

Scaling up, listening better

How Microsoft Visual Studio prioritizes product requests from their massive customer base



COMPANY SIZE
Enterprise



HEADQUARTERS
Redmond, WA



INDUSTRY
Software

USE CASE

- Managing feedback at scale
- Customer-centric product development
- Prioritization of roadmap initiatives

Building critical tools for developers so they can build everything else

Microsoft Visual Studio is a powerful suite of tools that helps millions of developers build and ship great apps. Team Foundation Server (TFS), one of the products in the Visual Studio suite, has everything a development team needs to manage their application lifecycle. Because their rich set of tools is tightly integrated, TFS is able to provide developers with the critical data they need for every step of their product development process: imaging centers, and billing partners across the country.

Listening to your user (millions of them)

TFS began as an on-premise offering and expanded their services in the cloud, known as Visual Studio Team Services. Moving to the cloud had many benefits, one being that it increased their reach. Typical TFS customers were from the

enterprise and Visual Studio Team Services made the same services accessible to small and mid-market companies. The addition of new users, however, brought some new challenges.

Previously with enterprise accounts, the TFS product team was able to personally connect with customers. To gather product feedback, the TFS team would invite a few customers to their offices and have regular calls with them to understand their needs and requirements. However, with the switch to the cloud, customer teams became smaller and more numerous. It became unfeasible for the product team to connect individually with all of the small organizations due to sheer volume. The TFS team did not want to lose their connection to customers and strove to find a way to get as much quality feedback as they could. They found a solution with UserVoice.

“We didn’t have a way to reach out to those customers and UserVoice gave us a way to give them a voice,” says Ewald Hofman, Senior Program Manager of the TFS team. The feedback they received from their customers via UserVoice provided valuable data to help make product decisions and



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– EWALD HOFMAN Senior Program Manager

confirm they were maximizing their engineering resources. In addition, UserVoice provided a channel for the product team to efficiently close the communication loop with users.

Since creating their UserVoice portal to capture feedback, more than 20,000 users have participated, contributing more than 2,300 suggestions in total.

Feedback itself is not the finish line

After the TFS team pulled insights from UserVoice data, it was time for the next step. At first, the TFS team only used UserVoice for one-way communication; they listened to the community, but did not update the status of completed suggestions or alert users if they were working on a requested feature. They soon realized it was important for users to feel heard so the team identified two areas where they could improve their process:

1. Tracking suggestions in their backlog: They did not complete UserVoice suggestions because they did not have a link between their backlog and UserVoice. Therefore, the feature team was often not aware that a feature they'd shipped was backed by clear demand from their user community. To remedy this, they created bi-directional links between their backlog and UserVoice for the most popular suggestions. Now when they ship a feature, they can easily find the suggestions that need to be updated.

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2. Providing frequent updates on in-progress items:

The "Under Review" state was overloaded because the TFS team used it for so many suggestions. To better indicate which ones the team was actively working on or which ones were on their 6-month plan, they introduced the states "Started" and "Planned." The goal was to provide updates on in-progress suggestions at least every 3 months. If a suggestion has a status, users can expect regular updates until it is completed.

Prioritizing feedback in the roadmap

To prioritize their backlog, the TFS team uses many channels for input, and UserVoice is one of these channels. The team completed 150 suggestions in the last year. Because of feedback on UserVoice, they even completed items which were not part of their original plans. Ewald says, "We heard [our customers] loud and clear and we prioritized these items higher on our backlogs."

The TFS team is so dedicated to listening to their users that they are held accountable for working on at least one of the top 10 requested features in each planning cycle. Users are encouraged to be a part of the product development process and product teams continue to be transparent about what they are working on through UserVoice and other channels such as blog posts, where they share what they are planning to work on in the next few months.

"When we hear from our customers about what they're looking for, it confirms what we need to build, and the data from UserVoice helps us to better justify that we are investing in the right things," says Ewald. "By actively using UserVoice, we've been able to look at trends and gain insights for our roadmaps and show our customers we're listening - ultimately making happier customers."

*This case study was partly adapted from a blog post by Ewald Hofman, Senior Program Manager at Microsoft Corporation.
<http://blogs.msdn.com/b/visualstudioalm/archive/2015/10/08/how-we-use-user-voice-to-make-a-better-product.aspx>*

ABOUT USERVOICE

UserVoice develops product feedback management software that transforms the way businesses gather and analyze customer feedback and prioritize feature requests to drive strategic product decisions.

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