

How Product Teams Benefit from Usability

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Summary:

Product teams can leverage usability in three simple ways. First, usability can disambiguate requirements. Second, it can push a product closer to perfection with a small investment. Finally, usability helps product teams inform the organization about potential and expected support issues.

Requirements Clarity

Product teams must interpret customer demands. In most cases, the requirements are poorly defined or ambiguous. If things are crystal clear for all the members of your team, consider yourself extremely lucky. For those folks only seeing thick mud, usability provides clarity. By interacting with customers your product team can find out what users are expecting and demanding.

This work can't be haphazard. It must be done using tried and true usability methods which have been explained many other places. The key is that product teams need to gather data on how users think and act.

By having this material on hand, your product team will have a common understanding of customer needs and demands. No more guesswork. The ambiguity dissolves. To an outsider, particularly an executive, this might seem like magic. Your entire team can rally behind the exact same data derived from real users. How beautiful.

Pareto Principle

Usability provides another benefit to product teams. It is very likely that you have one or more people on the team who live and die by the Pareto Principle. Everything is defined in terms of the 80/20 rule, where the majority of issues seem to stem from a small fraction of items. Similarly, most of the value seems to come from just a few features or functions.

This is a useful heuristic but it is constricting if your product team is enlightened. Through usability, it is possible to get another 5-15% without too much of a cost. Maybe you need to better understand the key items users care about. Maybe most of the issues are tied to the same widget. Maybe it is something else entirely.

The point is that you can move from 80% to 90-95% with a small usability investment. You can better understand the 80/20 rule in your product and adjust from what you know. Understand and push the boundaries through customer research. Greatness isn't that far away if you are open to working with, and working for your customers.

Insurance Policy & Foresight

Lastly, as I've mentioned on [Webword](#) previously, you can offer product teams a measured amount of insurance through user experience activities. By focusing on users, you can predict the problems you'll face in the future. This might seem obvious but remember there aren't many insurance options available to your product team.

Problem avoidance is desired however you cannot always eliminate problems ahead of time. A simple usability test can let you know what's coming. Your product team can let the Help Desk or Call Center know what to expect ahead of time because of your user experience activities. A quick user test or site interview can give you what you need to help the rest of the organization. Foresight is golden.