

Are Customer Surveys Hogwash?

Many companies are simply using surveys to impress the customer, and they rarely ever act on the data to drive change in CRM initiatives

According to a new study by customer experience research and consulting firm Strativity Group, companies are falsely touting customer surveys as proof that the firms are listening to their customers. The truth is that they are not properly using the information once they have it. The study's respondents were dozens of executives from around the world, spanning industries including banking, retail, entertainment, and manufacturing.

The results showed a lack of two-way dialogue between the customer and company. In general customer surveys were seen-in theory-as evidence of companies' commitment to their customers, but the information was to alter business processes and corporate culture. "For a lot companies it's all just an act," says Lior Arussy, president of Strativity. "They're using the surveys as a front to convey a sense of being a customer-centric organization, but the reality is they're not leveraging the invaluable information that's within."

"Discovering the Real Answers: Customer Surveys-The New Realities" found that 71 percent of executives said there is very little survey follow-up internally to change behavior in the organization. Another 55 percent of respondents indicated difficulty linking the survey results to changes within the company, either technological or process driven. The reason? Customer surveys are still conducted by specific departments within an organization for a specific goal and are not carried out as part of an enterprisewide initiative that multiple departments can use. Other departments aren't aware of the survey. "Companies are betraying their customer by asking them questions with little readiness to act upon the results," Arussy says.

The failure of companies to properly turn respondent's answers into organizational change says that despite a claimed commitment to their customers, the minimal follow-up and use of the data means the survey has become a fallacy in the eyes of the customer, according to Arussy. Today's customer survey has become a validation for what companies are currently doing, and not what they can be doing better. This shift in how surveys are being used and the consequences of a lack of communication with customers can lead to dissatisfied customers and diminished sales.

"Consumers aren't naive-they're going to realize that nothing is changing, despite the company's 'commitment to customer satisfaction'."

The survey also found that 71 percent of respondents find it difficult to get buy-in for change within the organization based on survey results, while slightly more than half of participants design surveys to validate current performance. Arussy says this is a perfect example of how many organizations talk a good game when it comes to customer service, but are rarely acting on it. What is needed is cultural transformation from top management to become more customer-centric. And for those companies that don't do this, the "failure to turn customer insight and feedback into actionable results will ultimately be detrimental to a company's bottom line."

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