# Users Power the Innovation Engine

One way or another, we're all customers. We all consume products or services, like the computer, phone or tablet you're reading this blog post on.

We all use consumer packaged goods like laundry detergent or hairspray (some of us more than others.) Product and service providers want us to buy Tide rather than Gain, or Candy Crush Saga instead of Two Dots (or *vice versa*). Even for our personal software choices – the apps we use on our phones, for example – we're both the chooser and the user.
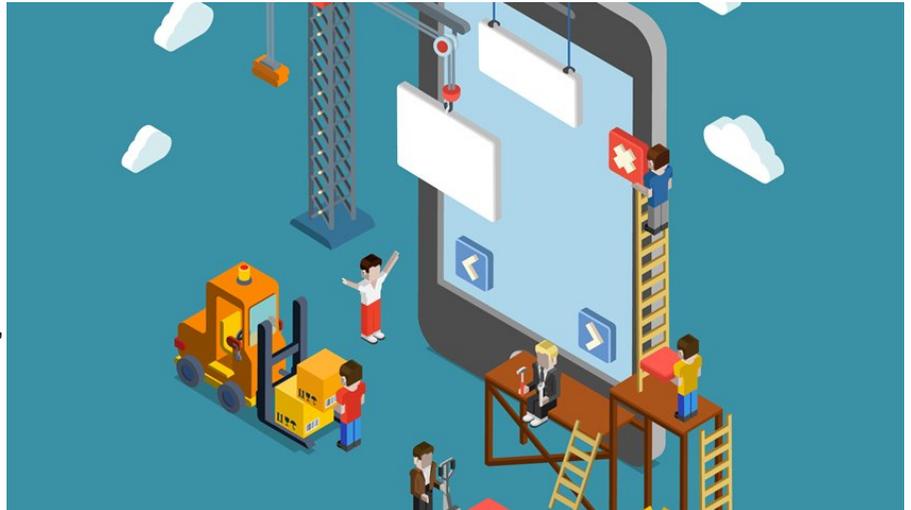
We select a product, and we evaluate the experience, consciously or not, as we go; this experience. A smart product developer will always test the product with the people who use it – and learn, make changes, and try again with an improved version. When the user is the person who makes the buying decision, user satisfaction can be measured by revenue, among other ways.

In an enterprise or B2B marketplace, however, the buyers aren't always the same as the users; in fact, they're frequently not users at all.

So how do you reach the users and learn from them? This is a problem that enterprise technology organizations – or companies that build technology for organizations rather than individuals – wrestle with constantly.

At Rockwell Automation, we have robust Voice of the Customer (VoC) programs, and are able to learn a great deal from the organizations that buy our products and services; by investing in and scaling up our User Research Panel, Rockwell Automation is seeking feedback directly from users of our systems. Working directly with our users gives us an additional layer of insight and empathy into how our products and services are used, what works well, and what we can improve.

The User Research Panel

The User Research Panel began in 2014 as a way for Rockwell Automation User Experience teams to reach the people who volunteered to provide user feedback on our software products. As more groups within Rockwell Automation work with their end-users to generate ideas and improve existing products, the need for participants from various industries, markets, regions and demographics has grown – and will continue to do so.

Participants initially fill out a profile that allows them to describe their experience with various tools, services and activities. After they've done so, they receive periodic email contacts from Rockwell Automation, inviting them to participate in surveys, remote usability tests (typically on the Web), or in-person events; for example, a number of panel members will be participating in research at Automation Fair 2015.

Signing up is easy, and users have the option to opt out at any time (we've added a one-click unsubscribe to each email, making it easier than ever to opt out.)

We're always looking for new participants, and encourage you to sign up if you want to be one of our research partners.

User Research Case Study: EasyActivate

User research within Rockwell Automation has illuminated problems and inspired many solutions.

For instance, we'd heard through Voice of Customer research that activating software to isolated devices is slow and cumbersome, and that there are many activation scenarios we could make much easier to handle.

So we decided to go deeper, learning about the details as users activate software themselves: finding and entering credentials, saving activation files, and hitting various roadblocks.

By watching users activate software, conducting in-depth interviews with users who activated software, as well as reviewing users' responses to surveys, we were able to identify a few key pain points we thought we could eliminate:

- Too many duplicate inputs required (up to three different strings of letters and numbers, in some cases.) Why did users need to put information in twice?
- Switching to a second (or third) piece of software, like FactoryTalk Activation Manager, or using the Rockwell Automation activation website, required too much time and was experienced as needlessly complex.

How could we solve these problems, and ease some of our users' worst activation headaches?

Attacking the first case, we adopted the guiding principle that each ID should be entered once at the most, the the team developed a workflow in which the activation step "remembered" IDs that had already been entered.

In some cases, we were able to eliminate HostID altogether; serial number and product key never needed to be entered twice. Although EasyActivate, the resulting interface, still requires users to enter new information, its design eliminates the need to duplicate data – never a good use of time.

Second, we wondered: what if we just made activation part of the installation process, rather than separating it out? By making "activate" the next logical step in installing software, the team eliminated the need to open up FTAM in the vast majority of cases.

After EasyActivate was released as part of FactoryTalk View 8.0 and Studio 5000 v24, we have continued to evaluate it, including extensive testing at the User Experience booth at Automation Fair 2014.

Users completed several tasks with EasyActivate, as we measured the time it took them as well as their success rates and reactions. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive; a few of the participants were excited by how much easier the activation process had become and even wanted to double check that activation was complete. We're now evaluating how we can make this clearer in future releases.

EasyActivate exemplifies the success that can come from partnership with Rockwell Automation users. We're continuing to nourish and grow the User Research Panel, so that we can continue to improve and refine the products and services we offer our customers, across the Connected Enterprise.

At Rockwell Automation, we know that our users are critical partners in innovation. Our User Research Panel is one of the best ways to collaborate on improving Rockwell Automation products and services. Sign up now or send us an email to be a thought leader and help shape the future of our offerings?

Posted November 12, 2015 By Abigail Plumb-Larrick, UX Leader, Rockwell Automation

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