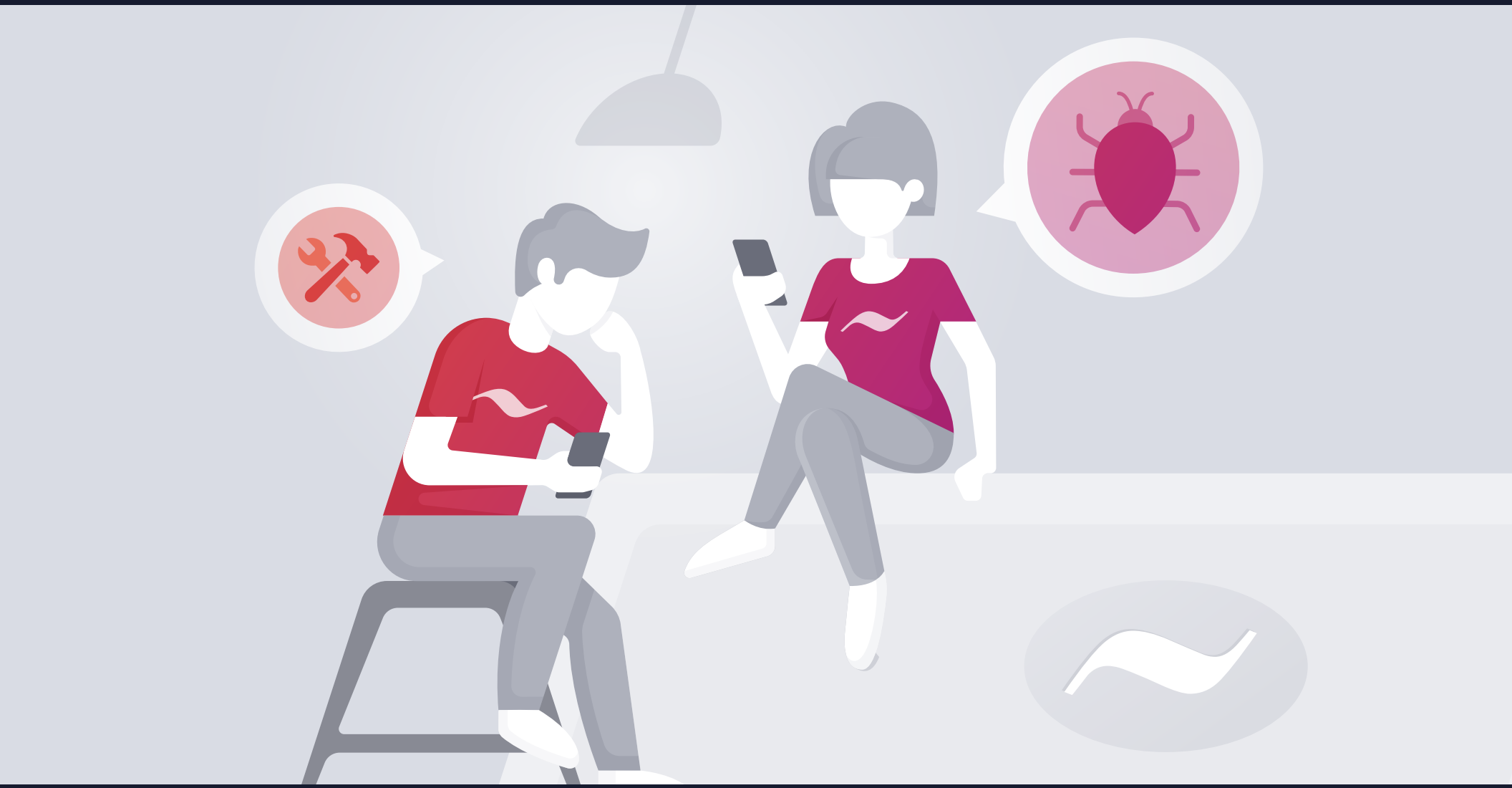
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Essential Tips for Dogfooding Success

PRACTICAL TECHNIQUES FOR DELIVERING INCREASED EMPLOYEE PRODUCT TESTING VALUE

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Introduction

WHO THIS E-BOOK HELPS

Quality, support, engineering, program, and product professionals who have been tasked with running employee tests for their organizations.

