

CAN'T GET NO SATISFACTION?

Companies should involve their salespeople if they want their customer satisfaction measures to work, says Rob Brickle.



Rob Brickle: the most innovative tools are customer face-to-face interviews

It's a fact that the sales organisation gains significantly more benefit from the way customer metrics are measured and managed if its people are involved in gathering and using customer feedback. Those who invest in that level of involvement reap the rewards.

Indeed, when the involvement of the sales organisation in customer measurement is required rather than optional:

- The company's focus on customer loyalty is much more likely to be visible to its customers.
- Customer feedback is much more likely to be a critical component in account planning.
- Up-to-date customer information is much more likely to be integrated into any CRM system.

So given the perceived value of customer measurement, it is surprising how few organisations say their salespeople actively determine how and when customer data is gathered, or craft their company response to customers.

In many organisations, customer measurement tends to focus on gathering customer satisfaction metrics. This is fine but doesn't provide the richness of data to drive customer loyalty and direct bottom-line results.

Many companies have started to recognise this and are making the shift to professional methods of customer management that focus on customer confidence and loyalty.

Organisations that have implemented leading-edge approaches to creating customer loyalty describe their innovations this way:

- Developing a joint strategy with the customer; partnering with the customer for mutual benefit.
- Measuring customer loyalty attributes; looking at predictive modelling.
- Taking action on customer issues; developing and executing action plans.
- Being proactive on uncovering customer issues and taking action; anticipating needs.

Innovation is also evident when customer feedback processes are linked to other improvement processes and programmes such as:

- Research & development, product and service development and design.
- Quality initiatives like ISO or Six Sigma.
- Corrective action, complaint handling and customer feedback.

The most innovative tools used are customer face-to-face interviews and methods that allow organisations to link their data to business results. Benefits can be gained from these leading-edge methods.

A recent survey identified that most organisations believe that formal and professional customer management strategies can deliver competitive advantage. But only a small number of organisations know how they, or their competitors, gather and use customer management data in their business!

CRM technologies have a significant part to play in helping organisations achieve the gain and benefits they need when implementing any innovative customer management strategy. The trick is in how that technology is integrated into the strategy and process framework.

There can even be lessons here for the IT department and the way it manages the relationship it has with its internal customer. Even internal functions face competition from outside!

● *CRM, Call Centre & Marketing Systems Expert Rob Brickle is managing director of customer-driven change consultancy Bsquared Consulting. Tel: +44 (0)20 8939 3840. Email: rob.brickle@bsquared-consulting.com. Acknowledgements go to Dee Gaeddert for her contribution and original thinking.*