webex by CISCO

Cisco's Webex Team Disrupts with Beta 2.0



A Shift from Internal to Global

Frank Murphy saw the need for change when he joined the Webex beta team as Director of Customer Success, Beta Engineering, and Collaboration. Their old approach relied heavily on internal QA and an outdated feedback system, making it challenging to engage real customers effectively.

At the time, beta was a de facto extension of engineering QA, using employee beta testers to help catch issues that slipped through the cracks during quality testing. Engaging actual customers for real-world feedback remained a significant challenge for the Webex beta team. Furthermore, their aging, homegrown customer collaboration platform made it difficult to manage the customer feedback they were able to gather.

INITIAL CHALLENGES

- Overreliance on internal QA
- Lack of real customer feedback
- Aging feedback platform

With two decades of successful product launches under his belt, Frank knew the transformative power of a well-structured beta program that ensures the customer's voice is present throughout a product's life cycle. But to evolve the existing program, he knew he needed better training for his team, more efficient and effective processes, and new, purpose-built tools that supported that vision. **This realization marked the birth of Beta 2.0, a game-changing initiative designed to integrate the voice of the customer throughout the Webex development process.**

"Our philosophy is 'always in beta,' and it applies to our products as well as to us. We're willing to try anything new."

SANJEEV KOTHARI
Senior Leader of Webex Beta



Getting the Right People

Frank teamed up with Sanjeev Kothari, Senior Leader of Webex Beta, to build a team of beta leads and engineers that's as sharp as it is savvy. They focused on training and deep product knowledge, ensuring each team member became a subject matter expert (SME). Now, these SMEs frequently handle beta feedback from testers, offering top-notch assistance and resolving issues swiftly, while gathering invaluable insights that help shape the future of their products.

An Impactful Team

This powerhouse team of beta experts, led by Sanjeev, is always looking for improvement. “Our philosophy is ‘always in beta,’ and it applies to our products as well as to us,” Sanjeev says with a smile, “We’re willing to try anything new.” This approach means embracing new methods, learning quickly from any hiccups, and applying those lessons to future products and tests. With Sanjeev and Frank’s support, the team has the freedom and encouragement to innovate continuously, ensuring that each new hardware and software release is better than the last. **The Webex beta team has made such an impact on Cisco and its customers that it was selected to present at Cisco’s premier customer event, Cisco Live.** At the event, beta lead Abdul Rahman gave a talk on beta and new collaboration features to a very engaged audience. Up until this point, neither the beta team nor the beta program had ever been featured at a Cisco event. This new opportunity was a direct result of the efforts the beta team had made to evolve and ensure the voice of the customer continues to remain front and center.



ABDUL RAHMAN
Technical Leader of Webex Beta

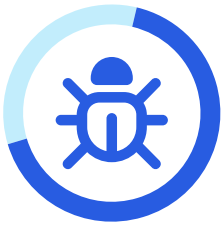
The Webex beta team has developed a streamlined process to handle **15-20 projects simultaneously**, each involving **thousands of customer testers.**

Modernizing the Beta Approach

With each new release from the product team, testers receive updated instructions, prompting them for feedback on the latest updates. A key component of their process is feature flagging, which ensures customer testers easily know which features are ready for feedback or relevant to their testing scope, keeping the tests and testers focused on what matters. This continuous cycle (a reflection of the “always in beta” philosophy) keeps the product development closely aligned with user needs and expectations.

For a snapshot, in the last year, thousands of testers across multiple releases for more than 15 products have submitted an impressive 9,100 pieces of feedback (original and duplicate submissions of issues, ideas, and praise). Such a sizeable tester population and high volume of feedback ensures that the Beta 2.0 team has a robust data set that strengthens the confidence in their decisions and improvements.

Broken down across feedback types: just over 60% are issues that the team can address to continually improve the Webex stability and functionality; approximately 30% are new ideas that help inform the product roadmap; and roughly 7% are praise, helping product managers understand what customers love about Webex. By aiming to leverage every piece of feedback, the Webex beta team has transformed their process into a dynamic and customer-centric operation. This approach not only enhances the product but also builds stronger relationships with their customers, ensuring that Webex continually evolves to meet user needs.



60%
ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

7% **PRODUCT PRAISE**





30%
NEW IDEAS THAT HELP SHAPE THE PRODUCT

Digital Transformation

To elevate their beta program, the Webex team replaced their patchwork in-house system with Centercode, the leading all-in-one user testing platform. With this switch, the team gained access to powerful new tools to streamline processes and improve the quality of their tests:



Tester profiles and participation tracking - Beyond gathering and storing key information about testers (e.g. customer site, details about their test environment, etc.) in a secure, centralized location, the beta team is able to see detailed breakdowns of each tester's engagement including logins, feedback, tests completed, and more.



Integration with Webex - Announcements and other media can be pushed directly to the Webex app from Centercode to keep testers informed. Testers can also submit feedback to Centercode directly from within Webex itself, eliminating friction and making it easier for users to provide their insights.



