

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PARTNERS

The Commoditization of Satisfaction



We participated in the early development of customer satisfaction measurement. In the late 1980's and early 1990's satisfaction surveys were an event...a rare chance for customers to appraise a manufacturer/service provider of how well they were doing. Because of their novelty, a good proportion of customers opted into such surveys, providing useful information and insights. But the infrequency also told another story - management's oversight or naïveté. At the time, it took considerable arguing to convince management teams that customer satisfaction measurement provided two distinct benefits; 1.) the information would help improve services and products, and 2.) the very act of asking would assure customers the organization was "listening" and considered their input important.

Why It Didn't Happen

Management's reluctance to sponsor satisfaction surveys was born out of several concerns: the costs involved, the fear of being told exactly how well (or how poorly) they were performing, the uncertainty of how to respond to the information, and the unappreciated benefit of showing customers their feedback was desired.

Advances in technology during the last two decades have mitigated many of these concerns. First, and foremost, data collection by the Internet has become commonplace, eliminating most of the costs of data collection. And, customers have become far more comfortable and experienced using computers to respond to surveys. Numerous software packages now exist for programming and disseminating surveys. An unfortunate consequence has been a trend to "do it yourself" questionnaires - non-strategic, and poorly constructed. Further, the enticing simplicity of the "one question", Net Promoter approach has unfortunately produced 'dumbed-down' questionnaires totally lacking diagnostic information.

What Goes Wrong When It Does Happen

Concerns about how to respond to satisfaction information, while less wide-spread today than in the past, are still prevalent. However, some organizations have begun to incorporate action planning programs into their satisfaction measurement processes. Other organizations still blindly field surveys without any idea or plan of how to act on the insights they gain. Without action planning the whole satisfaction survey process is, of course, nothing more than a sham. Management deludes itself into thinking it is actually acting properly (if not incompletely) and participating customers are duped because nothing will come of their honest opinions and suggestions.

Now, in the 2010s, on a "global basis" the omni-presence of satisfaction surveys proffered by most companies has trivialized the process in most customers' minds. One can't help but be besieged with banners, counter-cards, register receipts, etc. all asking for immediate feedback. And yet, customer satisfaction is anything but excellent! So how effective must the initiatives be?

A further aggravation (to participating customers) is the failure to ever hear any response from a company when feedback is offered and re-encountering the same annoyances in the next interaction with a company! Apparent proof that "nobody's listening"! And so the ubiquity of satisfaction surveys these days doesn't necessarily mean that the act has been perfected. Ask for our perspective:

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