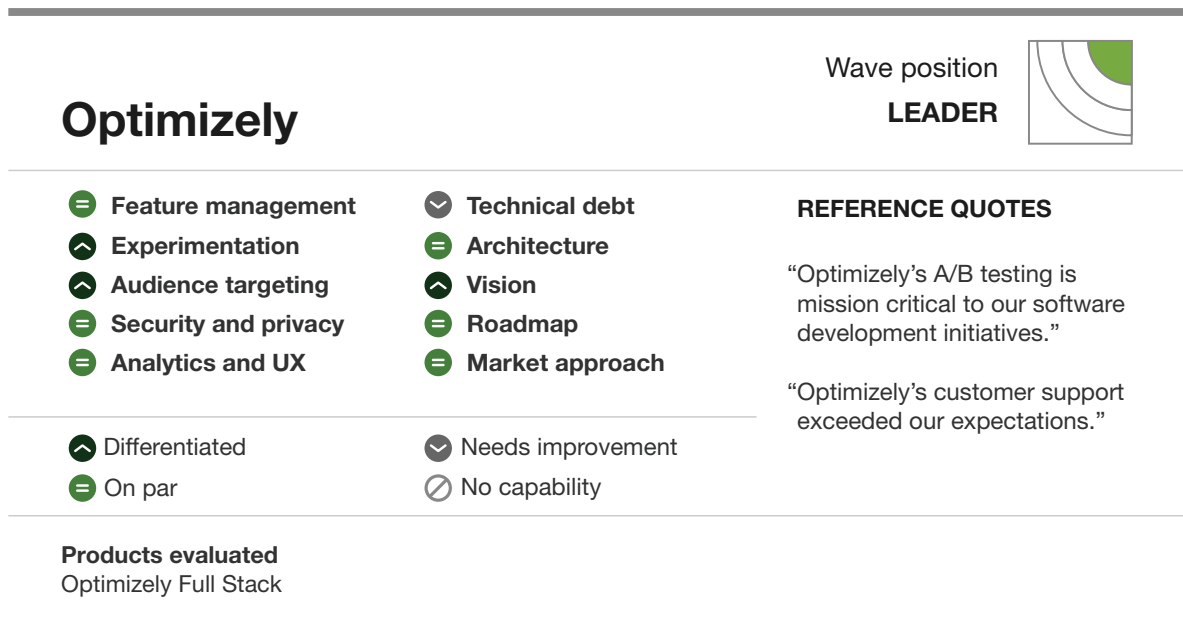
Our evaluation found that Optimizely (see Figure 6):

- **Offers strong experimentation and analytics capabilities.** Optimizely comes from traditional A/B testing for marketing but also serves application development teams with a full stack offering. This delivers both experimentation and leading analytical capabilities with patented analysis algorithms.
- **Still needs to strengthen its feature management capabilities.** To fully serve app dev, Optimizely needs to improve feature management capabilities like progressive and key performance indicator (KPI)-informed rollouts as well as kill switches to limit the blast radius of features gone bad.
- **Best suits companies that want a strong strategic vision for content and app delivery.** Optimizely merged with Episerver. Their combined vision serves digital teams that want an end-to-end platform that helps both the digital experience and the app dev teams.

Optimizely Customer Reference Summary

Optimizely customers are very happy with its security, privacy, and customer support. They report that they are satisfied with all major capabilities related to experimentation.