Feedback Collaboration - When multiple testers have similar feedback, they can indicate "me too" and add their own thoughts and experiences to the same feedback ticket. This collaboration adds a new dimension of data for the Webex beta team to examine, including frequency and popularity, and helps identify the top issues.

Webex Beta Culture 2.0

With the beta 2.0 transformation complete, the Webex beta team expanded its mission to include innovative support for customer IT readiness, a reflection of their "always in beta" philosophy. This newly expanded mandate helped to accelerate a broader Webex platform migration initiative across their user base.

Rather than relying on traditional methods like the "stick" approach of issuing end-of-life notices to push users toward new versions, the team implemented a more encouraging "carrot" strategy. This tactic involved introducing as many customers as possible to the new platform via the beta program itself, showcasing the exciting new features and improvements while generating enthusiasm for the update.

Each new beta release incorporated production-ready code and introduced new features and activities to invite feedback, with a direct channel to product managers. Customers saw immediate benefits to this strategy as it minimized the risks associated with deploying new products and features, alleviating the "fear of messing up."

Overall, the proactive and positive approach resonated with users, leading nearly 70% of beta program participants to voluntarily migrate to the new platform ahead of schedule. This level of success highlights the value of this added mission to the team's objectives.

A prime example of this success is a power user and beta customer who joined Webex's beta tests to familiarize himself with this new suite of innovative features. Impressed by the features and his experience with a supportive beta team, he moved his production install base to the new version ahead of schedule. His enthusiasm culminated in a presentation at a Cisco customer forum in April 2024 where he showcased the enhancements and praised the beta program. This new approach not only increased customer engagement but also built significant trust, underscoring the team's impact and expertise.

The Proof is in the Results

The results of Beta 2.0 have been nothing short of remarkable. Since its launch in February 2022, the Webex beta community has experienced tremendous growth and engagement, showcasing the effectiveness of the program. These results highlight the remarkable impact of Beta 2.0, illustrating how a well-executed beta program can drive significant growth and improvement.

11X GROWTH IN PROGRAM COMMUNITY SIZE:



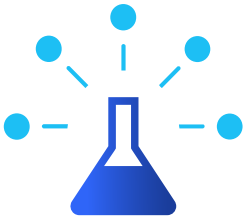
The community has expanded significantly, reflecting the team's efforts to build a robust and engaging beta program.

14X INCREASE IN MONTHLY ENGAGEMENTS:



Tester participation has surged, highlighting the success of strategies to keep users motivated and involved.

8,200+ TESTERS ACROSS 3,900+ CUSTOMER SITES:



This widespread participation ensures a diverse range of feedback, contributing to continuous improvement.

Frank Advice From Frank & Team

Frank Murphy and his team have valuable insights for anyone managing user testing programs. One of their most emphatic pieces of advice is to ditch the spreadsheets. ("What are you doing with spreadsheets!?") Feedback stored in spreadsheets is at risk of disappearing or being distorted by those handling it, introducing bias and undermining its value.

Frank's key advice centers around preserving the integrity of customer feedback:

1. **Get the Voice of the Customer:** Capture genuine, unfiltered feedback directly from users. This authentic insight is invaluable for making meaningful improvements.
2. **Don't Lose the Data:** Use dedicated tools that secure and organize feedback systematically. In the absence of data, product teams run the risk of a roadmap influenced by hubris or "whatever you heard from your last customer interview". Hubris doesn't belong in the roadmap or the backlog.
3. **Keep the Internal Agenda Out:** Ensure the feedback process remains objective. Avoid letting internal biases influence data collection and analysis. Pure, unbiased feedback leads to more accurate and actionable insights.
4. **Remember That Data Has a Shelf Life:** Treat feedback like potato salad at a picnic on a hot day—use it quickly before it goes bad. Timely responses to feedback are crucial for maintaining its relevance and utility.

Additionally, Frank emphasizes the power of using customer buzz to drive adoption. Instead of forcing changes onto users (the "stick" approach), create excitement and anticipation around new features (the "carrot" approach). This strategy not only makes transitions smoother but also fosters a more positive and engaged user community.

What's Next for the Webex Beta Team?

Looking ahead, the Webex beta team is committed to building on their success by setting a standard that other organizations within Cisco can emulate, ensuring that the principles of Beta 2.0 are applied company-wide.

- One key initiative is to solicit pre-release design feedback from their global install base of disability advocates, ensuring accessibility remains a core component of development.
- Additionally, they plan to leverage AI to increase efficiency in beta testing processes, enhancing data mining and feedback integration.

As Frank Murphy puts it, "The input we gather with Centercode, and the community of enthusiasts we've built has given us global reach to gather the voice of the customer that I never thought possible." This global reach is instrumental as the team continues to innovate and refine their approach, ensuring that Webex remains at the forefront of customer-centric product development.

By leveraging their strong foundation, the Webex beta team is poised to lead the way in user testing and product development, setting new standards for excellence within Cisco and beyond.



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