Intel IT Business Review

(intel®)

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Building stronger bridges between users and IT

Teamwork starts with listening. Listening leads to understanding. Understanding fosters alignment and informed activity.

What sounds so simple and so fundamental isn't always the norm. Often overwhelmed with new service requests, systems administration, infrastructure optimization, and problem resolution, IT organizations sometimes overlook the users they serve.

"End users are our customers," says Faith McCreary, user research team lead for Intel IT. "It's critical that we listen to them to understand what they find useful and important. And then we must turn their feedback into action and improvement."

Intel IT started building stronger bridges between its user community and its IT strategy with the creation of a central user experience function in 2005. Recent years have brought a variety of people-centric innovations to Intel IT including an annual Voice of the User (VoU) survey that helps assess employee preferences and satisfaction and a Partnership Excellence (PE) interview that facilitates discussion and collaboration between Intel's senior business and IT leaders.

"Our task," says Mac Agan, director in the CIO Strategy Office, "is to listen, discuss, and commit to act."

"The ultimate value and the greatest insights are found when we align and correlate this data with other business intelligence, projects, and investments."

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The VoU survey has a standard set of questions—covering everything from user satisfaction and support to computing systems and services to training and communications—that helps establish baselines and measure progress. New questions are included every year to attain additional feedback and new insights.

"The VoU is our connection to the user community," says Julie Rovegno, marketing communications manager of IT products and services for Intel IT. "It's much more than a satisfaction survey. Employee VoU feedback helps us understand what drives satisfaction; what is most valuable to our employees; what's being used and what's not; and it uncovers opportunities for improving employee productivity."

The intersection of satisfaction and importance

The intersection of two key vectors helps identify areas of needed improvement: satisfaction and importance. Low satisfaction in a certain category is more acceptable, for example, when users deem that category less important. But when users express dissatisfaction in an area they feel is important to their job or their productivity, Intel IT can justify and prioritize change.

VoU and PE feedback are also used to measure the progress, satisfaction, and impact of recent investments. Intel IT, for example, invested heavily in mobility to better support user workflows and was able to compare 2012 VoU feedback with 2013 results to demonstrate these investments yielded an average increase of 10 percent in satisfaction year-over-year. VoU also allowed Intel IT to gauge the efficacy of 2013 investments with different user groups and shape 2014 strategy to focus on those groups with the lowest satisfaction.

"We're taking the pulse of 100,000 employees," says Agan. "We can identify opportunities for improvement.

Mac Agan, Director in the CIO Strategy Office in Intel IT

We can measure how well our investments are working, and we can also see what happens when we don't invest in certain areas. We can't invest everywhere, so the VoU and PE feedback help us prioritize and justify at a very granular level."

This granularity is what sets Intel IT's user research apart from others, says Ed Goldman, CTO of Intel IT.

"We've transitioned from tactical to strategic over the years," Goldman explains. "We're diving deeper and getting a much richer picture of the work we do on behalf of our customers. And we use it to guide where our IT organization is going and how to get there."

Shaping IT Strategy

If the first few years of VoU and PE research were about establishing macro baselines, 2014 and beyond will be focused on new, more specific insights that help shape Intel IT's Strategy. This includes research about emerging technologies and interfaces, such as gesture and touch, to gauge demand and perceived value. VoU and PE feedback is also being used to learn more about specific personas and segments, from new Intel employees to administrative assistants to software developers.

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"There is so much data, we can slice and dice it in many ways," says McCreary. "We can conduct analyses based on specific roles, geographies, teams, or tenure. We can learn more about the importance and usability of specific tools, services, and interfaces. And we can evaluate and refine things like our change management and implementation processes."

"The ultimate value and the greatest insights are found when we align and correlate this data with other business intelligence, projects, and investments," adds Goldman.

These efforts are ongoing. For Intel IT, taking the pulse of its user community, identifying opportunities for improvement, driving more purposeful, informed action and investments, and measuring progress is a never-ending journey.

But it all starts with listening.

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