

Effective Survey Methods that Develop Memorable Customer Experiences

OVERVIEW

Developing an effective survey is no easy task. Creating the questions, removing bias, presenting the survey, and analyzing the feedback can all affect the outcome of the response. In the ideal world, a survey captures true feedback that helps to refine your customer experience and drive bottom line profits. Leveraging best practices can help you to quickly create surveys that help you to better serve the customer and grow your business.

HIGHLIGHTS OF CREATING EFFECTIVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE SURVEYS

- Identify and understand your brand and its specific differentiators
- Define your customer journey and highlight important interaction points
- Develop specific questions that relate to the brand, differentiators, and experience
- Present the questions in a simple, but clearly branded manner
- Surveys should include both qualitative and quantitative questions
- Consider including incentives to increase survey participation
- Use the information to improve systems and training
- Create a guest recovery process to address feedback

CREATING EFFECTIVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE SURVEYS

In today's economy, customer wants and perceptions change more rapidly than ever before. Businesses are constantly looking for ways to capture more feedback from their customers, so they can continuously refine, improve, and exceed their expectations. Using a customer experience survey is an effective tool to gain insight, but only when the survey is developed correctly and with action in mind.

Identify and understand your brand and its specific differentiators

In order to develop an effective customer experience survey, you must first decide what makes your business different. What are the major elements that make your customers initially try your services and continue to come back again and again? What are the major points in the experience that make them choose you over other alternatives? Identifying these differentiators and incorporating them into your survey process will ensure that you are delivering on your most important value propositions.

Define your customer journey and highlight important interaction points

After you have determined the major differentiators for your business, you should determine the ideal customer journey. A customer journey is simply the process an individual follows to become a customer and enjoy your services. It also includes the actions a customer takes after the experience, including interacting with the brand online, returning for a second visit, or influencing their friends to try the brand for themselves.

A customer journey map will include 3 main elements – interaction points, differentiation points, and customer emotion. Interaction points are defined as the individual touch points that the customer has with your brand or employees. For example, a restaurant has multiple interaction points that include the selection of the restaurant via an online review site, the process of parking at the establishment, the customer greeting when they first enter, and the customer greeting at their table. Differentiation points related to how you make your brand experience unique. Using the same restaurant example, if the differentiator is speed, then we must map how fast the customers are greeted, how fast the food gets to the table, and other ways speed of service are provided. Customer emotion is the last of the elements. We look to map what type of emotion the customer has when they enter a situation and how we can modify it with our interaction. When a customer walks into a restaurant they are nervous and excited, but if we interact well, they become comfortable and ready to eat!

Develop specific questions that relate to the brand, differentiators, and experience

Once you have determined your brand differentiators and mapped customer journey, you are ready to define the individual survey questions. Remember, you are not comparing your restaurant to your competitors, you are comparing yourself to your brand promise and how it relates to the customer's expectations. The questions you ask and how you ask them will be directly attributable to the differentiators and customer journey inflection points. Organizing your survey around these elements will help to ensure that you can take action from the resulting information.

In addition to organization around the brand promise, survey questions should be easy to understand, clear of bias, and specific. Questions should be written at an elementary level and be short in length. Review the questions to see if they are leading the customer to answer in a certain manner. There is a significant difference between asking the customer to rate their experience versus asking them if the experience was in line with their expectations. Ask specific questions, by telling them what the standard should be. Such as; was your food hot when it arrived? Did your server let you know about the specials of the day? Was your order taken promptly?

When possible, leverage survey tools that automate the question process to include specific questions related to the customer's experience. Avoid asking broad questions like "how was your meal" and leverage the tools to ask, "how was your Big Kahuna Double Cheeseburger." Feedback specific to the experience will allow you to identify specific opportunities rather than general areas for improvement.

Present the questions in a simple, but clearly branded manner

When creating a survey, it is important that it is clearly branded with your business name and logo because it lets the customer know that they are working directly with your business. Make sure the survey is located on your website at your specific URL. Customers should know that they aren't talking to a third-party survey company that lacks investment in the result. People tend to provide more thoughtful feedback when they know it will not be ignored and is received by a decision maker.

