

LISTEN TO THE VOICES

Hear the customer and build your business, says Rob Brickle.



Rob Brickle: customer's voice is a strong business tool

First spotted in late 1998, voice-of-the-customer departments are apparently making a comeback in boardrooms and corporate organisations around the world, according to a well-known global research organisation.

A voice-of-the-customer department generally represents customers within the enterprise and reports their experiences to the board or high-level executives. For example, some departments get 20 minutes with the board once a quarter when they discuss where customer complaints are arising from and other satisfaction metrics.

Others are getting more creative. Some firms are using multimedia presentations with video footage of a customer's shopping experience, or call centre recordings. Others are taking the board out and giving them a hands-on customer experience. Many are moving away from analytical feedback to more experiential.

Why is this interesting? It's not the fact that organisations are investing in voice-of-the-customer departments but the fact that the customer's voice is back in vogue and being recognised as a strong business and organisational development tool.

At its simplest level, organisations invest in call centre or customer satisfaction feedback to drive improvements in operational performance – at least those who recognise the potential of this data rather than using it as a scoring mechanism do.

This is where the way this type of intervention is implemented is crucial.

An executive who has their bonus tied to customer satisfaction scores will take a keen interest in the score and possibly how they can manipulate it to achieve their bonus – not necessarily drive performance improvement. An incorrect application can therefore drive inappropriate behaviour rather than benefit the organisation.

Customer satisfaction is of course only one element in how you need to manage customers and is very transaction oriented. It is a defensive strategy which is backward looking and aimed at taking corrective action after the event.

Progressive organisations who understand the need to remain competitive and maintain an edge will adopt a proactive approach to managing their customer relationships.

Strategies employed here will clearly include a whole raft of marketing and loyalty initiatives at a consumer level. In the business-to-business environment, organisations will adopt key or strategic account management processes. These too may be backed up by some form of structured customer feedback.

In summary, anyone who works in a high-performance organisation using things such as Black Belts for improvement will know that one of the most important ingredients in achieving high performance is the voice of the customer.

If you want to stay ahead and improve the performance of your own organisation, maybe you should be investigating how you can collect this information and use it to maximum benefit.

● CRM Software, Call Centre & Marketing Software 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.