

Collaboration is more than just customer feedback—it's actively listening

Taking and using feedback is a step toward success in implementation, but it's also important as a general business practice. Communication is especially vital in the higher ed space, where technology needs to be purpose-built, and adapted, for the right fit.

According to a national [survey from EdSurge](#), educators and researchers are looking for partners—not vendors—who understand what they need, can explain products in a non-technical way, and who have a shared purpose and are responsive to questions and critiques.

The sense of community and collaboration are the hallmarks of how we do business at Kuali. Our products are built for the higher ed community, through collaborations between the community of users and the company.

"You can pay other vendors to do things, you can pay for cloud hosting, but you do not get nearly the amount of voice that you have in the Kuali community," said Marlise Blackburn, Lead Systems Project Manager at Indiana University. "I don't know exactly how Kuali has been able to do it and maintain it, but there is a mutual respect for the institutions and the subject matter experts who've been working in higher ed technology for so long. And I think that's really helpful, too. Just the understanding of the knowledge and years of knowledge that's out there."

So how does listening improve a company and product?

Listening Differentiates a Company

There are so many players in the ed tech space—from startups that focus only on products for education to behemoths that provide software for everyone from accounting firms to zoos. In that crowded space, though, there are many ways a company can differentiate itself from the competition. However, we think the best way to stand apart from the rest of the field is through listening.

We're working with the University of California San Diego on its Enterprise Systems Renewal program to replace legacy systems. We're building new tools and modifying existing tools to meet their needs.



“We believe in the company, and we believe in the tool,” said Susan Oswald, Technical Project Manager, Information Technology Services at UC San Diego. “... Sometimes, when you work with an ERP company ... you don’t trust them, they’re all about the money, and the consulting service is not really about the success. I don’t feel the same way at all with Kuali. I just know that we’re going to get a good product, a good outcome. We’re going to be successful.”

Our employees and how they interact with our partners make a huge difference.

“They really know their subject, they’re really passionate, and they’re very good at collaboration with us,” Oswald said. “It’s just like they do whatever it takes to work with us together in a partnership. I really appreciate that from them; it’s very helpful for our school.”

UC San Diego isn’t the only client who’s impressed with our ability to listen and collaborate. In fact, it’s something you’ll hear from our partners.

“Kuali really pays attention to the users, really worries about community, wants community engagement,” said Stephen Dowdy, Director of Research Information Systems & Integration at the University of Maryland.

Listening Improves Products and Satisfaction

It’s one thing to listen, and it’s another thing to take feedback and apply it to your product. However, when companies do that, they improve their own offerings, increase partner/client satisfaction and improve their chances for success.

It may seem incongruous for a for-profit company to allow users to give input and have access to its product. If a company wants to improve, though, it can’t ignore its users. A [study from EdSurge](#) found cases where an institution of higher education and vendor collaborated for research, resulting in published work for the faculty members and evidence that the product works for the ed tech company.

We’ve seen this principle in action. When a client gives us feedback or asks about a new function, we know it’s something they need. And if it matters to the client, it matters to us, and we’ll implement it. Then other clients see the new functionality and realize it was something they were missing, too. Our process improves, and so does our product.

Emilie De Oca Sarasua, Assistant Registrar in Student Services and Records Management at York University, said they asked for specific function to be added to a Kuali product. We listened, acted and implemented the change.

At UC San Diego, our collaboration involves a dashboard.



“They’re building on it, and they want to know what we want, we’re telling them what we want, and they’re going to build to that,” Oswald said. ... “It’s going to work for us, and they’re going to keep improving it. They want to take our information, what our requirements are. So, that makes us happy.”

Our philosophy is that you have to collaborate—take feedback and act on it—to innovate, and innovation is the path to success and longevity.

“I do feel like there’s real collaboration and wanting to iterate and wanting to grow the product and make it better,” Oswald said. “There’s excitement with the employees about it.”

How to Listen

Listening isn’t always as simple as, well, hearing what someone is saying. It involves using different methods of communication to engage with clients. Engagement can [involve](#) having active user groups and forums (we prefer these), sending customer surveys, using social media research and analytics, enabling crowdsourcing for ideas with a secure portal for user submissions, and more.

We also use an executive sponsorship team to facilitate communication.

“An executive sponsorship team works closely with the company but also works with institutions that are consuming the product through a variety of ways, including user groups,” said Bruce Morgan, Associate Vice Chancellor for Research Administration at the University of California Irvine. “We help guide the company in the development of the product. We are thinking strategically about the future and the future of the product. So the future of research administration as a profession, the future in terms of federal regulatory activity, and the future of the product, and how we bring all three of those together so that the product meets the needs of research administrators going forward.”

Listening is an integral part of building and maintaining a successful product and company. We believe that listening and collaborating with our partners results in better software, a smoother implementation process, and more robust customer satisfaction.

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