ABOUT THIS E-BOOK

The benefits of leveraging employees to collect feedback on your products before launch are immense. However, if you've ever been involved in the dogfooding process, you understand firsthand the challenges that go along with executing high-value employee Alpha and Beta Tests. This e-book outlines basic tips and industry best practices for improving the value of your dogfooding, customer zero, internal beta, or employee product testing program.

You'll learn practical techniques for

- Increasing participation in your dogfooding program,
- Improving employee product testing outcomes when you're pressed for time,
- Delivering extended value to stakeholders and executives, and
- Laying the groundwork for organization-wide adoption of your dogfooding program.



*For a comprehensive overview of best practices for planning and executing your Customer Validation tests, check out our **Beta Test Planning Kit**. Then circle back to this e-book to learn more about what makes employee product tests unique.*

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Driving Organizational Value with Dogfooding



Asking employees to test out your products and provide feedback before release is a common practice in modern organizations. It's also an important part of Customer Validation. Dogfooding programs often evolve as an executive's pet project, a bootstrapped ground-up initiative, or as a way to bring business value out of a simple employee perk. Wherever they start off, employee product testing programs seem to spring up in one way or another throughout most organizations - and for good reason.

The Benefits of Gathering Pre-release Employee Feedback

The advantages of asking your colleagues for their insights about your product before giving it to customers include:

- IMPROVING PRODUCT QUALITY
- REDUCING DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT COSTS
- NURTURING A CUSTOMER-CENTRIC CULTURE
- ESTABLISHING PRODUCT AWARENESS
- PROMOTING PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE
- OPTIMIZING PRODUCT DELIVERY
- HONING YOUR PRODUCT ROADMAP



Detours on the Road to Success

The advantages employee product testing offers to today's organizations mean that the expectations for these programs are often very high. Unfortunately, it doesn't always mean that dogfooding programs succeed at delivering the full range of those benefits to their organizations.

Executives look to squash product bugs and increase employee enthusiasm, even while investing few or even no additional resources into their employee product testing programs. This often leaves QA and Product teams scrambling to find the time to execute effective employee Alpha and Beta Tests, and middle management at a loss for how to prove the value of their organization's dogfooding efforts.

DEALING WITH SETBACKS?

The full advantages of employee product testing can seem just out of reach when you're facing the common challenges of

- Developing a scalable and effective project plan for achieving your test objectives,
- Setting aside the necessary time for people with the skills and knowledge to execute your plan most efficiently,
- Getting the employees who can provide the most useful feedback to join your project,
- Keeping your employee testers engaged in your dogfooding projects and program,
- Structuring feedback collection in a way that enables you to bring in the most useful insights,
- Delivering actionable product recommendations, and
- Demonstrating ROI.

In addition to the struggles of customer product testing listed above, dogfooding introduces unique issues that arise specifically from working with internal test participants.

The Employee Tester Mindset

Recruiting and motivating your fellow employees to provide feedback about your products comes with its own set of specific nuances that call for a tailored approach. There are three big ones in particular: entitlement, bandwidth, and silos.

The good news is that there are simple, practical things you can do to start overcoming these challenges right now, without having to get buy-in for a deeper investment in your dogfooding program. The rest of this e-book outlines proven techniques, tips, tricks, dos, and don'ts to help you shake the difficulties of dogfooding and capture the full benefits of employee product testing for your organization.

ENTITLEMENT

Employees often feel entitled to participate in product tests, and may even feel it's their right to keep test units. They view the product as a perk of work rather than an incentive to providing quality insights during your tests.

BANDWIDTH

Employee testers commonly find it difficult to set aside time to participate in your test or feel that they are too busy with their own responsibilities to provide feedback. Since your colleagues are already working on products or other business-related tasks, they often view participation in your tests as additional work that comes at the expense of their job or personal time.

