

Customer Satisfaction Bonus Traps

by Lynn Hunsaker

Why do sales and service representatives feel compelled to tell customers how to answer a survey? Does the company want to know what the customers really think, or is the company trying to build positive publicity by claiming superior ratings?

The answer to the second question exposes the company's culture and customer experience management motives — whether they are striving to be customer centric (eager to know and act on what customers really think), or happy to be self centric (eager for positive publicity). Maybe the motive behind the satisfaction survey depends on the sponsoring organization; perhaps a Marketing-sponsored satisfaction survey will naturally lean toward PR objectives, while a Quality-sponsored satisfaction survey will naturally lean toward continual improvement. Regardless of the sponsor, here's why it's best to pursue a customer centric survey strategy:



1) Investment: Surveys are an investment of customer time and of company funds, manpower and time - aren't there more straightforward (honest) and cost-effective ways to build positive publicity? From a statistical view, manipulated surveys are worthless. Even the positive publicity is not sustainable, if it is inaccurate. Telling customers how to respond to a survey makes the survey results invalid, and the whole effort a waste of everyone's time and money.

2) Customer Management: Many companies are concerned with respondent fatigue issues, so it's essential to design surveys wisely and use results wisely. And since customer expectations can rise after they participate in a survey, it's wise to have a well-established process in place to act promptly and systemically on survey results.

3) Growth: Marketing is overlooking lucrative opportunities to heighten their value within the organization if they do not view their role as a voice of the customer conduit into all functional areas across the company.

The answer to the first question reveals weaknesses in the company's performance management strategy — either imbalanced scorecards or poor training of employees. Customer experience management scorecards should balance lagging indicators and leading indicators, with greater weight placed on the latter. Leading indicators are metrics that are actionable at



the manager and worker levels, with a strong (predictive) tie to the customer survey ratings, and which can be measured before customers experience their effects. Survey results are lagging indicators because they reflect what customers have already experienced. If sales and service employees know their performance is being measured primarily by leading indicators, and secondarily by lagging indicators, their compulsion to tell customers how to rate them will be lessened. With the proper setup of customer satisfaction incentive pay, employees should be trained to respect customer's pure assessments of the business and its related services, and to welcome constructive customer feedback.

The practice of coaching customers on satisfaction surveys should end! Customers feel insulted to be told what to say, especially in our Web 2.0 world, where customers are now accustomed to thinking independently and voicing their true opinions. To end this manipulation, go to the root cause of it: the company's motives and/or the employees' bonus calculation. Customers will reward you well for doing the right thing the right way.

Find out how to customize these tips to your situation; contact the author lynn.hunsaker@clearaction.biz.