

# Case study on quality

Business



Computer In the fast-paced personal computer industry, it would be very tempting for a computer company to rush a new product to market without taking the time to solicit customer input and feedback during the customer input and feedback during the product development cycle. To avoid this temptation and to highlight its commitment to customer satisfaction, Apple Computer has developed a program called Customer Quality Feedback (CUFF).

CUFF is a hands-on program providing Apple engineers with the ability to communicate with potential end users during the entire development cycle of an Apple product. The program integrates many of the features of a focus group but is sustained on an ongoing basis. It is also a very substantive and useful tool for Apple because it keeps the company attuned to the needs, preferences, and desires of its end users. For people interested in participating in the program, Apple has posted an application form on its website.

The application form is fairly comprehensive and outlines the terms and conditions of participation.

Although the program is open to anyone, it is clear that Apple wants well-informed participants who will stick with the program. Participants are selected based on their interest, ability to provide timely information, commitment to working with Apple personnel, and the suitability of their computing environment as it relates to Apple's current needs.

Once selected, the participants become an integral part of the development process for the products they are evaluating. They are provided early

prototypes of Apple products and are asked to provide feedback pertaining to the rotgut's features, interaction with employees, ease of use, performance, compatibility with third party software, and other topics. The participants are also asked to provide suggestions as the product development cycle matures.

The information provided by participants is fed directly to the apple engineers who are developing and testing the products. The overriding objective of the program is to incorporate customer input into the development of Apple products before they are shipped, rather than waiting for customers to react to the company's products after they are made available for sale. Prior to a product launch, the CUFF participants involved with the product are asked to write testimonials about their input into the product's final design.

These testimonials are used by Apple to demonstrate to other potential end users how Apple incorporates user feedback into the design and development of its products. Apple's CUFF program is a good example of a proactive approach to satisfying customer needs. It is also evidence of the company's willingness to "listen to the voice of the customer" in its product development and sign.

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