The Buyer’s Guide to Enterprise Innovation Management Platforms
Introduction

The concept of enterprise innovation goes far beyond the once popular, now archaic term idea management. While ideas are still the backbone of a successful innovation platform, they are only part of a larger process - a process that should always result in measurable business outcomes for your organization.

Staying ahead of your competition requires a steady pipeline of innovation. These innovations may result in new products or services, process improvements and cost efficiencies, increased employee engagement, cultural transformation, or a range of other desired outcomes. The goals themselves are often driven by a stakeholder within the organization or, on a macro level, by the marketplace and competitive pressures. Regardless of where or why the need originated, a consistent and well-managed innovation process can be the single, most critical differentiator for your organization’s long-term success.

A well-architected innovation management platform that supports crowd innovation with deep crowd science algorithms and configurable program governance can become the backbone of a sustained innovation program that gives your organization the competitive edge it needs. When selecting an Enterprise Innovation Management Platform for your organization, there are several key requirements to have on your shopping list. A platform’s inability to fulfill just one of them could negatively impact that overall goal of actionable innovations.

A recent Accenture study shows that those companies which have instituted formal innovation management systems, compared to those that have not, are almost twice as satisfied with their initial idea generation abilities and almost twice as satisfied with the return on their innovation investments.

The study also found that companies with a formal system in place are 75 percent more likely to define their innovation strategy as delivering a competitive advantage, twice as likely to introduce a new business process or model and 35 percent more likely to say they are typically first to market with new products or services.

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Companies that believe their innovation program makes them more likely to be first to market with new products and services.
5 Key Requirements

01 It must be an engaging platform.
Will your users actually use it? Getting thousands of users across globally dispersed parts of your organization to contribute their cognitive surplus and collaborate to refine ideas and solve problems is a hard problem that requires engagement algorithms that scale to the enterprise. Are you getting the best ideas from your employees? Can it engage your organization at scale, whether you are a 1,000-person company or a 300,000-employee global organization? Can it extend securely beyond employees to your customers and partners?

02 The platform must have deep crowd science algorithms to help you surface the best innovations.
Can your organization identify ideas with the most potential from thousands of submissions? Does your platform always bring the true game-changing ideas to the top? Can your platform help you clearly separate ‘idea signal’ from ‘idea noise?’ Ensure you are not deploying a lightweight “post and vote” solution that does not scale with your innovation program and that allows potentially game changing ideas from your employees and customers to die on the vine.

03 The platform must provide the structure to make innovation repeatable.
Innovation should be treated as a mission critical business process. Does your enterprise innovation platform make it easy for you to replicate this process at scale? Does it help you make innovation a repeatable, predictable, scalable and quantifiable business process within your organization?

04 It must be an enterprise grade platform.
Consider the fact the innovation management platform you select will become a repository of game-changing ideas for competitive differentiation. Does your platform then, have the enterprise grade security, availability and scalability that this demands? Can it be used by a global, mobile organization? As your innovation program matures, does the platform provide well-architected interfaces that will enable integration at the right time with key business applications?

05 Besides a software platform, the vendor must create an ecosystem that connects you with innovation best practices.
The best innovation programs in the world stay ahead of the game by constantly learning and benchmarking against best practices in the industry. Does your software vendor enable access to a community of innovators across multiple industries? An ideal vendor should go beyond just providing the software for innovation and connect you and your team to a network of innovation thought leaders and practitioners at some of the most innovative companies in the world. The availability of strategic innovation services and and global support from the vendor should complement the software platform.
It Must Be an Engaging Platform

An innovation management solution is only effective if you are able to get the ‘crowd’ (your employees or your customers) to actually and repeatedly use it. Since their participation on the platform is in addition to their existing workload, the platform itself must offer a feature set that makes the experience compelling, rewarding, and fun. While rewards and incentives may be one strategy to entice users to engage with the platform, intrinsic rewards such as peer recognition, advancement of reputation and cross-organizational visibility are powerful motivators.

Whether your crowd consists of your employees or your customers, it represents an array of diverse interests, knowledge, and experience. When aggregated and utilized within the proper platform, this breadth and depth of backgrounds and diversity of opinions will result in the greatest potential innovation for your organization. Often it will be the platform’s subtle use of game mechanics that becomes the key to unlocking this potential.

BREADTH AND VARIETY OF SUBMISSIONS

An innovation management platform will only prove compelling if the user receives the credit for their contributions and ideas. Users take pride-of-ownership in their ideas, so it’s important to ask: Will specific users be identified as the originators of their ideas? Can others within the organization easily connect a specific idea to a specific user? The answer to both of these questions should always be “Yes.”