FIGURE 6 Optimizely QuickCard



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Split: Forrester’s Take

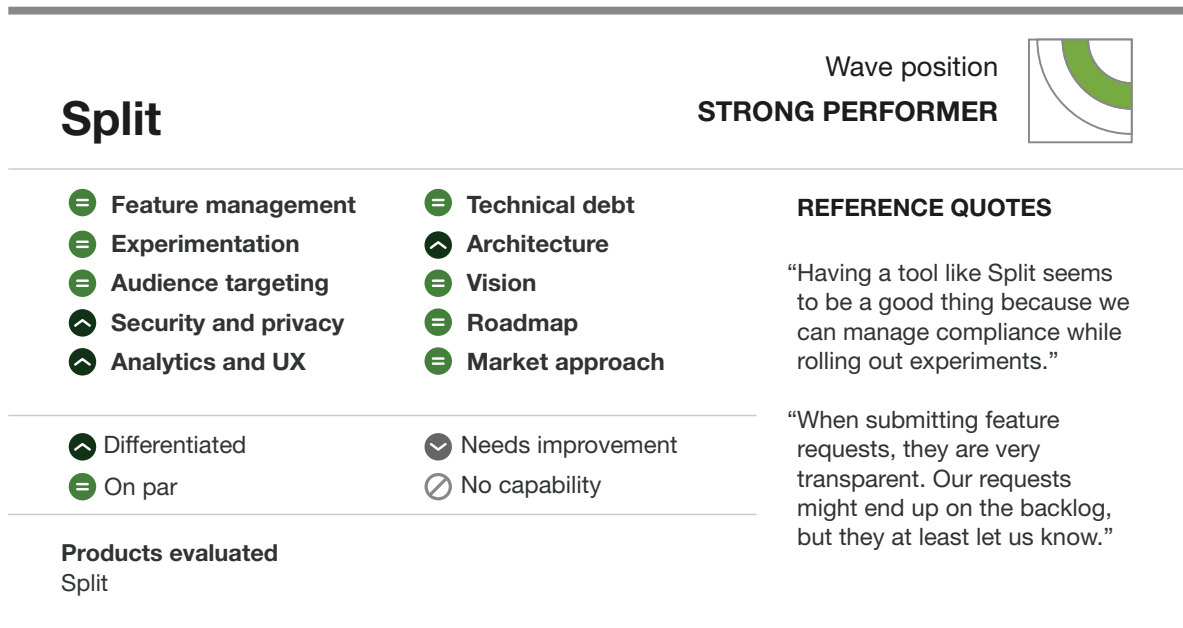
Our evaluation found that Split (see Figure 7):

- **Offers strong analytics and UI capabilities.** Split has leading analytics and UI capabilities, allowing teams to easily manage features and experiments while gleaning actionable insights from the Split dashboard.
- **Is adding integrated workflows that will improve its governance capabilities.** Automated workflows integrated with approval processes were a differentiating capability in this evaluation. Enterprises in regulated industries will welcome that addition.
- **Is the best fit for companies that need balanced feature management/experimentation.** Split offered strong-to-leading capabilities in nearly every category, reassuring any dev team on the journey toward feature management and experimentation.

Split Customer Reference Summary

Split customers are happy with privacy and security features and say the resilience of the service is “top-notch.”

FIGURE 7 Split QuickCard



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ConfigCat: Forrester’s Take

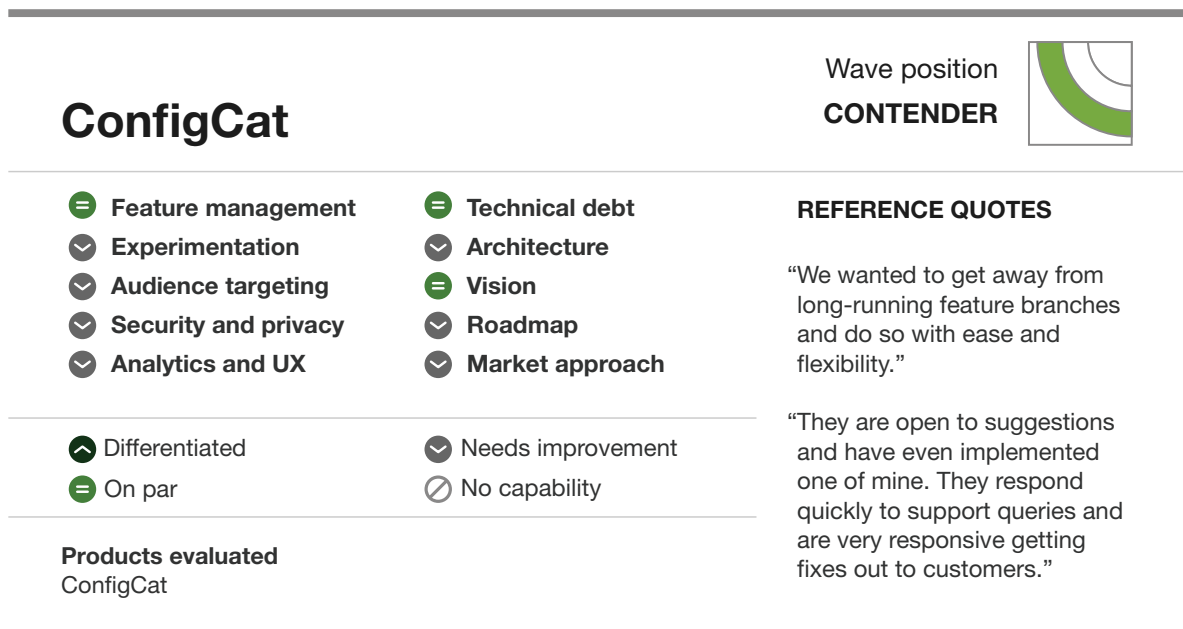
Our evaluation found that ConfigCat (see Figure 8):

