

Using Social Technologies to Co-Innovate Product Evolution

by Stephanie Logerot, National Instruments

AT NATIONAL INSTRUMENTS (NI), WE DEVELOP intuitive software and modular hardware products that help engineers and scientists around the world design and deploy systems. Customers use our products for applications ranging from simply acquiring data to controlling the world's largest supercollider.

We understand the importance of embracing our lead users and other customers when developing new product features and have successfully implemented a system for co-innovating the evolution of our flagship software platform, NI LabVIEW. Co-innovation is a hot topic among technology companies, and we have embraced this idea to incorporate user feedback into our development process. The online LabVIEW Idea Exchange (ni.com/ideas) is a forum where users can provide ideas that help make our products better. It also serves as a way for us to show that we listen to and value their feedback.

Gathering Data

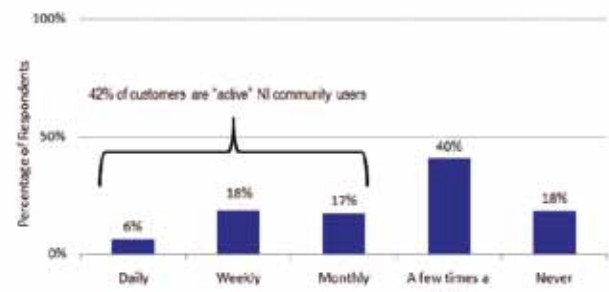
As we began to discuss the idea of building co-innovation into our LabVIEW development process, we knew we needed to gather more information about our community members, as they would be a key part of the process. To accomplish this, we conducted an extensive survey of our community. We specifically wanted to embrace the audience of innovators and evangelists in our community.

The survey showed that 41 percent of NI customers are "active" NI community users. Additionally, the more active customers are with the NI community, the more loyal they are, meaning they are

- satisfied overall with us as a company,
- likely to recommend our products to a colleague,
- likely to purchase the same products from us (repeat customers), and
- likely to purchase new products from us.

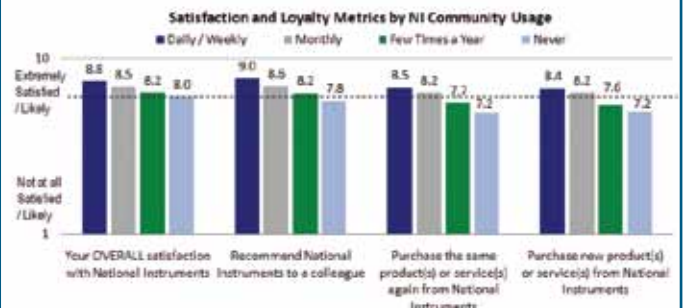
This data, shown in more detail in the following graphs, confirmed that it would benefit us to embrace these customers in our software development process.

NI Community or Discussion Forum Usage



Source: Q2 2010 Customer Loyalty Survey
 © Note: Frequency of use for the National Instruments community or discussion forum is a technical requirement. By use we mean: read content, contribute to posts, share code, join groups and so on. Single select.
 US/Canada. Random mix of all customers who made any purchase since Jan 2009. n=622, margin of error +/- 3.0%.

The more active the customer is with NI community, the more satisfied and loyal they are with NI



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 US/Canada. Random mix of all customers who made any purchase since Jan 2009. n=622, margin of error +/- 3.0%. Data is presented as preferred mean score +/- SD.

Implementation

After evaluating our audience, we narrowed our focus down to the following objectives, which helped us solidify our plan for a LabVIEW co-innovation system:

- Make it easy for NI customers to share, discuss, and vote on new software features.
- Gather feedback from lead users as we enter new markets.
- Encourage customers to share their feedback in the community-driven software development areas.
- Launch customer-driven software developments at NI-Week, our annual user conference and trade show.
- Integrate these ideas into traditional marketing efforts.

Our end product, the LabVIEW Idea Exchange, was born out of the need to implement the above objectives. Built using the Lithium community platform, it goes beyond the typical beta program by giving our online community a way to interact directly with NI R&D to provide candid feedback about our products. We then work to incorporate their feedback into LabVIEW as much as possible, which results in increased customer satisfaction because they see that we pay close attention to their needs and suggestions.

Users can submit and vote on features covering topics such as

R&D team. Many users who had complaints just posted them to their own blogs. By launching an open, public idea board for users to share their feedback, we gave our customers a welcome hand in our software development process. Because of the success of the LabVIEW Idea Exchange, we now have eight Idea Exchanges covering multiple product lines.

We have also seen an increase in our own software development productivity because we no longer have to guess which features our users would prioritize. Now, the feedback our community provides in the Idea Exchange gives us direct insight into which features they want to see most, and helps our R&D team prioritize accordingly.

Other specific metrics include the following:

- 2,400 ideas submitted across several software product lines (our initial goal was 500)
- More than 47,800 votes on product ideas
- 9,470 customer comments on ideas
- More than 45,400 unique visitors to the Idea Exchange, for a total of 99,100 visits
- The LabVIEW 2011 beta includes 13 new features from the Idea Exchange

Hot Ideas | Most Recent Ideas | Top Kudoed Ideas

New Idea | Idea Exchange Options

477 Kudos

Allow the Distribute Tool to work on Wires

by JackDunaway on 06-12-2009 12:08 AM

Currently, the block diagram has an endlessly useful feature. I use it every day - the

Indicator 1
Indicator 2
Indicator 3
Indicator 4

Vertical Gap

The following feature would be AWESOME for expediting BD readability:

Indicator 1
Indicator 2
Indicator 3
Indicator 4

Many companies are afraid of what their customers might say about their products; however, by embracing customers' opinions and making co-innovation an important step in the product development cycle, we have been able to work with them to create better, more useful products.

The LabVIEW Idea Exchange includes ideas straight from customers interested in helping us develop the next version of LabVIEW.

user interface enhancements, performance improvements, computation capabilities, and hardware integration. Since August 2009, more than 2,000 ideas have been submitted for consideration in future versions of LabVIEW. In August 2010, we launched the newest version of LabVIEW, which incorporated 14 Idea Exchange submissions.

Results

Overall, we consider the LabVIEW Idea Exchange to be a great success. One important measure is that it has decreased the number of customer complaints. Before the Idea Exchange existed, customers requested new features for the product by emailing our

Companies are generally interested in customer feedback, but often don't know the best way to gather and then implement their suggestions. The most innovative part of the Idea Exchange is that we not only use social technology to listen to our customers, but that we then incorporate the best feedback directly into our products and give customers access to our R&D team. Many companies are afraid of what their customers might say about their products; however, by embracing customers' opinions and making co-innovation an important step in the product development cycle, we have been able to work with them to create better, more useful products. **L**