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Rob Brickle makes you an offer you shouldn't ignore.



Rob Brickle: customer satisfaction is often poorly defined

How much money does your organisation spend on consultancy? And does it all return a significant value to the organisation?

Don't get me wrong, I am not saying all consultancy is unnecessary because clearly it isn't. It's just that in the world of customer management there is a huge pot of largely untapped free consultancy that has a direct impact on your business – the opinion of customers themselves.

Hold on, you may say, we have customer feedback mechanisms in place that we follow religiously as part of our customer experience, CRM, or quality management system. Well, I would argue that even if there are initiatives in place to capture some of this feedback, they are often largely ineffective.

So how can I justify this position? Firstly, I don't think anyone would dispute the fact that you get free insight into how you might improve your business and the relationship you have with your customers, directly from the customers themselves. All you have to do is ask them!

Where this normally falls down, however, is that initiatives to collect this type of information are invariably not joined up, not owned at a significant level in the organisation and, worse still, rarely acted on.

At the recent Gartner CRM Summit in Washington DC, managing the customer experience seemed to be a major priority and indeed it was the central theme of the opening keynote. And it would appear that while much of the focus in CRM has shifted to better managing the customer experience, it comes with a significant challenge – which is how to measure it.

According to recent research from Gartner, 80% of executives think that customer satisfaction is more important than it was three years ago, and 95% of business leaders see it as the next competitive battleground.

But customer satisfaction is often poorly defined, may mean different things to different people and, particularly in a business-to-business environment, rarely grabs the attention of senior management.

People see customer satisfaction as largely operational, and therefore the focus is on operational metrics around delivery, quality and price. It's an overpopulated battleground, one in which it is easy to copy or follow the strategies of others and not an area where differentiation occurs.

It is important therefore to recognise that there are a number of areas that need to be addressed when you are looking across the organisation and taking an holistic picture of the customer experience.

You also need to make sure that these initiatives are joined up if you are to get the maximum benefit from them. So, for example:

- Customer satisfaction typically measures operational metrics in sales, service or support.
- Customer loyalty may be measured by churn/retention or referrals.
- Brand is usually measured via marketing communications.
- Quality may be measuring such things as process improvement or product engineering.

It is not unusual for initiatives such as these to be going on with little or no interaction – which is dangerous, as this could potentially paint conflicting views of performance and of where change may be necessary to be more competitive.

The answer must be to join up the initiatives, if you are to get the most from this free consultancy opportunity!

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