- **Provides solid feature management capabilities.** AD&D leaders looking for a platform that focuses on the developer experience will do well with ConfigCat. Its feature management system enables single trunk development from feature flag creation to removal.
- **Must invest more in A/B testing to appeal to the growing need for experimentation.** Even though A/B experimentation at the development phase is still nascent, our data tells us it is a growing need. More enterprises are looking for complete platforms for feature management and experimentation.
- **Should be chosen to support dev-centric teams focused on speed and quality.** Customers chose ConfigCat over other vendors because they were looking for solid feature flag functionality focused on developer productivity. ConfigCat serves the role well.

ConfigCat Customer Reference Summary

ConfigCat offers a dev-centric solution to adopt both feature management and experimentation. Dev teams like ConfigCat’s ease of onboarding and ability to use software development kits (SDKs) or REST APIs, which enables them to select the option that works best for them.

FIGURE 8 ConfigCat QuickCard



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Unleash: Forrester’s Take

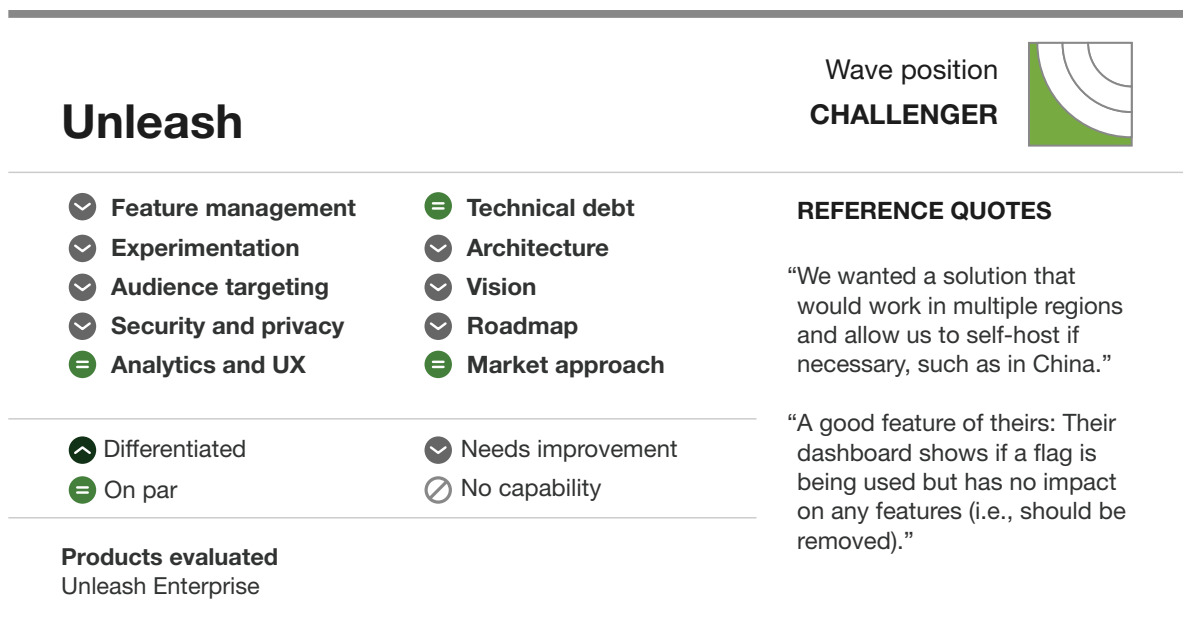
Our evaluation found that Unleash (see Figure 9):

- **Offers solid analytics and tech debt management capabilities.** Unleash offers great analytics that stand up well to those of Leaders. Its tech debt features are helpful and dev friendly with a dedicated technical debt dashboard.
- **Still needs to improve feature management and experimentation capabilities.** Unleash is off to a strong start in creating a complete feature management and experimentation platform. But it has more work to do to match Leaders in this workspace, such as offering KPI-triggered kill switches, better hosting capabilities, and better governance.
- **Is the best fit for companies that desire an open source market approach.** Unleash is the only open core solution evaluated in this Forrester New Wave, meaning the core of the application is open source and free to use, but vendor extensions are proprietary and only available at a cost. With a reported 4 million downloads, this solution will appeal to developers who want to try feature management without having to deal with procurement.