Also, the business stakeholder within the organization (the person soliciting ideas to solve a particular business challenge) should be empowered to drive usage by instituting a time limit or deadline for idea submission. For example, if a stakeholder seeks ideas from employees on “How may we improve customer service?” they will find increased participation by instituting a challenge. In this scenario, employees would have a set amount of time (set by the stakeholder) in which to submit their best ideas on improving customer service.

Each challenge represents a unique community focused on a specific business objective on a timeline. When there is a finite amount of time that a challenge is open, employees are compelled to prioritize their own ideation and to participate in voting and refining the best ideas before the challenge ends.

QUALITY OF SUBMISSIONS

High participation can actually jam the radar of innovation resulting in users submitting lots of poorly thought-out ideas in order to see what sticks. While breadth and diversity of participation are important, your program will be infinitely more successful if users are rewarded for submitting quality ideas. It is the platform’s task to help cut through the noise and bring out this quality by:

- Allowing for categorization of submitted ideas so ideas are aligned to specific business needs, product lines or strategic objectives
- Automatically identifying similar ideas so the crowd’s time and efforts are focused towards the best possible ideas
- Offering intelligent recommendations to users who may hold an interest in certain categories of ideas to increase engagement across the platform

As overall quality increases, Leaderboards are an excellent tool for rewarding users who submit the best ideas, enabling these users to receive a visible ranking and status that credits them for the quality of their participation.

User Reputation is a powerful mechanism that builds upon this concept, utilizing the enterprise innovation platform’s advanced algorithms to reward meaningful participation. Reputation should be configurable so as to follow a specific user across communities and challenges, or be confined to a specific challenge. Reputation can also be the basis for that user being designated as an expert within the community, empowering them to be more involved in an idea’s graduation along the innovation pipeline. The ability to weight votes based on user reputation is also a key component to ensure the crowd can accurately help surface ideas that are best suited to meet business objectives by becoming products or services. Providing a 360-degree evaluation of employee contributions helps push quality ideas to the top.

Virtual Currency is another effective way to reward high-quality submissions. This feature encourages effective participation with earned credits or points, which can then be redeemed for prizes from a customizable virtual store. This virtual store can offer products that will best incent users and recognize their participation. The store could have physical rewards, for example, a branded sweatshirt or incentives that help get ideas on their way to execution such as a pitch session with your CEO or resources to prototype your idea.
The value derived from your innovation pipeline will depend upon the level of automation inherent to your innovation solution. Automation should enable stakeholders to utilize crowdsourcing to initially evaluate ideas. While not every user or employee may have an idea to submit for a specific challenge, they can still be invaluable to your innovation process by voting or rating ideas submitted by others.

In enterprises, the number of ideas submitted for specific challenges can become unwieldy for the individual stakeholder, or a limited resource of experts, so crowdsourcing acts as a sort of filtering process, allowing the best ideas to rise to the top. Users who submit ideas will remain significantly more engaged if they receive ongoing feedback on their submissions. Utilizing an Up/Down Vote (thumbs up/thumbs down), or Star Ratings (depth of sentiment for an idea), all users can provide the feedback necessary for your innovation platform’s algorithms to begin ranking all of the submitted ideas.

**Pairwise Voting**

In order to ensure fairness in your overall innovation process, a powerful mechanism called “Pairwise Voting” presents ideas to users in a head-to-head review process can be applied to the comparison of ideas to rank ideas higher or lower. The ability to apply a rank order to the voting, so each individual idea has equal opportunity to be voted upon, is a required component for solutions.” - IDC Full Article

Deep Crowd Science Algorithms to Help You Surface The Best Innovations

Whether you’re instituting a new innovation management program or seeking to improve an existing internal process, the crowd innovation platform you choose should allow you to separate idea signal from idea noise. As before, it all boils down to not just the breadth and diversity of the ideas submitted, but the quality of those ideas, and the ability of the crowd to accurately identify ideas that have high economic potential.

In a recent report by IDC on Worldwide Innovation Management, IDC points out the importance of deep crowd science algorithms such as pairwise in an enterprise innovation platform:

“For an idea to move from being a standalone idea to being compared with or measured against another idea with the same intended context, an idea needs to be ranked based on its level of contribution to the goals of the specific challenge, campaign, or project. A pairwise voting mechanism or structured head-to-head review process can be applied to the comparison of ideas to rank ideas higher or lower. The ability to apply a rank order to the voting, so each individual idea has equal opportunity to be voted upon, is a required component for solutions.” - IDC Full Article
head-to-head comparison to see which they think is better. This mechanism helps give every idea equal consideration and eliminates the risk of missing game-changing ideas that were submitted later in the process.

