

PARAMARQ

An Introduction to Customer Surveys: The Seven Deadly Sins

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1. Why Survey Your Customers?

There is increasing research to show the most successful businesses have excellent customer relationships.

Retained clients have lower management and running costs compared to new clients. They can also, if genuinely satisfied provide, via recommendation, a source of high quality sales leads, from whom it is easier to win new business. Unfortunately, one dissatisfied customer has a more powerful, negative effect than nine happy customers.

Customer surveys are carried out to assess the causes of both customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

2. The Six Deadly Sins of Customer Surveys

The main problems associated with undertaking customer surveys are:

2.1. Failure to Meet Business Objectives

A survey should be designed so it can be used to develop the business. Care should be taken to ensure each stage of the survey matches this objective.

2.2. Lack of Width

Often surveys may look at one aspect of the customer relationship as a first stage rather than seek to understand the core issues before delving further.

2.3. High Level Sponsorship

Reports produced should be acted upon – rather than shelved. Management needs to set aside time to evaluate the survey, challenge it and then act up on it. A shelved report is a waste of your customer's time as well as your time and money.

2.4. Lack of Objectivity

Surveys need to be rigorously unbiased because customers quickly realise when a survey has a hidden agenda and this inhibits their response.

Surveys can be used to aid corporate change but any bias will increase resistance as the results are seen as unfair.

Surprisingly, strong company cultures inhibit a more objective approach as there is often, a subconscious, attempt to limit the survey to known areas of strength or weakness. Managers with a passion for their business find it difficult to admit there are issues they actually know little about.

2.5. Poor Interviewing Technique

Whether by phone or face-to-face interviewing customers requires both good interpersonal and good business skills. Staff need to be trained to react appropriately to client behaviour as well as understand the implications of the points raised by customers so that points raised can be explored to the appropriate level of detail.

2.6. Biased Customer Selection

A survey based on a biased customer selection will produce, inevitably, biased results. Time should be set aside to ensure the selection of customers is representative.

2.7. Failure of Follow Up

Having established baselines and benchmarks with customers surveys should be repeated at regular intervals to ensure that progress towards customer satisfaction goals are maintained.