Unleash Customer Reference Summary

Customers choose Unleash for its ability to be self-hosted, allowing them to conduct feature management and experimentation in a variety of locations. Customers would like to see improvements to analytics capabilities and to architecture beyond the current set of SDKs as well as the product’s growth in maturity.

FIGURE 9 Unleash QuickCard



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Featureflow: Forrester’s Take

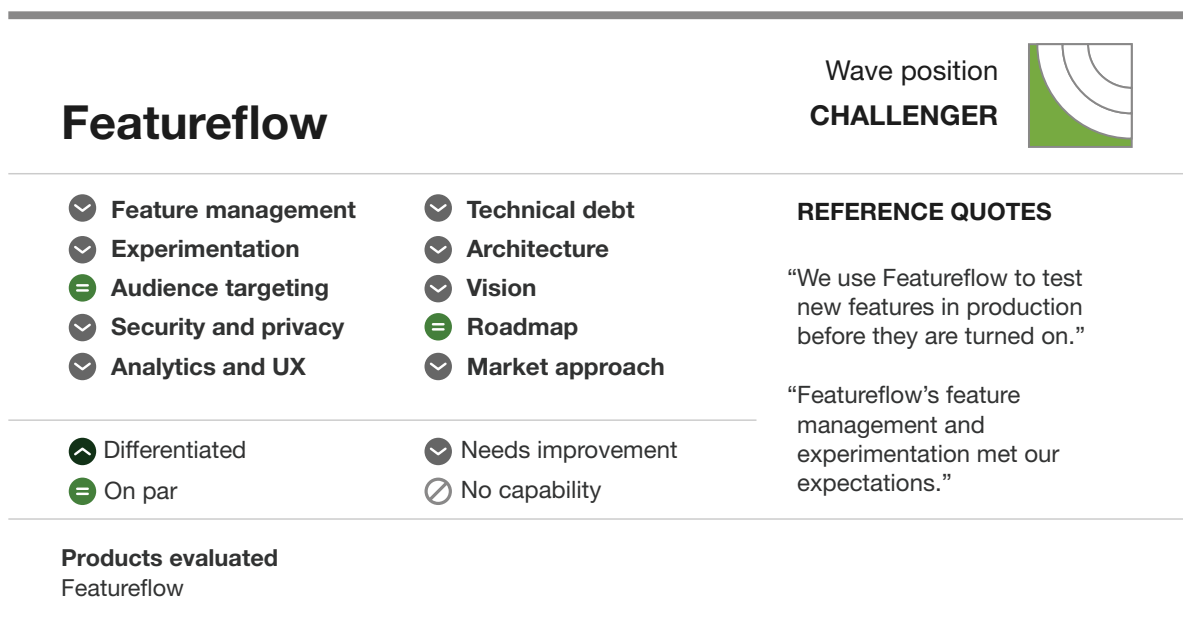
Our evaluation found that Featureflow (see Figure 10):

- **Offers solid A/B testing capabilities that cater to dev teams.** AD&D leaders looking for a solid A/B testing platform that focuses on the developer experience will do well with Featureflow. Featureflow’s integrated A/B testing engine is simple to use and can easily integrate with more sophisticated analytics engines.
- **Still needs to improve security.** As enterprises begin their journey toward testing in production, they want to ensure proper governance. Featureflow should consider including multifactor authentication and having its software certified as secure by an independent organization.
- **Is the best fit for developers that need solid experimentation and audience targeting.** Featureflow brings experimentation to developers and provides elements of sophisticated audience targeting similar, but not equivalent, to vendors that are Leaders.

Featureflow Customer Reference Summary

Featureflow’s customers indicated that both feature management and experimentation are very important to their development team’s initiatives and are satisfied with the performance, reliability, and developer experience from this vendor.

FIGURE 10 Featureflow QuickCard



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Supplemental Material

The Forrester New Wave Methodology

We conducted primary research to develop a list of vendors that met our criteria for the evaluation and definition of this emerging market. We evaluated vendors against 10 criteria, seven of which we based on product functionality and three of which we based on strategy. We also reviewed market presence. We invited the top emerging vendors in this space to participate in an RFP-style demonstration and interviewed customer references. We then ranked the vendors along each of the criteria. We used a summation of the strategy scores to determine placement on the x-axis, a summation of the current offering scores to determine placement on the y-axis, and the market presence score to determine marker size. We designated the top-scoring vendors as Leaders.

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