SILOS

It's typical for silos to develop across specific departments throughout an organization, which can present a significant roadblock for dogfooding programs. Since a common side effect of silos is a historical tendency for abrasive, unreceptive attitudes towards product feedback, they often deter employee contributions to your dogfooding program.



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Use Dogfooding to Train Key Employees on Your Product

When identifying recruitment targets for your project, be sure to include the departments that will benefit from the hands-on experience of using your product. Typically teams like Support, Marketing, and Sales receive traditional training about your product via classrooms or meetings, but participating in your dogfooding projects takes their training a step further. It gives them a more nuanced understanding of your product's features and the real-life problems they solve. Their hands-on, real-world experiences with your product will positively shape their teams' contributions to its success. Here are some things to keep in mind when it comes to recruiting for the purpose of training:

- **IF YOUR PRODUCT IS SOLD IN STORES, AVOID RECRUITING SALES FLOOR EMPLOYEES**

  Becoming too familiar with pre-release products too soon often causes salespeople to undersell current products because they know what's around the corner. It can also increase the likelihood of product leaks if sales associates are excited about new features but disconnected from policies and information regarding which details should be kept confidential.

- **KEEP EMPLOYEE TESTERS ORGANIZED INTO GROUPS BASED ON MARKET SEGMENT**

  Not every employee tester will be part of your target market - especially if they were included in your test for training or other purposes - and that's okay. The customer product tests running after or alongside your dogfooding projects provide a more focused look at your target market. At the same time, it's helpful to have the option of creating dogfooding reports specific to unique tester groups to avoid making decisions based on skewed results

Recruit from Every Corner of Your Organization

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE WEALTH OF TRIBAL WISDOM around your office by recruiting from a wide range of teams, disciplines, and locations. Looking beyond your UX, Product, Engineering, and Support teams helps you collect well-rounded feedback and gain new perspectives on how to improve your product. Your colleagues have unique skills and knowledge that will enable you to validate elements like product messaging, production efficiency, or other key aspects that will ultimately help your product edge out the competition.

- Get feedback from team members who work on similar product lines and can offer insights based on relevant product experiences.
- Make sure to include executives in your projects, and tailor their experience to help them understand the value of their participation and get them in your corner. Sometimes, it's best to communicate with them in person or via other 1-on-1 forms of communication. However you do it, including executives and other VIPs saves loads of time during development. It helps prevent a situation where upper management is unhappy with a product in the later stages of development because they had limited input on it earlier in the process.



Download our ***Recruitment Kit*** to learn more about setting goals for your employee Beta recruitment, identifying ideal testers, and attracting them to your testing opportunity.

CREATE A SENSE OF EXCLUSIVITY

Test applicants, including your co-workers, are generally more intrigued by exclusive or limited availability opportunities when it comes to applying for testing projects. Taking advantage of this tendency is a great method for promoting a sense of urgency and getting more of your colleagues to apply for your test.

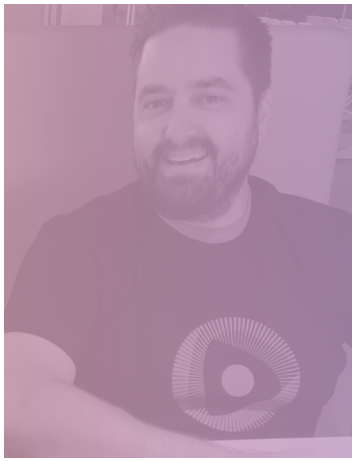
COMMUNICATE THE EXCLUSIVITY OF YOUR PROJECT BY

- Briefly mentioning the limited availability of testing slots,
- Using phrases like: sneak peek, confidential, early access, and limited, and
- Telling people why their specific point of view is valuable to the product.

Go the extra mile to make testers feel like they're part of a secret club. Some dogfooding teams throw invite-only events or create custom shirts, mugs, or notebooks to make their testers feel special.







