Goldplating Software: Another Step To Customer Gratitude

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
What should be your reaction if you order a pizza and you get it in next twenty minutes? And can you express your response if you get an ice-cream free with it? Further, if you get a discount coupon for your next order? What is the difference in your feelings in these three scenarios? Which one is the better? Can we think of the same feeling in software industry too? Software development is no longer limited to development and marketing activities. Software Industry has been dramatically grown-up into an extensive service industry and like any other service industry, customer satisfaction is the key of success in this filed too. But in the competitive market of software services, just satisfying customer may not be sufficient. Perhaps an overwhelming response is what would excite the team to produce more. But what can be expected from the customer if it is provided only with what it ordered for. How about providing something over and above the expectations of the customer? Customer when proposes some software for development, a formal in-depth analysis is expected for writing specifications of requirements. Contributing to the success of the project, customer provides its support by helping the software team understanding the requirements and application of the software. Customer provides input best way it can from its domain knowledge, environmental familiarity and results of any required investigations. Analysts are required to translate the understanding of the customer into technical statements that would finally be implemented in design and programs of the software.

Does this mean that customer is the only source of requirements of the software? Certainly not!

‘Software Requirement Engineering’1 states that customer, beneficiary, operator, domain expert, software developer, tester, and other people concerned with software and its development can significantly add inputs to the software requirements. These inputs can add functional as well as non functional requirement specifications to the software. In fact, being strongly focused to its direct applications, customer usually becomes unable to look into other connected requirements of the software that can make its use much efficient. For example, adding a music system to a car makes the drive fun although it no-ways affects basic functionality of the car.

The concept of reformatting the requirements of the software projects in order to add to them which is not a basic need specified in the proposal is considered as gold plating the software. Software gold plating is an activity to appreciate the requirements overlooked by the customer. Analysts and other members of software developing teams while working on the project can suggest areas of requirement that might not be of any direct benefit to the customer due to which the customer had ignored them. Such areas usually do not come from functionalities of the software that are of direct benefits to the customer or which are noticeable for the user straightforwardly. They rather are defined by looking into applications of the software and bringing other concerned applications into the same software package. This hence redefines the requirement specifications of the software with some more functionalities, and performance. Gold plating is usually not considered an integral part of software maintenance. In fact, most organizations do not conduct it at all, yet it is considered important for many cases. Gold plating is an activity to enthuise the customer by providing him/her with the facilities never expected from the software. For example, with bearable extra efforts, the software-developing team creates another supporting package for the software that could enhance the facilities with the software. These facilities are never asked for or expected by the customer, are purely an invention of the developing team alone, and are offered to the customer out of the contract of development. Gold plating is never an easy task. Redefining the SRS needs strong management control and strong watches over schedule and cost of the software. Any gaps in focus while formatting the requirements of the project can cause failure of the project. Any loose management control can cause loss of efforts and gigantic customer disappointment. In spite of bearing high built in risks, gold plating has capacity of increasing customer satisfaction significantly, provided that it is executed under sharp focus and strong management control. Once executed successfully, this can significantly add to customer pleasure and satisfaction. Software with formatted specifications can also be expected to serve successfully for longer periods saving lots of maintenance costs. With many other benefits, this adds to healthy customer relationships with the software development organization.

CONCLUSION
Customer is not the only source of requirements but one should appreciate inputs from development team too. Being strongly biased with its current needs, customer can be unable to provide inputs from other connected areas of application of the software. An analyst of requirements should give importance to these areas too. Software gold plating is the concept of reformatting the requirements of the software projects in order to add to them which is not a basic need specified in the proposal. This reformatting of the requirements is done in order to make the software more efficient. Software gold plating...
needs very strong management control over the schedule and cost of development of the software. But once implemented successfully, this can significantly add to customer pleasure and satisfaction. Software with formatted specifications can also be expected to serve successfully for longer periods saving lots of maintenance costs. With many other benefits, this adds to healthy customer relationships with the software development organization.

**FUTURE SCOPE**

This study can be continued in different directions. One can look for roles of different individuals in SDLC and their expected inputs for software gold plating. Another direction of the study can be to formalize the methods that can help carrying out efficient gold plating in early phases of SDLC to minimize cost of implementation. Another direction can be to find the legal liabilities in gold plating and formal processes of taking customer approvals for gold plated requirements. Future of this study can be defined in many other ways too.

**REFERENCES**


