



By Catherine Constantinides

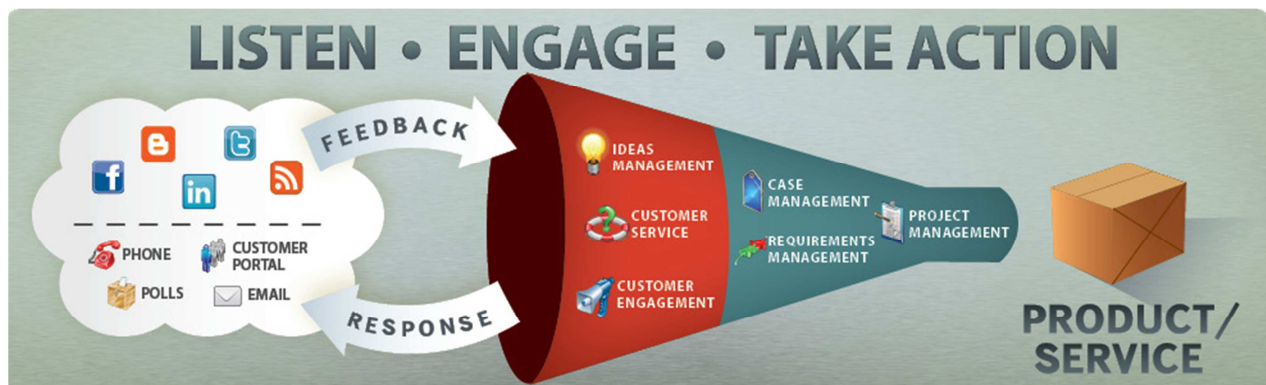
Improving the Front and Back End of the Innovation Process

Achieving innovative products and services in a context of rapidly changing customer needs and constantly shifting markets is challenging. In particular, two activities are very beneficial to overall results: expanding the front end and tightening the back end of the innovation process.

Expanding the front end

Organizations have tackled innovation issues by focusing their attention to the front end of the process. To create stellar products and services, organizations must expand the innovation funnel to include insight from a multitude of sources and channels.

Anyone who spends even just a small amount of time on social networking sites is fully aware that individuals are not just using the social web to share ideas. They are also using these communication channels as customer service outlets to get answers to issues they are experiencing with a product or service, disseminate their experiences and feelings towards a brand to the masses, or simply to get answers to their questions about product functionality. Regardless of the need or method used to engage and dialogue, customers are sharing a wealth of knowledge and insight potentially valuable to organizations looking to enhance their innovation process.



To fully leverage this wealth of information, organizations need an efficient front end strategy coupled with social technology tools that capture and organize customer insights. This enables organization members to engage, respond and clarify inquiries or support requests from a multitude of channels such as the social web, company feedback portals, online help desks, and of course, more traditional communication methods like email, telephone, polls and surveys.

Tightening the back end

Once ideas are captured from an expanded front end, people often ask: Now what? How does one systematically make sense of everything?

In product development, ideas must be sorted, screened and aligned with business strategy so that those with potential can be further tested and used to create, produce and launch profitable customer-driven products and services.

To accomplish this, the use of social business applications capable of tightly integrating all product development activities which permits the bi-directional flow of information from one stage of development to another, are required. This means that insight gathered in the early ideation stages are linked to product and service requirements which can then be further developed and turned into tasks to be implemented. It is important to note that for the process to get the requisite results, these tools must also promote collaboration and communication across all involved stakeholders both inside and outside the organization. Finally, these tools must also include robust analysis capabilities that allow for the selection and prioritization of the best customer input that aligns with corporate goals and product road maps.

With a well-articulated strategy for innovation, the right combination of seamlessly integrated technology tools, full traceability and visibility of actions throughout the product development process, great ideas will not fall through the cracks. From an expanded front end through to a tightened back end process, many more ideas can be successfully commercialized, allowing for sustained organic growth, especially during difficult market conditions.

About the Author: Catherine Constantinides is a marketing associate with OneDesk Inc, a market leader in the social product development industry. She is also a regular blogger on their [OneDesk Blog](#). You can find out more about OneDesk at www.onedesk.com.