Communicate Clearly and Often



TESTERS PERFORM BETTER WHEN THEY KNOW that you're listening and that you truly value their input. They also need clear direction and some level of transparency about your objectives in order to provide feedback that is relevant to your goals.

Communicating with testers in these ways will enable them to contribute the most value:

- Send testers a simple email or letter that outlines what you are trying to achieve with your project and how they are expected to participate.
- Guide your employee testers with clear activities and instructions for submitting each type of feedback properly.
- Honor the time your colleagues are taking out of their busy days to submit feedback. This means responding to every piece of feedback and keeping testers informed about their feedback as it is implemented.
- If something happens during your project that impacts your testers, including delays or extensions, keep them in the loop.

Make Feedback Easy to Submit

Feedback submissions are a critical measure of tester participation. A difficult feedback submission process can devastate the results of your test and leave you with few meaningful insights. It can also undersell your company's level of investment in your program and leave testers questioning your organization's commitment to the practice of dogfooding. Here are a few things you should avoid, and some things you can try when it comes to making feedback easy to submit.

AVOID

Collecting and managing feedback via email. This often overwhelms both your testers and your test managers

TRY

Gathering bugs and suggestions via forms. It's an added bonus if you're able to allow testers to upvote and comment on other testers' forms. This helps you prioritize feedback based on how many people experienced the issue and to keep your feedback organized.

AVOID

Asking for bug reports or suggestions inside surveys about overall product performance or user satisfaction. It's often difficult to keep track of these, and if a tester has already submitted this feedback elsewhere, it could seem like you aren't listening.

TRY

Designing survey questions that are concise, simple, and likely to generate insights that you can act on quickly.

AVOID

Using long, overly detailed forms that capture information you already have or don't need.

TRY

Collecting information about your testers and their devices during the test application process or when they sign up for your program. This allows you to provide additional context to your feedback without having to repeatedly ask testers for information.

Use Creative Testing Scenarios for Full Coverage

Creative testing scenarios are unique tasks that give your testers new opportunities to interact with specific areas of your product. These scenarios are a great technique for making sure your project generates feedback about all of your key use cases and environments. Sometimes, you need to give testers a little inspiration to get them to really dig into your important features and provide their feedback before moving on.

EXAMPLE TESTING SCENARIOS

1. We would like you to take your phone and head to a local coffee shop. While you are there, try streaming a video through your cloud app. Enjoy a coffee or treat of your choice on us with this $5 gift card!
2. This week we have a challenge for you! Sign on at 8PM on Thursday, watch a movie that's around 2 hours long, and let us know how well the application performed. Here's a bag of popcorn to get you in the mood. Happy watching!

KEEP IN MIND

- Include small incentives or gifts that relate to the feedback you are requesting. This is extremely effective.
- Design activities that put testers in a state of mind or situation that brings context to the use case and helps them understand it more naturally.
- Make it fun and show some personality. It's easier for testers to relate to the importance of each activity when you show them that there is a real person on the other end of the feedback they're submitting.



Increase Participation with Creative Incentives

Incentives are not only a wonderful way to express your gratitude to employee testers, they're a great way to motivate your colleagues and increase their engagement in your project and program. Organizational policies often prevent you from using monetary incentives as employee rewards. So instead of using cash or gift cards, get creative! Here are some ideas to help get the creative juices flowing.

- Have executives or management take your top participants out for dinner or lunch.
- Give out program swag like shirts, jackets, or coffee mugs. This is also a great way to promote your program across the business.
- Many people get excited about snacks and desserts. Distributing a cookie or dessert platter to your testers to share with their team is a great way to say thank you.
- Send thank you letters from management to acknowledge your testers' efforts to improve the company's products.
- You could even have executives fork over their parking spots to top participants for a week.

Dig further into reward and incentive strategies with our ***Beta Tester Incentives Kit***. It has tips for planning your incentives, creating a great tester experience, and distributing rewards.

