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## Customer Experience Data: Untapped Gold Mines

by Lynn Hunsaker

“More companies are getting to the point of putting the customer at the central part of their data collection systems, and managing from outside-in. That’s when you know you’re working to optimize customer experience.”

This theme emerged in my recent online interview with Theresa Kushner, Director of Strategic Marketing Customer Intelligence at Cisco Systems. Theresa is co-author of the book, [Managing Your Business Data: From Chaos to Confidence](#). Her team at Cisco received the National Council for Database Marketing Award for Analytics and Modeling, as well as The Data Warehouse Institute Best Practice Award, for Cisco’s new customer intelligence center initiative that integrates customer data for sales, marketing and financial applications. This initiative assisted in correlating over \$500 million in customer bookings.

Theresa explained how to go after the gold in your customer data, avoid fool’s gold, and refine your customer data gold to make a difference in your business growth and profitability. *Untapped opportunities exist in:*

- \*Making use of unstructured data, such as customer inquiries
- \*Connecting data systems such as order-entry and sales
- \*Helping Sales, Service, Finance, and the whole company see the customer in totality
- \*Allowing customer-facing people easy access to combined customer/company data
- \*Enabling customers to define their profile and why they’re interested in the company
- \*Demonstrating to customers you can move with them as a partner
- \*Avoiding pitfalls of fools’ gold, such as a focus on internal data, measuring what you want to hear, incentivizing data collection rather than problem prevention, and pursuing internal agendas rather than aiding superior customer experiences.



“Customer knowledge is becoming the hottest thing companies can do”, continued Theresa, “particularly in weak economy. We want to hold on to the customers we have: what are customers telling us? The trick is to collect that data, refine it, and make it available to the right people. Most companies have tons of data, but don’t know what to do with it.”

### Outside-In or Inside-Out

“We tend to think customer intelligence is very important when it’s translated into business intelligence reports or dashboards that tell us how we’re doing in the business. The problem with this is it’s a very internal view of how *we’re* doing with customers. It’s more of a response to how we want to see things in managing the business, how our processes are working and what we’re doing. It’s not always focused

on the *customer*. Very few systems manage against one customer profile and put the customer at the heart of it; usually financial systems are at the heart of the business, not the customers' individual information."

### **Define the Customer**

"To begin data integration, determine how to define the customer; this definition becomes your master data. Customer definition sounds easy but it's not. Ask 5 people and get 50 different answers, particularly in a B2B environment. To Sales, a customer is the person I call on that makes the decision to sign the purchase order. To Finance, a customer is the person who pays the purchase order. To Service, it's the person who is using the product or service. Defining the customer with common agreement is a tough thing, but it's the key to successful data integration and data ROI."

### **Avoid Fool's Gold**

"Since there's so much data out there we get enamored with insights we can glean around what's happening with manufacturing and the product — to identify the next big purchase from customers. What you're really looking for is *real gold* that tells me how the customer is reacting to my product. Where's the real gold that tells me whether they're really liking what I'm selling them, or their stuck because there's not another competitor or we're not doing everything needed to keep them happy. One of the measures of customer loyalty is how often they refer others to you. Even CRM systems don't always tell you which customers are referring."

"Customer satisfaction data is not always related to what customers actually do. Very few companies use survey data to figure out what customers are really telling us. We tend to throw up dashboards that say a certain point on the scale means we all get paid, or not. That motivates people to go out and collect more information from customers. It doesn't motivate people to fix the problem the customer had to begin with."

### **Aid the Customer Experience**

Companies that go after the real gold, that understand it the best, are the ones that are succeeding. Help executives and managers become more comfortable with what customers are actually saying and how they're acting. Combine appropriate data sources, take the insights to heart, and act to aid the customer experience at every touch point.

*Access entire interview at Untapped Gold Mines in Customer Experience Data  
([www.blogtalkradio.com/BTR-CEM](http://www.blogtalkradio.com/BTR-CEM); 28:40)*

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