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CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PARTNERS

Why Aren't Satisfaction Scores Improving?

Back in the summer of 1994 the University of Michigan started a national measure of customer satisfaction. For those who can remember back that far, the need to retain exiting customers and efforts to increase customer satisfaction were not exactly job #1 at the time, nor for that matter even a concern, for management of most corporations. The initial national score for the ACSI (American Customer Satisfaction Index) in that third quarter in 1994 was 74.2.

Much has changed

The quarterly release of ACSI data now gets headlines. The need to keep existing customers coming back to buy more and the desire to generate positive word of mouth are top of mind issues in US Boardrooms. Discussions of customer experience and how to improve customer satisfaction fill websites, books and seminars. Corporations have poured billions of dollars and countless staff hours and attention into improvement. You can barely talk to a sales rep or visit a website without being asked to answer a few questions about your satisfaction. And as a result (drum roll please), the recently announced ACSI scores for the third quarter of 2010 have climbed all the way to 75.7 – a whopping 2% over 16 years!

Over those years we have watched ACSI scores fall as low as 70.7 and bounce as high as 76.1. Certainly some of the 10 economic sectors, 45 industries and more than 225 companies and government agencies included have made progress, but overall we are basically looking at a flat line.

What does that suggest?

Can it be that a few bad apples keep pulling down the ratings? (Unlikely, when the index is composed of 225 companies.) Could scoring be held down by a "ceiling" driven by some factor of human nature? (Not a reasonable assumption considering some of the higher scores seen in several of the composite categories.) More likely it's the result of managers imploring their employees to do anything and everything to improve satisfaction – without a coherent prioritization of which improvements will make the biggest impact on overall satisfaction. Attempting to fix everything is a fool's quest.

To better understand what is most important to customers and to help management set priorities (put their money and energies where they will accomplish the most), Customer Experience Partners has developed a tool called ***CEM Optimization***™. This discovery and management process identifies the most critical ***touchpoints*** and ***experiential components*** in which performance improvement will most increase satisfaction and perceived value. It's a process that identifies (in customers' own words) and sets priorities where spending is most needed to improve processes, training, communications and/or other deficient elements.

To learn more, visit our website: www.customerexperiencepartners.com or call us to discuss.

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