



TriNet innovates together with its community of thousands of SMB customers

## About Trinet

TriNet is a leading provider of a comprehensive human resources solution for small to medium-sized businesses (SMBs). TriNet enhances business productivity by enabling customers to outsource their HR function to TriNet. TriNet's momentum continues to grow as it helps its 9,000+ customers in more than 1,000 industries and verticals to manage benefits, payroll, expenses, HR compliance, reporting and more.

### The Business Case for Community

Madhukar Govindaraju, TriNet's Vice President of Products and Software Development, has been leading product innovation teams for many years. When Govindaraju came to TriNet, he was struck by the interesting challenges of developing products for the fast-growing and highly entrepreneurial SMB market. He also noted the complexities of developing solutions that cater to so many different kinds of industries and verticals.

To maintain a culture of continuous innovation for this diverse and dynamic user base, Govindaraju recognized the need for a deep, ongoing connection with customers. The company already interacted regularly with customers across many business functions, but those interactions tended to be transactional in nature—such as a payroll process, an open enrollment or a bonus payout. To deepen the relationship, TriNet launched an online community for customers to stay in tune with the more contextual side of their product, services and other HR needs.

## The Community Effect

### Better understanding of customer requirements

In 2010, TriNet launched its community to give customers a mechanism for sharing their product ideas and requirements with the company. Since that time, the Products Group at TriNet has received hundreds of suggestions from customers from multiple industries and verticals. Sometimes it's as simple as exposing a bug that needs fixing or suggesting a new feature that is critical to running their business. Other times it's an idea for a brand new product or service. "SMB customers have very different needs than large enterprises," said Govindaraju. "From a product management and software development perspective, we want to be very tuned into what they are really asking for so we can create the right product to meet their evolving needs."

This online, real-time customer connection becomes especially important as TriNet embraces a deeper vertical market strategy. "Our customer community helps us prioritize and innovate in areas that impact their business," said Govindaraju. "With the growth we see ahead of us, we need systems that help us build the right products and services to meet the emerging needs of our different customers."

### Increased customer engagement and feedback

TriNet also leverages its community to solicit feedback on the ideas it originates. Govindaraju and the product management team learn regularly from their customers by posing questions or presenting ideas in the community and then observing participants' reactions. They can also study trending conversations to see what's top of mind across the customer base or within a specific industry. TriNet's community provides a great customer feedback loop. "The platform's design allows us to keep customers informed of our intentions and report on the status of an idea that's under construction, planned or being implemented," he explained.

### Accelerated innovation

Govindaraju believes its community has accelerated the pace of innovation at TriNet. Ideas come in at a steady pace and the community automatically surfaces the best ones through voting and comments. One popular idea was the option for a preview page before a final payroll is submitted. Hundreds of people weighed in favorably and that feature is in development. Another request was made for the ability to set up automatic reports that run nightly or weekly. This suggestion is being implemented as well. "Our customers are always learning from us and growing with us. Once you have a community working together, you can harness the power of that vibrant group and let it inform and fuel your innovation programs," said Govin- daraju.

The community also helps TriNet customers innovate within their own organizations and drive business results. "If one client in a biotech, education or manufacturing vertical needs something, he or she can connect online and find out what others are doing in a similar industry or vertical," said Govindaraju. "We see this all the time."

### A fresh new marketing touch point

The community has proven to be a valuable asset in ServiceRocket's marketing toolkit. "We strive for fifteen touches in our marketing efforts," said Castaneda. "Whether it's an e-book, a blog, a tradeshow or a community conversation, the more touch points we have, the more comfortable our prospects become." In fact, Castaneda says community interactions serve as a refreshing alternative to traditional touch points. "Connections over community can feel less 'salesy' than a follow up call from a rep," he explained.

### Fast time to value

TriNet's community was up and running in just 60 days, in part due to Get Satisfaction's Software-as-a-Service delivery model. "We believe in the cloud-based SaaS model," said Govindaraju. "We don't have to worry about servers, uptime, scalability and security. We can concentrate on customer engagement and where we want to take them next."

### Expert customers helping others

The company has seen tremendous benefit from its pool of active community champions—subject matter experts who spend considerable time responding to other customers' questions and problems. Recently TechSmith made a push to expand that group of advocates. It sought out candidates who were not just highly knowledgeable but also helpful and service-oriented, and a number of individual candidates rose to the challenge. "Over the past twelve months, champions have replied to almost 700 topics in our community, increasing our total number of replied topics by approximately 30%," Foster said. Get Satisfaction's new leaderboard feature, which ranks Tech- Smith's most active experts, is tapping into these cham- pions' competitive spirit and motivating them to engage even more.

### What's next?

An area that Govindaraju would like to explore moving forward is a robust innovation program with the customer community as a centerpiece. Successful innovation programs have different phases, according to Govindaraju, including early program marketing, idea collection, recognition for winning ideas and feedback on beta products. "Community software could be leveraged to support every stage of an innovation program, whether we're soliciting ideas, gathering votes, announcing winners or even building prototypes in a private-access setting and developing a strong business case," he explained.

### Community as a differentiator

TriNet views its online community as a way for the company to innovate together with its customers—a place where customers can feel like a participant in the innovation process. According to Govindaraju, there's a big difference between one-to-one and many-to-many when it comes to product feedback. "With the many-to-many aspect of community, we tap the collective wisdom from groups of customers who are being exposed to ideas from others like them." By taking this kind of an ongoing pulse of the customer base, TriNet can be sure it

## About Get Satisfaction

Based in San Francisco, Get Satisfaction provides an online community platform connecting companies with customers to foster relationships that unlock new value for both sides. Companies of all sizes and industries—from Kellogg's, P&G and Intuit to Sonos, HootSuite and SugarCRM—rely on Get Satisfaction to deliver online communities

"Once you have the community working together, you can



**Madhukar Govindaraju,**  
Vice President of  
Products and Software  
Development, TriNet  
Group, Inc.

### Business Results

- Deeper understanding of customers' product needs
- Steady stream of customer-generated product and feature ideas
- Real-time customer feedback on TriNet product plans
- Accelerated innovation cycles