



Give It to Me Now!

In the Age of the Customer, customers demand attention.

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Veruca Salt wanted her Oompa Loompa now. And, if you'll remember, she didn't want just any squirrel-she wanted a trained squirrel. At the time, it was perfectly understandable for Grandpa Joe to suggest, "What she wants is a good kick in the pants." Now, however, we've come into the age of the customer, and this customer-whether she's part of the "me generation" or not-expects her Oompa Loompa now, and her squirrel trained. She knows what she wants, and she intends to get it.

Last September at the 2008 Gartner CRM Summit, many experts offered advice for businesses in the current economic downturn. They pointed to customer retention as a key focus area for CEOs. In a world where switching to a competitor's products is increasingly commonplace and in an economy in which people may stop purchasing altogether, companies maintaining a strong customer base becomes Job No. 1.

In the last decade companies have transformed the way they do business, offering products and services through a variety of options-in store, online, via call centers, and so on. As routes to market continue to change, companies must work to maintain their brand promise and create a coherent customer experience across all channels.

Loyalty and repeat purchases increasingly depend on the quality of service provided, the speed of response, and whether a customer feels that his/her opinions, desires and attitudes are taken seriously.

Companies can best enhance customer experience, loyalty and advocacy by measuring it and then showing customers that their opinions count, and that the quality of each interaction with the company tops the agenda.

Research carried out by the Strativity Group supports this, finding that 95 percent of executives think that customer experience is the next competitive battleground. Developing an effective customer strategy that allows an organization to build long-term relationships with customers in order to counteract the "switch culture" will be essential going forward.

Most senior managers measure success by tracking metrics that relate to three key business performance criteria: acquisition of new customers, retention of existing customers, and growth in business from existing customers as a means of developing their business.

Call centers typically measure performance from the perspective of operational efficiencies (i.e., cost). Key metrics include length of call, call abandonment rate, and agent utilization. First-call resolution is one of the metrics call center management measures to infer customer satisfaction.

But isn't asking agents to measure their own performance something of a self-fulfilling prophecy? Isn't it better to ask customers themselves whether their problem was solved on the first call?

Businesses are increasingly investing in feedback and analytics software to better understand their customers, their most valuable asset. While DMG Consulting's "2008 Contact Center Surveying/Feedback and Analytics Market Report" highlighted a 21.3 percent growth in this sector, it's worth remembering that simply gathering facts and figures about customers is not enough to prompt loyalty.

Creating a two-way dialogue with customers to find out how they feel about a product or service and what factors impact their decision making process, either positively or negatively, must play a role in any successful customer experience strategy. Only by tracking individual pain points can you change business processes to improve customer experience or enhance a product offering or provide a personalized service that differentiates you from your competitors.

Technology has evolved to the point where consumers are now able to communicate with businesses regarding their services and products both how and when they want. Companies can leverage this feedback across a range of channels into an enterprise-wide program that directly impacts business results.

Enterprise feedback management (EFM) software enables companies to turn the multichannel environment into a highly effective communication and marketing mechanism. When a company wants to answer a specific question, it conducts market research. EFM goes beyond this, helping companies connect with each customer's experience as part of an ongoing process.

Sophisticated EFM software offers a raft of tools so that event-driven, contextually-rich surveys can be initiated at "key moments of truth" for individual customers after each interaction with a company. This feedback can provide actionable insight about the sales process, product selection, pricing or service provision, with real time alerts enabling an organization to respond in real-time to proactively manage any customer complaints or other customer-related scenarios.

This process mechanizes the collection of customer feedback, with tools such as alerts and attitude trending, giving companies the ability to drive the feedback back into the business, across all channels, and ultimately integrating the voice of the customer into every facet of the business.

Combining key business performance metrics with real time understanding of customer attitude, companies can differentiate themselves on the basis of customer experience and quality of service... striving to give each customer her Oompa Loompa, just the way she wants it and right when it matters most. In many cases, "NOW!"

About the Author

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