

What do your customers really think of you?

 By [Bruce von Maltitz](#)

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Many products are becoming commoditised - goods and their providers are seen as virtually indistinguishable from the next, as companies constantly and consistently match or merely marginally improve upon the offers and efforts of their rivals. Whether it is the fault of social media, or a failing to demonstrate true innovation in a rapidly changing market, it does mean that customer satisfaction has become vitally important.



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Research has shown that 'totally satisfied' customers contribute 17 times as much revenue to a company as a 'somewhat dissatisfied' customer and a 'totally dissatisfied' customer decreases revenue at a rate equal to 18 times what a 'totally satisfied customer' contributes to a company. It is therefore imperative that every single customer touch point remains committed to keeping customers happy and for most companies, the call centre is the primary touch point.

So, how effective are call centres when it comes to monitoring, researching and reacting to customer's feedback about their experience with the company in question? After call surveys (the standard measurement tool) is valuable, but limited.

For one thing, any quantitative question can be ambiguous and misconstrued, leading to skewed responses. Even a simple question, 'are you happy with our service' is open to interpretation - should the caller make a recommendation based on the agent's interaction or the company as a whole? Not to mention that posing standard questions to a client who has phoned to cancel a service or has just opened an account is unlikely to reveal information that can be used.

While it does draw attention to customer satisfaction, it simply does not give insight into why customers feel the way they do. Scores and quantitative answers may reveal that the customer is happy with the agent's performance, but they could be unhappy with the poorly constructed IVR. Ultimately, nothing is learnt that can be improved upon.

Open-ended questions more helpful

The only way to monitor how a customer feels is through open-ended questions - "How do you feel about our company?", "Please take a minute to tell our CEO about your experience with our call centre." These answers can not only assist with agent coaching and provide insight into why customers rated the service the way they did but also with process and service improvement that can ultimately lead to action.

The challenge with that methodology, however, is translating open-ended answers into usable data. Fortunately, the next-generation wave of software has arrived and that will automate the process of capturing, analysing and using open-ended responses at a call centre level. This will enable companies to determine exactly what customers think of them and spot trends as they emerge. If, for instance, hundreds of customers are mentioning price as an issue or if there are recurring technical difficulties with a product, the company can react to that.

Rather than trying to gauge customer sentiment using the old "rank your satisfaction with our agent from 1 to 10", companies will be able to understand how their customers feel about them, based on their experience with the company as a whole, not just their interaction with the agent.

Technology drills down

The next generation of technology is going to enable companies to drill down to customers' pain points on a granular level - every interaction could potentially reap the same insights as an expensive focus group. Moreover, the information gleaned could be the difference between being a market follower and a market leader, because companies will be able to influence the customer experience in a positive manner as issues emerge.

Ultimately, for the customer experience to change, we have to change our tactics of listening to them.

ABOUT BRUCE VON MALTITZ

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