This additional intelligence should be configurable by the innovation stakeholder and can be utilized at different phases of a challenge. It should also be configurable by role so that you can either use pairwise across the larger crowd, or enable it at later stages to force careful consideration of each idea by subject matter experts in the organization. Regardless, the result will always be a thoughtful ranking of ideas.

The algorithms powering pairwise should help improve engagement in innovation challenges, while at the same time ensuring each idea is equally and thoughtfully considered by the crowd.

Your organization’s ability to innovate will only be as successful as your ability to initiate and sustain engagement at scale. It’s critical to establish and maintain a vibrant community of users that can follow each other and communicate openly. With the proper feedback tools at your community’s fingertips, your stakeholders will be able to measure your platform’s effectiveness. This empowers them to focus on the best ideas as measured against your KPI’s and internal benchmarks.

Beyond the generation of ideas, a major component to true enterprise innovation is progress - shepherding your crowd’s best ideas from concept to actionable innovation and onward towards implementation. Such progress should be repeatable at scale and should incorporate visual tools to identify what stage (i.e., Brainstorming, Qualifying Round, Expert Review, Implementation, etc.) an idea currently resides in.

Specific stages should be customizable and may depend upon your organization’s internal processes, but an effective solution will present an idea’s progress in a dynamic, visual format that’s easily understandable for any stakeholder within the organization. The lifecycle of any idea typically includes several stages and each stage will have its own set of criteria that an idea must meet to advance to the next stage. Some ideas will continue along the path to maturation while others may simply fail to satisfy a certain stage’s requirements.

**AUTOMATED IDEA GRADUATION**

Definition of these requirements or criteria should always be configurable by the stakeholder. One stage in your innovation process might allow an idea to graduate based on the community’s sentiment by applying algorithms to the number of views, votes or comments an idea has received. Other ideas stages could require multiple experts to complete objective evaluations of an idea using pre-defined templates and a structured workflow. Regardless of how you configure graduation from one idea stage to the next, the platform should always permit you to integrate with your organization’s own internal workflow. This notion of automated idea graduation is critical to scale the innovation process, since it allows organizations to leverage the crowd for the heavy lifting of discerning ideas at scale in the early stages of a challenge and then effectively leverage the scarce time and resources of experts in later stages.

As with any enterprise innovation process, your employees are busy and executives get distracted so there is the constant risk of your organization’s best ideas vanishing into the ether. The future of your business depends upon leading these prospective innovations toward potential implementation, and doing it in a way that is repeatable at scale. The right innovation management solution will mitigate this risk by increasing your stakeholders’ ability to consistently move the best ideas along, from one stage of the innovation pipeline to the next.

A back-end dashboard should unite all of data in one view for the stakeholder, providing a snapshot of analytics and all available data related to their challenges - community health, site statistics, reputation and ranking reports. An enterprise grade innovation management solution should include out-of-the-box reporting and analytics with the ability to create custom ad-hoc reports very easily. In short, stakeholders should never be more than a click away from the latest developments in their innovation pipeline.
Every organization has its functions and culture unique from all other organizations. Your KPI’s are specific to your business objectives, and your internal work streams have been instituted in order to maximize effectiveness. Any software platform integrated into your organization must conform to your established systems of review and communication. Your innovation platform is no exception.

Customization and flexibility is key when integrating into your internal processes. For example, an idea that is led from one stage of maturation to the next without consideration of the appropriate internal reviews and sign-offs will inevitably result in an idea that never realizes its potential for organizational benefit. The various reviews and criteria you use to subjectively and objectively score or evaluate ideas could be unique to your product lifecycle methodology, and as such your platform should offer the ability to create specific templates to match your process and objectives.

Stakeholders must be able to shape their specific innovation pipeline process to match their own organizational requirements and work streams. In this sense, the proper approvals can be incorporated into the platform feature set to ensure a smooth transition from one stage of innovation to another. Ensure that your platform has mechanisms to remind busy individuals and to escalate up the management chain when decisions or reviews are overdue.

With regards to your organization’s preferred modes of communication and collaboration, your innovation solution should be just as flexible. With Graph APIs, your innovation platform can integrate with your organization’s existing tools and technologies. Culturally, you may have pockets of innovators gathering in other collaboration platforms in use in your organization. Graph APIs help you bring those crowds into a structured platform where innovation can be fostered, measured and tracked. As innovation processes in your organization mature, well structured Graph APIs that are based on principles of the semantic web will make it easier to integrate innovation processes into the context of your business processes and business apps.

