



*Which of the following current topics will significantly change the market in the next year? And what is the impact? (Business Intelligence/Analytics, Customer Engagement, Mobile, Security, or Social)*

When considering your focus areas for the upcoming year, Customer Engagement needs to be on the top of your list. Many research firms have consistently reported that engaged customers provide long-term brand loyalty and continuous revenue, providing more value than your one-time customers. Specifically within the software industry, customer engagement is a critical factor that will determine your success with customer onboarding, adoption of your products and service offerings, and ultimately retention of that customer. In today's market, customers who are not engaged and do not feel connected to your brand, will quickly turn to a different product or solution provider. There are two areas within the software industry where I believe the greatest impact lies.

First, customer engagement as it relates to your software. Today's software users are looking for increasingly adaptive and intuitive programs, that anticipate what they want to do, and provide an easy way to get there with the least number of interactions. As we know, it is critical to step back and look at your software through the customer's eyes. Providing forums, multiple customer feedback avenues and other channels of communication for your customers to be part of your design & development process, allow them feel part of the process and gives them the understanding that their opinion matters. The impact of building a community of engaged users around your software, also has a direct impact on your bottom line through lower customer turnover or "churn" rates, resulting in stronger customer adoption and retention levels.

Second, customer engagement as it relates to your organization. Successful organizations focus on building a community of loyal members rather than a portfolio of users. Customers feel they are part of your community when you empower them to communicate and engage with your brand on a personal and organizational level, and as a result they become invested in your software. I'm not just referring to putting up a user forum for feedback with your development team and the creative process, although this can be part of building the culture.

To take it to the next level, you need to implement a proactive customer communication plan that provides value to your customers (product updates, new features, fun facts), responsive

support services, and a clear understanding as to where your customers want to go with your product or service. This enables your business to grow with your customers' requirements and anticipate the changes and enhancements you need to make to meet future needs and market opportunities. Successful customer engagement will result in the customer becoming a loyal member of your extended team, as well as driving customer adoption of your software enhancements.

Now that I have briefly discussed these two focus areas that are impacting our market, I want to suggest an approach that will effectively engage your customers with your software products and implement your communication plan: eLearning and OnDemand Support.

Enterprise software solutions are continuously evolving, and with new developments and updates users need to be able to quickly access and understand these changes to effectively adapt with the software. Using OnDemand eLearning provides clients with a real-time opportunity to enhance their knowledge, productivity and satisfaction with your products and services. Effectively distributed eLearning within an OnDemand SaaS environment, linked to your product offering, rapidly engages customers so they build loyalty to your software, rather than detach from it due to a variety of competing influences on their time and focus.

For example, think of how many of your Facebook friends initially posted negative comments about the anticipated Timeline feature. Facebook, however, offered videos, articles, screenshots and gave its users education and time to adopt the new changes. They set dates and an implementation plan, allowing their users to start the changes before their profiles automatically updated. Facebook did not implement the Timeline feature overnight; they educated and engaged their users before the changes were made.

In summary, customer engagement through OnDemand learning, education and media-rich support materials, that are tracked and managed within a global SaaS based content management portal for your software support, will result in enhanced customer loyalty and retention. As noted earlier, this will also lower customer acquisition costs through marketing and sales, while increasing your top line growth by maintaining a loyal base of clients that want more from your product and service offerings.

We all know that the lifetime value of a customer is vital to organizational success, and a major part of building that lifetime value is by engaging our customers through awareness, education and targeted communication. If our customers don't engage with our evolving solutions, they will certainly feel disconnected and move on to another solution that meets their needs and requirements. This is why I feel customer engagement is critical and will continue to change our market, having a huge impact on our industry. It's up to us as to whether that change is positive or negative

*This interview was published in [SIIA's Vision from the Top](#) , a Software Division publication released at [All About the Cloud 2013](#)*