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Keep the survey as short as possible and aesthetically basic. Don't over design the survey and use treatments that won't distract the user from completing the process. There is a direct correlation between customers willingness to take a survey and the amount of time they must commit to completing it. Limit your survey questions to 10 questions to avoid any survey fatigue. If the action or process is tiring, customers will not take the time to fill it out or may not answer in an honest manner. Keep it short, keep it easy and be thankful of their time.

Surveys should include both qualitative and quantitative questions

Including both qualitative and quantitative questions in your survey helps to ensure that the resulting data is both informative and actionable. Qualitative questions provide you with an understanding of underlying reasons and motives, they are often referred to as "open-ended" because the person responding to it is free to answer in any manner he or she chooses. Quantitative questions provide a measurement of occurrences or facts, which are typically provided via a numeric value or a "yes" or "no" answer. Over time, having quantitative feedback will help show performance trends and actionable opportunities.

Consider including incentives to increase survey participation

There is much debate around the practice of incentivizing customers to participate in surveys. Some individuals see it as a straightforward solution to increase survey participation rates, some see it as an outside influence on the survey process that results in bias data. Common issues that occur when offering incentives can include false data inputted by individuals completing the survey to only get the premium and the skewing of survey results because the incentive only works on individuals that are intending to return.

Although there are positive and negatives to leveraging incentives, it is proven to result in increased feedback. If incentives are used to increase response rates, you should record timing, incentive, and variables in results. This way you can analyze the responses to see if the incentive had any potential effect on the resulting scores. Then you can leverage filters to discount any responses that look to be invalid. For example, when incentives are used you may consider filtering any responses that took less than an ideal time to complete the survey. The idea behind the filter would be that if someone completed the survey that quickly, they were not reading the questions, and potentially completing the survey only because of the incentive.

Use the information to improve systems and training

Creating strategically driven questions, presenting the survey in an optimum manner, and purposefully filtering bias responses will provide your organization with a tremendous amount of insight. Using this insight to manage and improve the business comes with a significant level of responsibility. Used correctly it can be a powerful tool, but incorrect use can cause a decrease in employee satisfaction, in customer experience, and business profitability.

The underlying issue is how the data is used to improve the business. If you had the time and resources, it would be easy to review each survey and judge the performance of each employee based on the results. Although easy, this is not the intent for a properly calibrated survey. Establishing an immediate employee feedback loop within your survey process results in skewed survey results and an unhealthy workplace. If an employee knows that their performance will be judged on individual survey results, they will encourage surveys from customers that communicated a positive experience, and discourage surveys from customers whose expectations were not met. In addition, this direct feedback can make

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an employee feel micromanaged and continuously critiqued. Customer experience surveys are not designed for individual employee management and should not be used as such.

Customer Experience surveys are designed to provide feedback about whether an organization is delivering on its differentiators and brand promise. It is also designed to receive feedback from customers on what other differentiators they would be interested in to increase their experience. Analyzing this data over a period can provide opportunities for training, process improvement, and even potential shifts in customer needs.

Create a guest recovery process to address feedback

Although you do not want to leverage individual survey results to manage employees, you still need to have a process to communicate with unhappy customers. Take time to outline a process for guest recovery. The objective of guest recovery is to record the issue, apologize, and to get the customer to return for an additional experience. Where do you record the issue, who has the responsibility to follow up with the customer, what are the options available to win the confidence of the customer. Saving an existing customer can be much less expensive than finding a new one – make sure to invest wisely.

Summary

In a competitive economy, it is critical to understand what your customers are thinking. Customer experience surveys give you the insight you'll need to make better business decisions and make the necessary improvements to affect your bottom line. The information will help you understand how your customers view your business and if you are adhering to your differentiators and brand promise. The mere act of surveying a customer can increase satisfaction. You are sending a message that this company genuinely cares about their opinion and is acting on their feedback.

In the end, sales and profits are how we keep score on how we are doing, but the real driver of your business is customer satisfaction. Track progress against baselines and drive continuous customer experience improvements through feedback. Businesses need to be able to measure customer satisfaction to truly understand how well they're doing and customer surveys are the primary way of doing that.

If you are interested in learning more about the creation of effective customer experience surveys please visit www.surveyafterwords.com or contact the team at AfterWords. We can be reached at info@surveyafterwrods.com or 813-295-8033.