

ANGIE'S LIST SHARES EXPERIENCES

using GOTOMEETING WITH HDFACES



ANGIE HICKS
FOUNDER & CMO



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Angie Hicks
Co-Founder & CMO
www.angieslist.com

Angie’s List, a public company (NASDAQ: ANGI) co-founded in 1995 by Angie Hicks and William Oesterle, operates a paid membership website that aggregates and publishes consumer reviews of service providers, ranging from plumbers to physicians. With its brand promise, “Reviews You Can Trust,” the company enables consumers to find high-quality local service companies and healthcare providers in more than 550 categories. Based on member reviews, Angie’s List grades each service provider and posts the rating as part of an online profile. The company, headquartered in Indianapolis, Indiana, has 1.5 million members and employs over 1,000 people.

The challenge: enhancing communication internally and externally

One of the keys to the growth and success of Angie’s List is the company’s willingness to innovate and experiment. Initiatives range from adding new categories of services to continuously improving search functionality. New enhancements depend upon ongoing, effective communication – internally among the developers and externally with consumers. However, as the company grew, it became more difficult to get people together in person.

“We have embraced agile, iterative development because it is extremely well suited for Internet companies, especially for consumer-facing Web companies like Angie’s List,” said CTO Manu Thapar. “We have scrum teams that are iterating and releasing every week or two. One of the principles of agile development is that the teams should be co-located. But these days, it’s very hard to have the whole engineering organization in one location. For example, our developers are based in Indianapolis and Palo Alto, California. So it became very important to have the right tools to help the distributed teams communicate and collaborate effectively with each other.”

Another major reason why Angie’s List needed a powerful collaboration solution was its focus on the customer experience. Christie Hurst, director of user experience, said, “Unlike other services, our members pay to use Angie’s List. So we feel the bar for user experience is set higher for us.” Initially, Hurst was meeting consumers at a coffee shop or bringing them to the company’s offices and observing their use of the site. “I was keeping track of their pain points and presenting all that feedback to our senior management team to make recommendations about ways we could improve the product.” However, this approach was time-consuming and limited her ability to meet with members in distant geographic areas.

Co-founder Hicks, now chief marketing officer, recalled, “Originally, whether we were talking to members or interacting with service companies, it was done in one city, face to face. Today we’re working across the country, so finding tools that allow us to make that process more efficient is really important because we don’t want to give up that interaction.”



Bottoms-up adoption of GoToMeeting with HDFaces

Although Angie's List had a subscription to Citrix GoToMeeting in place when Thapar joined in 2011, the service was not widely used and the integrated HDFaces video conferencing capability provided with the account had not been turned on. Many employees used Skype. However, Thapar liked GoToMeeting and supported its adoption by the development teams at headquarters and in California. He explained that employees first started using GoToMeeting in smaller groups. Over time, when members of a team moved to other projects, they championed the service. "It was never something that we mandated top down; it grew bottoms up," he said.

"GoToMeeting has made communication between the two locations very effective. We are able to share the screen and also see each other. A key benefit of HDFaces is the ability to view people in multiple locations. Because of the time difference, some team members may be connecting from home. We have tried other tools. But, in the end, we come back to GoToMeeting because it has the quality and the features, such as switching presenters, which make a meeting so much more productive."

Hurst is another proponent of GoToMeeting with HDFaces. She uses the service to meet online with members and observe their use of the Angie's List site, saving time and effort. "Previously, I spent a lot of time arranging for our consumers to come here or driving to a nearby city such as Dayton, Ohio. But now, using GoToMeeting, I can schedule interviews with consumers in San Francisco or New York and meet up online in an hour. It's quick and easy."

HDFaces video conferencing enables Hurst and her team to see members in the home or work environment where they would normally use Angie's List. "With GoToMeeting and HDFaces, we get instant and authentic feedback: We experience our users' joys and frustrations with the product right alongside them. It's right there on their faces."

Collaborating to enhance the user experience

In addition to facilitating collection of member input, GoToMeeting plays a significant role in translating that feedback into new features and functionality. "Search is a very important part of our platform. We have to be sure the results we show to members are highly relevant," said Thapar. "Since we have teams in two different locations, it is much easier to work through the relevance issues if both sides are seeing the same screen.

"For example, we received feedback that members couldn't find service providers who were close by. We have been working to sort the search results so they include not just the rating and number of reviews, but also the location of the reviews. That is being fed as an additional signal into the search engine."

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Manu Thapar, CTO
www.angieslist.com



ANGIE'S LIST *founder & CMO* ANGIE HICKS



This intensive development work is made easier and more efficient with GoToMeeting. “Without the ability to share screens across the two locations, our iterations would have been much slower. Time and travel expenses would have been much higher. So it’s great that we have that capability now.”

- Key benefits**
- Simplifies gathering of feedback on user experience
 - Supports agile development by dispersed teams
 - Enhances communication and sharing of experiences
 - Aligns with culture of innovation and transparency

Simplifying sharing of experiences

“I believe communication and sharing experiences are at the heart of who we are,” said Hicks. “We want consumers to communicate with one another and share information on their experiences. We’re the conduit for doing that. And it’s important for all employees to interact so we can work together to improve the product.”

On the membership side, according to Hurst, “GoToMeeting helps us get honest feedback from our consumers faster than we could with any other product or tool.”

From the employee perspective, Thapar added, “GoToMeeting allows teams to communicate and share ideas freely and easily, increasing the transparency of our environment. It’s not just the screen sharing; it is also the video, which is extremely important to allow two sets of people in different locations to understand each other and work together as one unit.”

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