

What Your Customers Think of You

Do you know what your customers think of you? Have you lost customers without knowing why? Often, you may not even be aware that a customer is unhappy. Although direct feedback can be very useful, it is also sporadic and hard to draw conclusions from. For these reasons, a customer satisfaction survey can be highly valuable.

Surveys

Ideally, a survey should be independently conducted. This allows customers to answer candidly; moreover, it protects your company from accusations of bias. But despite the benefits of independent surveys, they are often too expensive for many small businesses.

Fortunately, in-house research can still provide many useful insights. If you decide to design your own survey, have clear objectives. What do you need to know about your customers? Are you assessing their response to an advertising campaign, a new product or improvements in your service? Or do you want to identify customer preferences with a view to developing new products and services in the future? Make sure every question is relevant and helps you to meet your objective.

If you plan a telephone survey, make sure your script is tightly constructed – you do not want respondents to digress.

Keep within the law

A survey is a good opportunity to confirm customer records and also to build customer profiles with demographic information such as age, gender and social class.

However, in the case of handling personal information, you must comply with Data Protection Legislation. Make sure you are familiar with the law when carrying out your survey, and include an appropriate Data Collection Notice.

If you conduct your survey by telephone, you must first verify that the numbers you dial are not registered with the Telephone Preference Service.

How many responses will I need?

This depends to some degree on the size of your customer base, and whether you want to extrapolate your results to make generalisations about the larger group. If you have only a few clients, it would be quite feasible to include all of them. However, if you have several thousand, a sample of 100 – 200 would be appropriate.

Maximise your response

If you conduct your survey by post, expect a 10% response rate. To obtain a sample of 100 – 200, mail out 100 – 200 questionnaires.

A simple survey design and an incentive for responding are key ways to increase your response levels. Make submission of responses as easy as possible – for instance, by using a freepost address.

Your incentive should be appropriate to your target market. Make sure any prizes and promotional items are issued to respondents as soon after the closing date as possible.

Interpret your findings

Analysis of your data need not be complicated. Before inputting any responses, scan answers to get an idea of general trends. If you have a fairly small sample, and your data is quantitative, a simple spreadsheet or database may be sufficient to collate replies. There is also a range of software packages catering to researchers; this is better suited to your needs if you have a large number of responses to analyse, and if you need to include data such as responses to multiple choice or open-ended questions.

Once your results are processed, you should be able to identify key trends. Are there any responses or issues that come up repeatedly? What might the implications be for your business? Draw your conclusions, and shape your future strategy accordingly.

After your first survey, conduct a follow-up study in 6 months to a year. This will allow you to measure the impact of any changes and update your customer knowledge.

When you're equipped with hard data, you have the best possible base for business growth, instead of leaving it to chance.