



Social Media - Changing the Nature of "Product Requirements" Forever

By Hollis Tibbetts

If you are not spending more time understanding your customers - and developing tightly scoped requirements to make great software to meet their real needs, not some imagined "needs mash-up" cobbled together by the squeakiest wheels in your organization - you're part of the problem, and you're accepting failure as an ever-present option.

This is the opening paragraph of an article I published entitled [Question: Why Is IT Project Failure Always an Option?](#)

Where Great Companies Come From

Great companies come from creating and bringing to market (with a great "go to market" strategy) quality products that solve one or more significant problems for an appropriately chosen target audience - and does so measurably better than alternative solutions. Such products are built from a foundation of well-developed requirements that come from customers and target customers.

Social Media - Changes the Dynamics of Product Requirements Creation

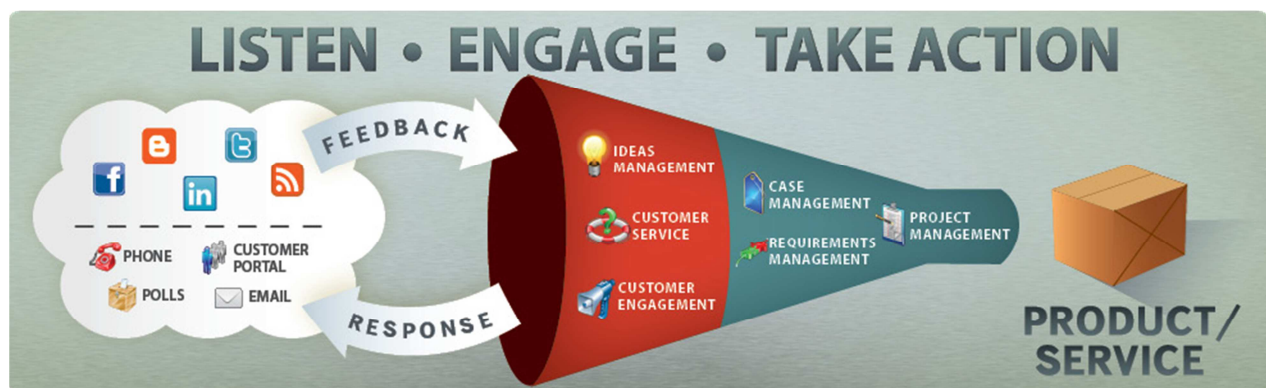
Appropriate use of social media tools in the development of requirements is not only a "best practice", it should be considered a requirement. Back in olden-days (like 2008), it was sufficient to talk to a handful of customers or target customers at trade shows, in meetings, over the phone. Today, that's no longer the case.

Social Media gives you the ability to have a 24x7x365 connection into your customers

and your target customers. If you don't leverage this opportunity, you'll be at a disadvantage.

A New Breed of Requirements Management Software

A few weeks ago, I received an email from a [software company called OneDesk](#) – after reading some of the articles I had written on “requirements” including “[Successful Software Best Practices: Requirements](#)” OneDesk felt that had a compelling story to tell, so we set up a briefing call and a “WebEx” demo. There are a decent number of strong “requirements management” software out there. But OneDesk is different.



OneDesk leverages social media to connect customers, employees and partners to the product development process. I'm most familiar with software development; however, all products have requirements. What I like about it the most is that it captures ideas – comments, suggestions, input that would **otherwise be lost**. And it's a continuous process – not just a one-shot “let's gather requirements for the next few months”. They offer an integrated platform that monitors, manages and preserves relevant input (which I'll call “ideas”) from social media, email and website commentary. These captured “ideas” can be gathered together if they are similar in nature. They can be scored, voted upon, documented, developed – and ultimately turn into product requirements that align with corporate and product vision. The graphic below is a conceptualization of this process.

Features exist to have 1-on-1 engagement with the person who created the idea, or community discussions can be held. Essentially what OneDesk has created is a “lifecycle” for feedback. Something that starts as a simple tweet – for example “iPhones should come in blue” might get joined up with other tweets related to product color. Then turned into a requirement. Then scoped out for level of effort/cost. Then evaluated and prioritized. All the while, the customers can be kept in the loop (if you

choose to do so).

Social Media and Engagement as a Best Practice

The OneDesk product does more than just social media and requirements – I'd encourage you to visit their site to learn about the rest of the product. But the thing that really caught my attention is this ability to continuously capture "buzz" and turn that into Great Product, and the built-in "continuous engagement" model that the product uses. Regardless of whether you choose a software package to manage your product requirements process or not, the concepts of continuous idea capture and continuous customer engagement by using social media are best practices for any product development organization.