



# WINNING THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF THE 99 PERCENTERS OF B2B: END USERS

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## Getting end users, who make up the majority of users, to engage with your system is critical to success.

I walked into a 50,000-person company not too long ago to talk to them about some software for a business process transformation. When I started talking about software usability and end users, as I always do, and their feedback—straight up—was “We don’t care about the end user.”

Most companies aren’t that blatant about it, but that’s really where their heads are. Sadly, this is true of buyers and vendors alike. Software is usually bought to accomplish a specific goal. Salesforce is so sales management can understand their pipeline and their deals. SuccessFactors is for HR executives to run their business.

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But no matter what it’s for, with almost any type of software you can think of, end users make up ninety-nine percent of the user base. Yet most vendors architect enterprise applications for the one percent of people in the company who are trained specialists, not the other ninety-nine percent who will have to transact in the system. End users are the 99 percenters of the B2B world. And everybody is OK with this?

### End users hold the key to good data

I think that’s dead wrong. The end user is the key to success in all your IT and business transformation objectives. In my experience, businesses consistently underestimate the negative financial impact of the end user not being engaged.

This is how most of my sales calls go:

One of the first questions I ask is, "What are you trying to accomplish? What are your success criteria?"

They'll say something like, "My executives need visibility, and I need to be able to analyze compliance, see how much we're buying and what we're paying."

I say, "Okay, can you do that today?"

"No, that's why we're talking to you."

"Why can't you do that today?"

"Because the data's bad."

"You know why the data's bad?"

"Why?"

"Because ninety-nine percent of your organization isn't using the system you have in place. If you look at your success criteria and you work backwards to where the process begins, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, it begins with an end user out in the field, and the end user isn't using the system."

### **The high cost of low user adoption**

It's true. In most situations I see, probably only twenty percent of the user population actively uses any application, costing companies untold amounts of money. Most of the companies I talk to have already bought all of the feature-function that my space, spend management, has to offer. I suspect that's true of other spaces as well. Feature-function is never the problem. The problem is that they don't own the hearts and minds of the end user.

That would be a change of religion for most companies. But they have to do it. I don't know any other way to put it. Salesforce is not successful if salespeople don't want to use it. HR systems are a little different; end users only interact with them a few times a year for reviews, but imagine being a 10,000-person company where nobody can figure out how to put their review in the system. Spend management systems cannot be successful if people don't spend through the system.

Those are the only two reasons people are going to follow your process and use your system. Either they are forced to, or there's benefit in doing it.

In the B2C online world companies have gotten this right because they can't force you to use their system, and they can see a direct correlation between delivering an outstanding experience to the end user and bottom line revenue.

### **Force is not the answer**

In the B2B world, that connection is less clear and direct, but it's there. Forcing people is not the answer. The answer is to look at the end user as a key value driver, not as a tactical extension of the system.

People want to do the right thing. Vendors need to build systems that enable them, to make doing the right thing easier and more delightful than any other alternative, software buyers need to start taking end users and software usability more seriously.

Yes, you always have to align the end user to executive success criteria, but if you can't get the user to engage, those success criteria or those goals are not going to be accomplished at the level you want. Many months and dollars later, you'll be talking to me, or someone like me, wondering if maybe it's finally time to change your religion.