



Company: Salesforce allows companies to connect with their customers by leveraging the combined power of cloud, social, mobile, data science and Internet of things (IoT) technologies. With its Customer Success Platform, Salesforce.com supports customer relationship management, engagement and intelligence by integrating sales, service, marketing, community, analytics, IoT and app development in a trusted cloud.

Challenge: Reinvent the Salesforce customer community to provide greater opportunity for Salesforce.com customers and employees to engage in more meaningful ways.

Solution: Update the Salesforce customer community to allow more collaboration opportunities between customers, employees and partners.

Results: Significant impact on cross-sell, retention, support, advocacy and product efforts.

Salesforce: Driving Engagement Through a Customer Community

Historically, many b-to-b companies have taken a passive role in understanding how to best structure engagement opportunities for their existing customer base. Most vehicles for customer engagement were disjointed or mismanaged, sometimes leading to missed opportunities and confusion among customers. In recent years, however, leading organizations have increased their efforts to provide a vibrant environment for customer engagement. In this Select Practice, we describe how Salesforce transformed its customer community to drive customer and employee engagement.

Client Profile

Erica Kuhl, senior director of community at Salesforce, leads a team that is responsible for community engagement, voice of the customer, and customer advocacy. In addition, Kuhl has access to an extended team that includes representatives from customer support, customer success, product, information technology and other marketing functions at Salesforce.

The Challenge: Increase the Value of Engagement for Salesforce and Its Customers

Since 2005, Salesforce has maintained an online forum for its customer base. The forum started as a best practice center where customers could access company resources, training, presentations and online workshops designed to help them quickly get up to speed on Salesforce usage and best practices. The online community has evolved over the years, adding enhanced functionality and an improved look and feel with each iteration. While valuable, the community was lacking a critical feature: a venue for Salesforce employees to collaborate directly with Salesforce customers. Salesforce knew that increased customer/employee engagement would likely deliver numerous benefits (e.g. informing product direction, facilitating customer-to-customer problem solving, leveraging customer advocates to help the company sell). However, the company needed a way to foster more effective collaboration to realize these benefits.

The Solution: Facilitate Collaboration Opportunities

In 2013, Salesforce launched its Community Cloud product, and the Salesforce Success Community was one of the first customers. The Community Cloud product delivered the final piece of the puzzle to the community: collaboration. Now Salesforce customers could engage and share feedback with other customers, collaborate directly with Salesforce employees and facilitate engagement with their own customers.



Select Practice

The SiriusDecisions Customer Community Ecosystem Framework

Lifecycle Stage:		Community Requirement				
		Company Goals Customer Goals	Audience	Interlock	Measurement	Insights
Community Elements	User Groups					
	Online Communities					
	Social Sites					
	Customer Advisory Boards					
	Events					
	Partner Groups					

© SiriusDecisions Inc. All rights reserved.

Salesforce enhanced its community in alignment with the key principles of the SiriusDecisions Customer Community Ecosystem Framework, which was designed to help organizations structure an aligned approach to all community elements. Establishing a comprehensive customer ecosystem is essential to optimize customer experience and ensure that an organization can effectively access valuable sources of insights from its customers.

The new community has changed the way Salesforce engages both online and offline. The company's annual event, Dreamforce, is also supported within the community platform through pre-event promotions designed to ensure the right audience is aware of opportunities to connect at the event, and the publication of event-related content. The community also includes mobile device support – a critical feature for driving sustained engagement before, during and after an event.

Initial Results: Increased Engagement and Participation

Salesforce has realized notable results from its re-investment in its aligned community strategy and platform. These benefits include:

- Active participation.** Because employees can now collaborate directly with customers, they are more aware of how they can impact customers' success. Salesforce employees actively introduce customers to the community during and after the onboarding process, and they take time to ensure customers know how the community can help them achieve optimal results from their investment in Salesforce's products and solutions. The community itself has grown significantly – to more than over 1.8 million customers, 450,000 of whom are active in a given month. The community continues to grow at a rate of 40,000 new customers per month.
- Peer-to-peer collaboration and advocacy.** Because the community encourages customers to collaborate, it receives more than 7,000 customer comments per month, demonstrating extensive peer-to-peer interactions. The community is intended to enable customers to help other customers. For example, the Salesforce MVP program, open to the top 1 percent of the company's most passionate brand evangelists and experts, features 180 customers, partners and developers who actively participate in Salesforce advocacy activities via social media and other



Select Practice

company-sponsored initiatives. Within the Salesforce customer community, MVP program participants answer more than 35 percent of the questions posed by other customers.

- **Customer-driven product innovation.** The customer community is a critical contributor to the product development process at Salesforce. The community currently delivers more than 100 ideas per month, along with 2,100 comments per month and more than 11,000 monthly votes from customers on product suggestions.
- **In-person interactions.** Increased engagement via the online community is also translating into additional face-to-face opportunities for Salesforce customers. The organization currently operates more than 250 user groups across 35 countries, with more than 70,000 participating customers.

The Sirius Decision

While all companies desire an engaged customer base, few are willing to put the effort into truly optimizing engagement opportunities for their customers. Salesforce understands the power of an engaged customer base and has discovered new ways to leverage customer engagement to support its business. Making the decision to optimize customer engagement requires a certain amount of trust, and developing the willingness to provide customers deeper access and the ability to influence company and product direction can be an uncomfortable transition at times. However, as Salesforce is demonstrating, these efforts can provide significant benefits.

Recommended Research

User Groups: Best Practices for Gathering Customer Insight
The SiriusDecisions Customer Lifecycle Framework
The SiriusDecisions Customer Community Ecosystem Framework
Core Strategy Report: Community Best Practices
Core Strategy Report: Leveraging Customer Advocacy for Demand Creation

