

# CUSTOMER CENTRICITY IN A DIGITAL AGE

REPRINTED FROM ENGAGE MAGAZINE | *enGage*



**BETSY WESTHAFER**  
CEO, THE CONGRUITY GROUP

In this day of mind-blowing amounts of data available to us, it can be easy for organizations to spend a majority of their time diving into volumes and volumes of data. They collect it. They analyze it. They distribute it. They make action plans around it. This is all very important for organizations to do, but it shouldn't be the only way of gaining the insights a company needs to succeed.

## OH, THE IRONY

There's an interesting irony taking place right now as it relates to gathering customer data. It seems that the truly progressive technology organizations are actually going old school. By that I mean, they are reverting to the non-tech way of gathering insights by engaging with the customers and yes, having actual face-to-face conversations.

Last October, GAVS launched their Customer Advisory Board to initiate these crucial customer conversations. This strategic initiative is a program driven by GAVS' CEO, Sumit Ganguli, along with members of the GAVS leadership team. The 16 members of the board, mostly but not exclusively CIOs, convene face-to-face multiple times per year to personally deliver GAVS with the input, direction, and feedback they need to address not only how GAVS can maintain a focus on continuous improvement, but also to provide board members a chance to learn best practices and better understand industry drivers from their peers.

"It is imperative that we have a chance to hear directly from the customers whose decisions are impacted by the work we do," says Sumit. "Without their continuous feedback

**“ CUSTOMER CENTRICITY  
ABSOLUTELY MUST BE  
REAL AND MUST BE IN THE  
FABRIC OF WHO WE ARE  
AS AN ORGANIZATION. ”**

**– SUMIT GANGULI  
CEO, GAVS TECHNOLOGIES**



and input, we would be doing nothing more than guessing which direction they are heading and how we can be there to support them. We need to validate with the customers that we are indeed meeting their needs now and into the future.”

Company leaders like Sumit are committed to engaging with their customers via their Customer Advisory Board to discuss such topics as product road map, business models, marketing and messaging and a host of other strategic subject areas for which insights from the customers are needed for continuous evolution. This feedback is then integrated into the overall organizational strategy.

“It’s important for me, as the leader of this organization, to have this opportunity for unfiltered listening. I need to hear directly from the customers, without the chance, unintentional as it is, for the message to get filtered before it reaches me. Being able to hear not just what our customers say, but how they say it, and then further, being able to ask clarifying questions, gives me perspective that no other means of obtaining data can do,” says Sumit. “This is why we are so committed to this process for understanding what our customers need most from us.”

Kerrie Hoffman, former business unit CIO for Johnson Controls and Johnson & Johnson serves as an advisor to GAVS and actively participates in the GAVS advisory board. Kerrie is also a certified FocalPoint business coach. Her experience and perspective point to the importance of engaging directly with the customers during this era of digital transformation.

“As companies make the shift to modern digital business models and technology, it’s important to leverage a forward-thinking network of peers and partners to accelerate their digital evolution,” Kerrie says. “Strong digital partners are hosting customer-centric Customer Advisory Boards that enable customers to significantly advance their digital journeys through peer interaction. The depth and value of the conversations at the GAVS Technologies CABs are a great example of customer centricity in the Digital age.”

## **SHARING THE MESSAGE**

While it’s vital for executive teams to engage directly with the decision makers of their key customers, sharing the customer feedback throughout the entire organization is where the real magic happens.

In a recent meeting with more than 70 global leaders from GAVS, I had the opportunity to present the findings gathered from the board members at the January GAVS Customer Advisory Board meeting with those whose daily responsibilities are impacted by the feedback. In addition, the executive team shared a list of action items, including stakeholders and timing, that will be executed upon and the progress of which will be shared with members at the next advisory board meeting.

“It’s not enough for me to hear the input. We need our team members to really understand what the customers are thinking, and to incorporate that information into the decisions they make



as well as the way in which they engage with our customers,” says Sumit. “Customer centricity absolutely must be real and must be in the fabric of who we are as an organization.”

## ADDITIONAL VALUE FOR THE CUSTOMERS

I’m often asked why high-level executives would take multiple days out of their busy calendars to help an organization from which they purchase products and services. While there are many answers to this question, the number one reason we hear is that board members gain great value from building relationships with their peers who understand the same challenges and are working on many of the same types of initiatives.

“The value of GAVS Customer Advisory Board is very significant in learning about how other companies are leveraging the solutions and technologies from GAVS, says Jim Song, Vice President Technology Infrastructure at Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina. “I find GAVS’s ability to take immediate measurable actions based on inputs from the board to be very refreshing and speaks to the agility of GAVS’s business model.”

The U.S. GAVS Customer Advisory Board is the starting point for this manner of hearing directly from the customers. Sumit recently announced plans for the formation of a Middle East Customer Advisory Board as well as an India CAB. This will ensure that GAVS, as a global company, has insights specific to the various regions they serve, and that the perspectives of customers around the world are being heard, considered, and acted upon.

“Customer Advisory Boards are mutually beneficial to participating customers and the host company,” says Dom DiMascia, Chief Information Officer at Gerber Technologies and GAVS Customer Advisory Board member. “There exists a symbiotic relationship between the customer and product/ service provider. The CAB affords participating customers the opportunity to provide critical feedback and influence future offerings, and the vendor gains invaluable information re: it’s products and services and market trends.”



thecongruitygroup.com | 513-464-6352

**Betsy Westhafer** is the CEO of **The Congruity Group**, a U.S.-based consultancy focused on executive-level Customer Advisory Boards. Betsy is also the author of the #1 Best Seller, **ProphetAbility—The Revealing Story of Why Companies Succeed, Fail, or Bounce Back**, available on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com). To learn more, visit [thecongruitygroup.com](https://www.thecongruitygroup.com) or call 513-464-6352.

