

TOP TIPS

Rob Brickle outlines five key actions you can take to make your business more customer aligned.



Rob Brickle: customers who don't feel heard don't feel valued

Customers are always feeding back about the little – and the big – things that their suppliers could do to improve their partnership. If we were to build a league table of the most common issues, these would be our top five. You'd be surprised how a little attention to these issues can go a long way to improving a customer's perception of you...

1. Give your customers a single point of contact.

It may sound obvious, but do your customers have one single focal point of contact for their relationship with your organisation? If, actually, it's two or maybe three or even four, then you have a problem. And if you often hear the words "I can never get hold of anyone" or "I don't know exactly who to talk to" you are also in trouble.

You are making life difficult for the customer and they'll get fed up before long. So gather your team, focus the customer's engagement with you and tell your customer who it is – now!

2. Ensure the focal point is someone close to the customer and their product or service.

Again, it might sound obvious but make sure the point of contact you agree isn't someone who is only vaguely familiar with the customer relationship, is away or uncontactable for long periods. The person you choose needs to be knowledgeable on the account and understand the customer history and business, as well as being easily accessible.

3. Build a process for listening to your customers; share and act regularly on the feedback you receive.

Customers who don't feel heard or listened to don't feel valued. Worse than that, they don't stay customers for very long. Put a mechanism in place that enables you to receive feedback from them and you'll get a vital insight into how you can improve what you do and keep them happy.

Listen to the feedback, share it with your team, act on it and then feed back to the customer what you are doing and why. They'll feel valued and included in the whole process. Then commit to an ongoing communications plan for customers – share information with them by telephone and email, meet them for lunch, whatever suits. Before long you'll become a genuinely trusted supplier.

4. Change the culture of your company so that customer needs are at the forefront of your staff's minds.

People are often so intent on getting a task done, completing this procedure to this deadline, that they are distracted from their customer. Turn it on its head. Get your customer-facing teams together in an interactive, workshop-style environment and work on changing their mental focus to the customer's needs.

Together, look at why you behave in a certain way, and how you might change to become more externally focused. Look at creative ways to keep the customers' needs in mind – for example, a shared new vision statement or a new set of team objectives.

5. Redesign your customer-facing processes so they deliver what your customers need.

Within your organisation examine your current business processes. Perhaps there are old, inefficient ways of working that are habitual rather than helpful to the customer? Redesign them so they are more lean and efficient, and always have the customer's end goal as the objective.

Customers miss the agility and responsiveness they get with small suppliers. Look at how you can bring that feeling back. The single point of contact will help foster intimacy and responsiveness. Always be friendly and helpful and don't involve

customers with internal problems or politics. They just want what they want, when they want it, and it's your job to deliver that seamlessly!

Change is a good thing. Ask yourself the question: what can I do differently tomorrow?

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