

How next-generation social technologies can help drive innovation



By Catherine Constantinides

Product innovation is about developing and delivering the “next” product or service-to-market quickly and cost-effectively. A well-managed innovation process that meets customer demands for new and unique products and services can contribute to creating a competitive advantage and business growth.

For many companies, several critical challenges that hinder the product innovation process exist:

- Lack of collaboration between stakeholders.
- Lack of visibility and transparency across the innovation process.
- Lack of customer involvement and feedback integration.

Organizations can improve their innovation processes through the use of next-generation

social technologies:

- Social media monitoring of the social web for any mention of products
- Idea management to capture, elaborate and manage insights and suggestions from stakeholders
- Case management to capture, manage and track customer issues
- Requirements analysis and management to manage product requirements and ensure alignment to corporate goals
- Project management to manage projects and build products
- Integration of critical business processes

Successful product innovation can be achieved through the close collaboration of several departments. Marketing, sales, customer service, product management and project management teams must work together through different business processes to make decisions at the various stages of innovation. Ideation, concept testing, business analysis and final product development all require collaborative input from diverse sources. Product innovation tools can be used to seamlessly unify processes and functions. This results in increased collaboration between departments/teams, control of innovation activities by employees, business partners and customers, visibility into the product development process, and communication of valuable product-related insights.

The examples below illustrate how social technologies and tools can integrate the requisite resources into the many phases of the innovation process:

Listening to the social web

One example: Social media monitoring tools can be used by different departments to create an integrated system of innovation. Typically used by marketing to listen to various channels on the social web for product and brand feedback, monitoring tools can also help salespeople discover sales opportunities and refine sales messaging. Support teams can identify and resolve critical issues and customer questions related to their product or service. Product managers can uncover new golden nuggets of inspiration for new product features. Finally, product management and development teams can use these same tools to capture the best insights and create requirements that align with organizational goals and customer needs.

Capturing new ideas

A second example: Innovation and idea management tools are typically used to capture, manage and select ideas based on organizational goals. These tools should be extended to different departments to provide input during the ideation stages of product development. Support agents and salespeople uncover ideas from managing issues and

customer emails. Ideas, concerns and queries can be communicated to the product or project team for possible integration into the product road map for new features and next product release. External stakeholders and customers can also use these tools to share their ideas, suggestions and opinions for product improvements.

Toward sustainable product innovation

While strong arguments can be made for extending social technologies to new users within the organization, the key to success is to ensure that these tool-sets are tightly integrated. Social media monitoring needs to be tied to customer support, idea management, to the CRM and to product management, and so on.

Cross-functional or cross-departmental integration helps organizations overcome the common barriers to product innovation, stay ahead of the competition and develop and build products that meet ever-changing customer needs. Integration is necessary; product innovation tools are available, and organizations need to fully leverage them.

Catherine Constantinides is a marketing associate with OneDesk Inc, developers of [OneDesk Social Business Applications](#).