



LINDA
SCHNALL



ED
RUSCH

MAPPING THE WAY TO INNOVATION

AN INTERVIEW WITH
LINDA SCHNALL

Linda Schnall, SaaS Product Delivery Manager, is interviewed by Ed Rusch, VP of Marketing, about insight on how the Elemica technology team develops and delivers new products. Pushing the boundaries of today's technology and gathering user feedback, the team uses innovation balanced with user experience to meet their needs. Learn how we encourage our customers to imagine a different and better way to achieve their supply chain goals. The challenges of the 'status quo', change management and uncovering the deeper insights of user testing are shared as examples.

Ed

Linda, you're a delivery manager or director of delivery here at Elemica.

Linda

Yes.

Ed

So in a lot of ways you have a lot of insight over our product roadmap.

Linda

Yes.

Ed

What's it like working with our technology team or product team here at Elemica?

Linda

The difference between this team and other teams that I've seen at software development companies is that this particular team is very knowledgeable about the present and the upcoming technology. They are also very well suited to be self-managed. They come back with different and innovative ideas instead of just doing the status quo. They are always looking for ways to improve something, not just repeat what you've seen before just because you're used to it. There's always a better or more efficient way, and that's where their focus is.

Ed

How do you balance that personally and then also inside the team here? They have this drive to build some really cool innovative things that you haven't seen before using the latest and greatest technologies. Then at the same time there's a practical element, if you will, that goes into this because at some point those aspirations need to translate into beneficial solutions for our process industry customers.

Linda

We work hard to ensure that we review what our priorities are, what are we working on and in what order. We make it a



priority to ensure that we're working on the right thing at the right time so that we can provide the services, get it out the door and actually make sure that our users get a chance to use it. We also try to give them an opportunity to verify that our great idea is actually suitable for the work that they are doing.

Ed

So how do you get that feedback from the users to know whether what you are proposing or what you're trying to develop is the right thing to do?

Linda

When we have access to the users, we put things in front of them, and then we ask them to use it and pay attention to what they're saying and how they're using it. If we have the luxury to actually have them sit in the room, we actually watch them use the tool. We also listen to how they're thinking and pay attention to the questions that they're asking.

Sometimes the questions may not be the right question, word-for-word, but if you read into it, you can see where they're getting confused because they're based on an old idea. Again, they run into the same thing that I run into where you've been so trained that things have to happen this way. Sometimes you have to stop them and say, "I understand your question, but step out of that for a minute and let me give you a new paradigm."

Ed

It sounds to me that a big element of what you're doing is change management, if you will, because you have this context in which our customers have been operating on for quite some time.

Linda

Right.

Ed

And you're asking them to step out of that context and imagine a different way. How do you manage that process? I think that's probably more difficult than even the technology development in some ways.

Linda

It's a matter of really understanding what's important to your client. Over the last ten years in software, these systems have become so complex that someone's day-to-day work is not about meeting a certain business objective. Sometimes it's just a matter of making sure the software is updated with data so that I'm feeding the beast so that I can eventually get to my objective.

We are building our product based on that, to remind the person that they are actually the intellectual individual and not the software. The software is a tool compared to something that you have to just be a slave to.

Ed

I think technology ... The intention underlying all technology has been to benefit the users in order to make either their work life or their home life easier, more pleasurable or more efficient.



Linda

Right.

Ed

I think you're absolutely right that good intention gets corrupted over time to where it's no longer that efficient mechanism that's helping you; it's a beast that's consuming all your time and energy.

Linda

Right. That was a natural evolution, because software was developed to be something that you use in your workflow. What we've done is stepped out of that and said, "Let's look at the entire business, the whole holistic universe and figure out what we're really doing and why we want to do it."

Ed

How did you get into this role where you have this business acumen you're clearly describing to us? That's not to mention this technological acumen you have as well. What led you down the path to where you've gotten today?

Linda

Part of a project manager's role is to ensure that the requirements of what someone is speaking about when they say they think they need this, is to ensure that what they think they need is actually going to meet their objectives. People constantly go to solve a problem, but we hire professional problem solvers; that's our R&D team. So sometimes I might say, "I need a button to do this," or, "I need the report to do that." Well, I'm jumping to solve the problem when in reality I have someone who is really much better at it.

What I need to do is communicate where I'm getting stuck in the process of reaching my business objective. As a product manager, my job is to start that conversation and get those two people together.

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