



Acting on Voice of the Customer

By Lynn Hunsaker

Marketing is so much more than image-building and strategic planning, although these roles are essential. As the conduit for customers' voices throughout the organization, and as a conduit for the company's voice to customers, marketing plays a significant role for the entire customer experience.

Accordingly, we need to expand the impact of marketing to include acting on the voice of the customer. How many functional areas within your company are aware of current customer sentiments and their functions' impact on improving customer relationship strength? Marketers can take initiative to systematically provide all areas of the company with this information and the business processes to act on it. This is the part of marketing that rolls up its sleeves, objectively analyzes the less attractive feedback from customers, and makes things happen within the company to substantively improve customer perceptions. Through substantive changes, growth through loyalty and word of mouth becomes sustainable.

Marketing Operations embraces acting on VOC as a key strategy for streamlining processes and quantifying ROI. Acting on VOC extends beyond the assignment of improvements for the top dissatisfiers indicated in survey results. First of all, a well-respected executive champion accounts for a great deal of the difference between success or failure of your endeavor. With this in place, start by analyzing your customer base. This is different from segmentation analysis; rather, it examines which customers are most profitable so that you can make sure VOC represents your customer base with a healthy balance. Next, you'll want to make sure your methodology for capturing VOC provides you with a thorough understanding of customers' pain, wherever it may be. One of my favorite quotes is from Jim Morgan, Chairman of Applied Materials: "Good news is no news, no news is bad news, bad news is good news."

To overcome apathy, denial, or finger-pointing when sharing customer feedback within your company, slice the customer feedback by product line and by sales and service teams. When each group has their own set of data, you can drive VOC throughout the organization, establishing clear accountability for action as the data relates to each internal group. Customer-focused service at all customer touch points is only as good as the weakest link in the entire value-chain. Analyze handoffs throughout the company's business processes to identify streamlining opportunities and to track in-process warning signals. Be sure to measure and reward the right things to motivate employees and to have the capability to actually predict future customer perceptions. And remember to "close the loop" with VOC participants as often as possible.

A wide variety of programs can be developed that engage and reward your customers, ranging from those who are delighted with their customer experiences to those who are at risk of defecting. But to realize your full power as a marketer, avoid the mesmerizing effect of focusing on your promoters, or advocates. Remember to systematically address the less attractive feedback from customers, and you'll make great strides in marketing operations success and your group's value to the organization.

For more information on this topic, see my article, ["Excellent Voice of the Customer Initiatives Drive Growth by Turning Lemons into Lemonade."](#)



Call to Action

If your company is facing challenges in any of the areas discussed in this article, or if you are thinking about creating a marketing operations function or increasing the effectiveness of the one you already have, you should start with a "current state assessment" that will help you evaluate the overall health of your marketing and/or Marketing Operations today. Doing so will help you zero in on those areas that represent your most difficult challenges as well as your greatest opportunities for bringing the significant benefits of MO best practices to your organization.

About the Author:



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