Gone are the days when your potential users might be tethered to a computer. Ideas can be generated anywhere, at any time, and it’s important to offer your users a solution that is as mobile as they are. Your platform should extend to the most popular mobile platforms including iOS and Android smartphones. This offers users the ease-of-use they’ve come to expect from the technology and devices used in their personal lives. Key innovation software feature sets such as posting ideas, voting, commenting, and viewing challenges should all be available on users’ mobile devices, allowing them to stay engaged, regardless of location.

It’s important to consider your platform’s ability to support multiple languages. If your organization has customers, partners, or employees in other countries, it would prove costly to deploy a solution that doesn’t support a variety of languages. Be sure your solution supports many of the most popular languages and offers a language development kit so you can easily handle translation to languages that may not be supported by the platform.

A truly enterprise-grade solution must work in conjunction with your established organizational work streams. Whether you measure effectiveness against ROI or KPI’s or some other preferred metric, the reality of turning ideas into executable innovations requires this type of platform flexibility and cooperation. Your innovation platform must be flexible enough to communicate as your organization communicates.
ENTERPRISE GRADE SAAS

Like any enterprise, your organization cares about data confidentiality, data privacy protection, protection against data breaches, the location and quality of data centers, and the availability, scalability and disaster recovery capabilities of the SaaS vendor. As you look beyond the surface attributes of the platforms, ensure you dig deep into the enterprise grade capabilities of your SaaS vendors. These attributes may start with simpler questions such as, “Does the vendor support current browsers with no software download required?” “Is all communication encrypted?” and “Can you enable SSO or Federated Identity to control access?”

As you dig deeper, look into the data segregation between customers, which is inherent in the architecture of the solution. Can sites be IP restricted to allow access only from an enterprise’s internal network, are data centers certified and managed by an enterprise grade provider, is there 24x7 data center staffed with on-site security? Are there multiple global data centers that cater to where your users are located and meet the data privacy regulation requirements?

It is equally important to ensure that the vendor has published information security policies, agreements and third party audits in place. Does the vendor have, for example an independent lab performing penetration tests and regular security scans?

Innovation programs are not a hobby for most enterprises, they are mission critical. When your CEO initiates a company-wide challenge that is highly visible and promoted globally, will your vendor be able to ensure high availability (at least 99%)? Does your vendor actually use external probes from cities worldwide on an ongoing basis to measure availability, and has their actual record been over 99% in the past year?

Ensure you also consider disaster recovery – are there full data backups each day, how many are retained? What spare hardware capacity does the vendor maintain at each data center to allow for recovery?

Typically vendors that have already provided enterprise IT solutions to large Fortune 100 companies will be able to confirm proper controls, audits and policies are in place. Fortunately, SaaS standards have emerged for data center security, that make it easier for you to spot the vendors that are capable of providing a secure solution. The data centers themselves should be SSAE 16 SOC 1 and SOC 2 audited, ISO 270001 and PCI-DSS certified. The vendor’s security policies should be modeled on ISO27002 Information Security Guidelines, and EU Safe Harbor.

A truly enterprise-grade offering would not be complete without the opportunity to access the knowledge of other industry innovators. The ability to learn from the experiences of other customers significantly reduces potential hurdles in launching your own innovation program. Make sure that your platform vendor offers multiple venues for sharing best practices, whether it’s at an annual innovation forum with thought leaders or regional forums with fellow innovation practitioners. Online support should always be offered by your vendor to ensure instant access to knowledge, experts and best practices.

In conjunction with access to other customers, the ideal platform should also take advantage of aggregated data across industries. This offers insights into your own program’s effectiveness by providing comparative benchmarks (i.e., “How does my innovation program compare in engagement to the telecommunications sector?”).

And your solution should incorporate data and intelligence into its software, resulting in a best-of-breed platform for social dynamics, crowd science, behavioral analytics, game mechanics, big data analytics, and workflow.

Another key question to ask when considering best practices for your program is whether your vendor offers expert consulting services. These should range from assistance in community management as you launch your first challenge to architecting an entire innovation program for your organization. A best-of-breed vendor will offer access to shared customer experiences via regular webinars and access to industry and technology thought leadership thorough webinars and training by recognized professional services and technology experts in the field.
Conclusion

Your organization’s future demands an Enterprise Innovation Management Platform with sustained engagement to help you get the best ideas at scale, advanced crowd science algorithms to surface innovations with the highest potential, and the workflow engine to make innovation a repeatable business process. The ideal platform has to be enterprise-grade to engage your crowd regardless of timezone, location, device or language and also be flexible enough to integrate with your organization’s unique processes. Your vendor should complement the software with access to an ecosystem of innovation experts and a community of practice consisting of innovation professionals across multiple industries. When these elements are all combined in one platform, ideas will lead to measurable business outcomes and true innovation.