

Case Study

GroupSystems Success Story: Global Technology Leader

Innovator's Innovator Taps ThinkTank® to Help Capture the 'Voice of the Business Partner'

When tasked with capturing the "voice of the business partner," a program manager at a global technology company had her work cut out for her. She and her team needed to gather and present the perspective of the company's global network of business partners within just a couple of months.

"We wanted to understand the partner's experience and collaborate directly with them to define recommendations for simplifying their interactions with our company and reducing the total cost of doing business with us," the program manager said.

Initially, the team looked at traveling to a dozen or more partner locations – across continents and time zones – to conduct partner interviews. But the more the program manager ran the numbers, the more she realized the numbers just didn't work. The costs, logistics and time required were all simply too high to visit select partners in person.

While bringing executives from partner companies together was appealing, those logistics were equally daunting. And finally, surveys lacked an interactive quality so important to relationship-building with partners.

A Level of Collaboration not Otherwise Possible

The program manager had heard about ThinkTank technology for brainstorming, collaboration and virtual interactive meetings. That led her to the company's facilitation team. With more than a decade of experience facilitating meetings with ThinkTank, one of the facilitators recognized the project as an ideal candidate for online collaboration.

"Business partners are out selling, so we needed to get in there, be crisp, get the information and get out," the program manager said. "ThinkTank was the perfect option not just because of time- and cost-savings but because it encourages collaboration among partners that would not be possible in one-on-one meetings."

The teams worked together to plan an interactive online collaborative workshop for partners. Based on the objectives, they structured meetings with the right ThinkTank tools to optimize productivity and outcomes. The group created an agenda and did a dry run of the session. Prior to the session, the company provided the partners with a "prep kit" that included screen shots and instructions.

The company could not grant partners access to ThinkTank inside the company's firewall. Instead, it ran a version of ThinkTank hosted by Group Systems for the workshop.

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— Program Manager

Customer
Global Technology
Leader

Business Benefits of GroupSystems

- ThinkTank reduced the time to prepare for, conduct meetings and organize information afterward by 93 percent.
- The team completed the project 1-2 months earlier than with other methods.
- Online collaboration reduced costs by approximately 90% over in-person meetings.
- Results were so strong the group cancelled additional partner research.

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Anonymity = More Ideas

The event involved one four-hour ThinkTank session - organized in two hour blocks. The first segment encouraged partners to brainstorm ideas, while the second elicited specific recommendations. The workshop was offered twice to provide scheduling flexibility for the participating business partners.

The workshop used ThinkTank's Categorizer feature to brainstorm issues, and organize them into buckets. Attendees prioritized issues based on specific criteria. From there, they brainstormed again to identify benefits of certain actions, if implemented. All participants remained anonymous, proving a key factor in the quality of the sessions.

"We were amazed by the candor with which partners responded to our questions," the program manager said. "The quality of the quantitative and qualitative data was fantastic. The workshop generated excellent recommendations, and one idea led to the next. The business partners also gained insights from one another which was exciting to see develop."

Partner survey comments reflected their satisfaction with the process:

- "Excellent process"
- "Questions were asked in a way to get real issues and details"
- "It helped us stop and think about where we might improve our own processes"

Higher-Quality Input in Less Time

In the end, the outcomes of the event exceeded expectations. The group identified costs associated with business processes, prioritized key cost factors, and came up with the quantifiable impact of addressing partner recommendations. In fact, on the strength of the input gathered, the company could move ahead with analyzing and acting on information instead of conducting more data gathering as planned. "The validation from this facts-based analysis was compelling enough for management to proceed without additional study," the program manager said.

In addition to high-quality input from partners, ThinkTank helped the company reduce the time to prepare for, conduct and assimilate information after the workshop. The team planned the agenda, developed the preparation materials and organized the logistics in less than a week. The reports from GroupSystems were available at the conclusion of the workshop, organized and formatted to enable immediate analysis.

Comparatively, travel planning, travel, meetings, and the assimilation of information would have taken a couple of months the traditional way - allowing the team to complete the project a month or two sooner and before the end-of-year-sales pressures hit. The program manager estimates that added up to approximately 90 percent cost-savings and 93 percent savings of their time. "The return on investment with ThinkTank was very high," the program manager said. "We conducted incredibly productive sessions for the time and money spent. Beyond that, ThinkTank enabled a level of collaboration that wasn't possible otherwise."

The company quickly leveraged the analysis to support the strategy and planning cycle. They mapped recommendations against existing initiatives and identified white space opportunities. Ultimately, it was a testament to the company's reputation for innovation. "In the market, we are known as the innovator's innovator, and working with partners in this collaborative way reinforced that brand," the program manager added.