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How to Develop an Effective Customer Satisfaction Survey

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What to Measure

A basic and effective baseline customer satisfaction survey program should focus on measuring customer perceptions. How well does your company deliver on the critical success factors and dimensions of the business as defined by the customer? For example, is your service prompt and is your staff courteous? How responsive and understanding of the customer's problem are your representatives? The findings of company performance should be analyzed both with all your customers as well as by key segments.

Sometimes an organization's customer service personnel are included in the survey so that a gap analysis can be performed to determine differences in perceptions between the service providers and the customers.

Relevancy of Dimensions & Factors

An effective customer satisfaction survey reflects what respondents care about most. Pre-survey interviews with customers to surface and identify the dimensions and factors they consider important ensure that the survey questionnaire does not overlook one or more important areas and specific service details. If at all possible, pre-survey interviews, especially when developing a customer satisfaction baseline questionnaire, should be conducted with customers to ensure all important service dimensions are included.

More Return for your Research Investment

In today's highly competitive environment, companies need an extra edge to enhance and build upon their relationships with customers. Many of our clients find that high quality customer service can make the difference in winning and retaining customers or losing them. Research shows that organizations that employ customer satisfaction research that goes beyond customer satisfaction, loyalty and retention measurements to identify and measure perceived customer value can deliver much more return on their research investment.

By determining which factors produce the highest perceived value by customers, research can provide the knowledge to both correct deficiencies in today's customer service and assist in building high value strategic, customer service offerings for the future. Special sets of questions can built into surveys to learn about the perceived value of services and how a company stacks up against its primary competitors in delivering on the critical value factors.

Organization of a Basic Customer Satisfaction Survey

- Section 1. Overall dimension rating questions
- Section 2. Ratings by service dimensions and specific service factors
- Section 3. Respondent demographics

Section 1. - Overall Rating Questions

This first part of the survey (or the first part of each dimension rating section) will typically have an overall rating question for each major customer service dimension plus one or two related open-end questions at the end of the dimension's section.

Scale and question examples:

(5 point scale - Excellent, Good, Average, Fair, Poor)
(5-point scale - Very Satisfied, Satisfied, Neutral/Not Sure, Dissatisfied, Very Dissatisfied)

Please rate ABC's customer service overall.

Please rate ABC's customer support overall.

Please rate ABC's technical product training courses overall.

Please rate ABC's documentation overall.

Overall, how satisfied are you with ABC's customer service?

Overall, how satisfied are you with ABC's customer support?

Overall, how satisfied are you with ABC's customer technical product training courses?

Overall, how satisfied are you with ABC's documentation?

In addition, reference and retention questions may be added.

Examples

How likely would you be to recommend ABC's customer service to a friend (or colleague)?

How likely would you be to buy or use ABC's customer service again?

Open-end questions in section 1 allow respondents to elaborate on their overall ratings.

Comment Question Examples

What did you like (like best) about ABC's customer service (support, technical product training courses, documentation)?

What did you dislike (dislike most) about ABC's customer service (support, technical product training courses, documentation)?

How could ABC improve their customer service (support, technical product training courses, documentation)?

Section 2 - Dimension Factor Rating Questions

Dimension factor rating questions comprise most of the survey. Examples of service dimension factors for the dimension of personal responsibility such as promptness, courtesy, accuracy and thoroughness can each be rated by your customers. The individual factors' ratings combine to produce an overall average rating for the dimension.

By combining these in a gap analysis, the relative significance of performance compared with importance can be judged.

However, this approach has several drawbacks. It doubles the number of dimension questions, making the overall survey longer, and that may affect response rates. What customers rate as important may, in fact, not be what actually affects their behavior. They may say thoroughness is most important while responsiveness may more likely affect their choice of service supplier.

A more reliable correlation is that between dimension performance ratings and the overall customer satisfaction rating or customer retention rating.

