OneDesk Translates Customer Feedback Into R&D

David F. Carr | *August 24, 2011*

Platform for managing online and social contacts emphasizes business needs related to product and service development.

Part customer relationship management, part social media management, part requirements management, and part project management--the software as a service application from startup OneDesk aims to deliver a little of each.

The theory behind the all-in-one suite from OneDesk of Montreal, Canada, is that service and support requests are at the wide-mouthed end of the product development funnel: what your customers and potential customers are asking about, or even complaining about, are important clues to what your future products and services should be. "We provide a feedback application, a social media listening application, and a customer service application," said Derek Gold, VP of product management. "We want you to listen to customers as a social channel, so you can respond to those and also put ideas into the development process." The ideas generated by customer feedback can then be refined through a requirements management module and fed into a project management application—all in a flow that can be traced "all the way to the customer feedback from which it may have originated," he said.

Another option is to publish suggestions or request from feedback to a customer portal and solicit more community feedback on which ones should be given the highest priority, he said.

The customer contact applications work for handling support issues and identifying sales leads, too. But the product is structured to make it easy to identify new product opportunities and route them into the development pipeline.

OneDesk is a young company that put the product into beta testing at the end of last year and into production about a month ago. OneDesk offers a free account for up to three users and pro accounts for $30 per user per month.

Aside from selling to other software companies, OneDesk has been getting interest from medical device firms and media companies, Gold said.

Products like Intuit Brainstorm, Spigit, and Brightidea also focus on generating product and product improvement ideas, but they do it by organizing employee brainstorming and crowdsourcing ideas from customer communities.

OneDesk is different because it seeks to play in what other vendors treat as a half dozen different product categories. The comprehensive nature of the product appeals to organizations that want all these capabilities, without the need to piece them together from specialized applications, Gold said. "They don't have time to integrate Radian6 with Zendesk."

Zendesk has actually been emphasizing integration with other service and support applications, but so far few OneDesk customers are also Zendesk customers, Gold said. Instead, the most frequent request from customers is for integration with Salesforce.com and other customer relationship management systems, he said.

As for organizations that might have established relationships with other vendors who provide other pieces of the puzzle, OneDesk currently directs them to "use the aspects that interest you and turn off the ones that don't," Gold said. "We're also working on an API to integrate with other products, which will be a better answer."

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