BONUS:

Establish a "Customer Zero" Culture

While implementing this tip involves more patience than the others, it's one of the most impactful tips in this e-book. The concept of a "customer zero" culture is based on the understanding that your employees interact with your products before your first customer ever can. These customer zero heroes work on your products, use them, and influence those around them to buy them, so they should be treated as valuable customers.

Organizations that treat their employees as customer zero and support pre-release product testing enjoy greater ROI and executive satisfaction with their employee product testing programs. Putting some effort into establishing a customer-centric culture will also save your team time in the long run. They'll reap the benefits of increased engagement and greater investments as your organization begins to rally around your cause.

HERE ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN ESTABLISH A CUSTOMER ZERO CULTURE:

1. Find champions and evangelists. These are the managers, directors, VPs, and executives that love the concept of dogfooding and advocate for your cause. Ask for their help with getting the cultural ball rolling!
2. Build a brand for your testing program. You'll love seeing shirts, jackets, and all kinds of swag peeking out of every office and cubicle as advertisements for your dogfooding program.
3. Host meetups where people can learn about your program, and encourage existing testers to invite their teams.
4. Get your organization's internal newsletter to highlight your program and help get the word out.
5. Provide program links on your intranet or Slack channels to promote awareness and drive signups.
6. Throw mini-events where users can test your products and provide feedback in person.

Don't get discouraged if you don't see immediate results. Great things aren't built overnight, and organizational changes of this kind take time. You'll know you hit the jackpot when the employee onboarding process introduces your program and provides instructions for signing up.

Putting It All Together



EATING YOUR OWN DOG FOOD DOESN'T COME WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES, BUT THE OPPORTUNITIES IT PROVIDES YOUR ORGANIZATION ARE EXTREMELY VALUABLE.

Leveraging your employees as customer zero not only enables an enhanced product experience for your customers, it also builds internal awareness and breaks down silos throughout your organization.

We hope these tips provided a helpful perspective on boosting engagement in your dogfooding program, saving you time, and delivering enhanced ROI.

Have a question? We're here to help!
Reach out to us at info@centercode.com.

Check out our Customer Validation Library for more resources on employee product testing.

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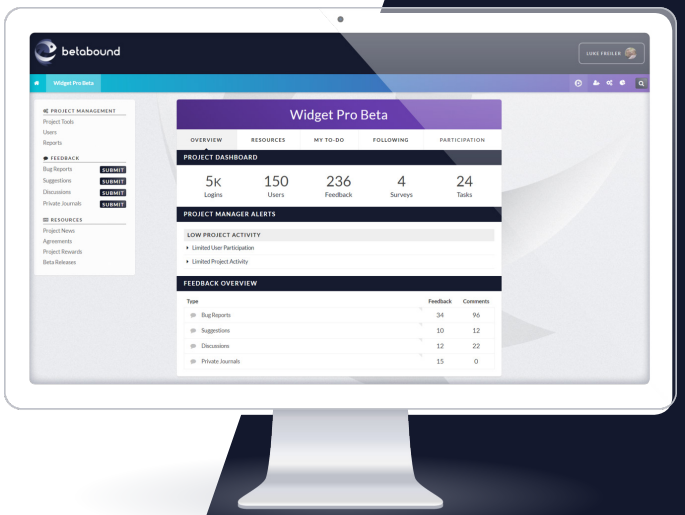
Expand Your Employee Product Testing Capabilities with Centercode

CUSTOMER VALIDATION PLATFORM FOR EMPLOYEE PRODUCT TESTING

The Centercode Platform is purpose-built to simplify your work. Its turnkey templates and features expand your dogfooding capabilities not only during recruitment, but across all of your employee product testing processes. Schedule a demo to experience the platform firsthand.

DOGFOODING BEST PRACTICES & PROCESSES

Take advantage of almost two decades of Customer Validation industry knowledge and lessons learned with techniques and best practices from Centercode. Check out our Customer Validation blog for more articles on employee product testing.



Schedule a demo to learn more!

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