Another consideration is rating dimension performance against your competition. While this may be very valuable to ask in some intensely competitive environments, it may not be valuable or appropriate to ask in other environments - and it does add another question per dimension.

Dimension Question Structure

Though dimension questions can be structured in a number of ways, it is best to use one question structure as much as possible throughout your survey. Examples of question structures:

How satisfied are you with _____?
(Very Satisfied, Satisfied, Neutral, Dissatisfied, Very Dissatisfied)

Please rate _____ customer service.
(Excellent, Good, Average, Fair, Poor)

ABC provides good customer service.
(Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)

How often does ABC's customer service exceed expectations?
(Very frequently, Frequently, Not Sure, Infrequently, Very Infrequently)

To what extent does ABC's customer service exceed expectations?
(To Very Great Extent, To Great Extent, To Some Extent, To Little Extent, To Very Little Extent)

Some General Customer Service Satisfaction Dimensions and Factors

- Overall customer service
- Helpfulness
- Friendliness
- Support staff that solves problems quickly
- Provides poor support
- Very talented professionals
- All the necessary resources to service you
- A very valuable service resource
- Competent
- Unprofessional
- People that are easy to deal with
- I receive the support I need from my ABC field engineer to resolve any service problems
- Ethical
- Dishonest
- Support staff which gives you a hard time
- Staff which is interested in your comments and suggestions
- Phone calls returned quickly
- People answering the phone are polite
- People on the answering the phone are cheerful
- Knowledgeable operators
- Listening to the customer
- Attentive to customer complaints
- Close to its customers
- Unwilling to go the extra mile for its customers
- Ignores customer suggestions
- Impossible to get satisfaction unless you go to the top
- In tune with the needs of its clients
- Prompt in dealing with customer complaints
- Efficient

- Easy to get information on the phone
- Poor customer phone support
- People who answer the phone have clear, easy to hear voices
- It takes a long time to reach the right person on the phone
- You are often put on hold for a long time
- Telephone support personnel who do not seem to have time for you
- Attention to detail
- Helpfulness
- Available support offerings fit your needs
- Phone support quality overall
- Ease of gaining access to support
- Time to reach technical personnel
- Effectiveness of answers/workarounds
- Access to technical support

Some Dimensions and Factors of Training Courses - Training Manager Satisfaction

- Overall rating of the course(s)
- Courses taken personally
- Courses taken by people I supervise
- Reasons you decided to attend a course
- Reasons you decided not to attend a course
- Reasons you decided not to send people to a course(s)
- Appropriate course offering to meet their needs
- Effectiveness of the training courses in improving employee performance
- Effectiveness of the training courses in developing employee growth
- Do test scores influence status of employees - (pay, promotion, etc.)
- Rate the quality of the learning materials (individual media)
- Length of courses
- Amount of classroom time
- Amount of hands-on time
- Training facility

- Course delivery (instructors' theoretical knowledge, hands-on knowledge, etc.)
- Instructors' presentation/communication skills
- Encouragement of participation
- Good use of time in the class
- Difficulty of tests
- Test process
- Structure of tests
- Levels of achievement
- Knowledge your (various positions) have of ABC products
- Skills your (various positions) have to administer, operate and service ABC products
- ABC courses are a good educational investment considering the tuition/travel cost
- ABC courses are well presented
- Knowledge gained has had a direct impact on my (my business) performance
- Skills gained have had a direct impact on my (my business) performance

Tracking Dimensions

Compared to one year ago, is ABC's customer service (any dimension):
(Better, Worse, Same)

Section 3 - Demographics

These questions provide the ability to analyze results by respondent segments and sub-segments. For a customer service satisfaction survey, demographics may include a variety of variables which would classify customers. For example:

- Geography/location
- Type of business
- Position title
- Function/role-responsibilities
- Types of product(s) used
- Types of service(s) used
- Frequency of product/service use
- Spending range on products/services
- Sex
- Age range
- Income range
- Highest education level

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