

Customer-Centric Model for Product Innovation

Posted on **June 6, 2012** by **Catherine Constantinides**

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The product innovation process essentially includes a wide array of **idea management** activities—from the initial capturing, analyzing and vetting of ideas, through to the development of a new idea into one or several requirements.

The FEI process is therefore usually characterized by many periods of uncertainty. Seeking out new ideas quickly becomes challenging, while also having to decide which of these ideas and product features should be implemented into current or future product plans. An easier way to navigate the turbulent waters of the product innovation is by involving customers throughout the stages of this process. The advantages include reduced uncertainty and ambiguity, which in turn, greatly facilitates the overall idea management process.

The question however becomes: With the multitude of methods available for customers to communicate, how can organizations successfully reach customers where they live and capture, and manage their valuable insight?

The solution is to adopt a culture and system built around customer-centricity. The following are effective customer-centric innovation strategies an organization can develop and implement to ensure success:

- Quickly and efficiently capturing, clarifying and integrating customer insights from various channels of communication (email, web, phone, help desk, social media, feedback portals) into the planning and development cycles.
- Analyzing customer insight with powerful 'insight assessment' tools like community voting, financial analysis, customer satisfaction, and strategic alignment, that enable the ranking and selection of ideas, based on real-world data, customer priorities and organizational goals.
- Providing customers with regular status updates, keep them tightly integrated in the decision loop, and informed of any changes made to the feedback they have submitted.
- Collaboratively engaging all stakeholders throughout the phases of the product development process as ideas are revised and refined.

Naturally your customers are the ones who know your products the best. When involving customers in the product innovation process here are a few helpful questions to consider asking them:

What enhancements or improvements would they recommend for an existing product?

What is missing from the product?

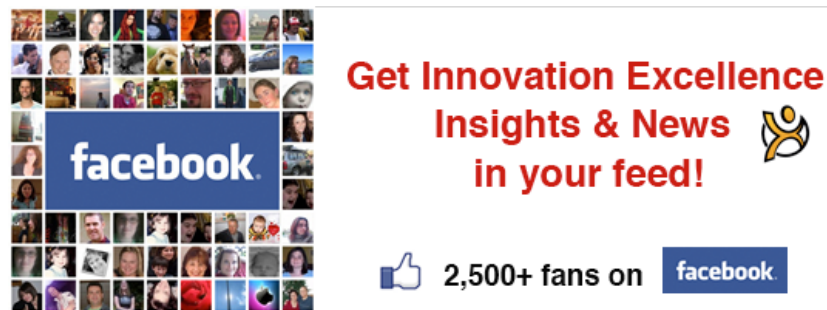
Would customers find the product more useful if it included certain features?

Once a customer-centric system is put in place, it is imperative to collaboratively work with *other stakeholders* whether it be business partners, suppliers, customers or employees. The primary goals are to implement a business innovation model and eliminate the practices that hinder the creation of innovative systems. The understanding is that by eliminating silos created by multiple processes, communication barriers that contribute to lower levels of business productivity, and changing practices that stifle creativity innovation can become a core team process.

There are, however, important implications to introducing such an approach across the organization. These challenges therefore require organizations to leverage the right technological and strategic tools successfully manage larger, more distributed teams, and more interactions, while at the same time allowing for increased participation with customers.

Are any of these key elements currently being implemented in your product innovation process?

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