

3 Things Companies Should Be Asking Their Customers



The phrase “the customer is king” has by now become a corporate cliché. It’s not to say that the customer is always right, but successful brands have demonstrated that customers ultimately drive the direction of a company. Think about Amazon, a brand which delivers the essence of “customer experience.” Their [number 1 ranking](#) in customer experience is no fluke. They’ve continually invested in areas like personalization and fulfillment in order to continue moving the needle and improve customer satisfaction. Two day shipping? How about one hour shipping?

Providing products and services that excite customers means needing to understand the very basics of who they are and what they need: What do my customers look like? How much are they willing to pay? What matters to them, what needs or problems can my company fulfill? Can I do it better than anyone else?

There’s an easy way to find out what customers think. Simply put, ask... and keep asking. Customers are more than willing to share their opinion, and can often provide the exact input you need as an organization to make real connections. In a series of articles, called “Getting Started” we recently detailed three areas for gaining customer feedback through surveys

- 1. Brand Equity**
- 2. Advertising**
- 3. Customer Experience**

By routinely investigating and asking for customer input, you will better understand, react to and improve not just your connection with customers but also your standing in the market. If you always keep the customer in the room, the end result will be positive change for your business.

Brand Equity

A brand equity study investigates your overall brand health. How are you perceived in the marketplace? What is your reputation? Are people aware of your brand? How does your brand perform relative to competitors? In a brand equity study, any potential or existing buyer for your product provides feedback about your brand and your competitor's brand. The idea is to have a comprehensive understanding of how you are positioned in the market and whether this aligns with what your buyers desire. And since a brand equity study also investigates key competitors, you will know how you stack up against them along the desired criteria; what are your strengths and what are your weaknesses. All of this is to arm you with the understanding of how your business can grow through proper focus on building your brand and bridging market perceptions.

Advertising

While a brand equity study can diagnose the health of brand, it is through effective advertising (and marketing) that businesses can influence brand perceptions. John Sculley, (Apple's CEO from 1983 – 1993) once said about Apple: "People talk about technology, but Apple was a marketing company. It was the marketing company of the decade." Through ad campaigns like '1984' to 'Think Different,' Apple has solidified its reputation as a brand of imagination and innovation.

To develop effective advertising, you can employ a survey technique called copy testing. A copytest pre-tests any type of ad (print, radio, tv, digital) on consumers before rolling them out. In a copytest, consumers view a draft copy of your advertisement, and key questions are addressed, such as:

- Does the ad change a consumer's perceptions of the featured brand?
- Is the main message getting through to consumers?
- Is the advertising memorable, what do people like or dislike about it?
- Does it get the consumer to act in any way?

Through a copytest, you discover what it is about your ad that does and does not resonate with consumers, allowing you to adjust, and make necessary changes so that you tell the brand story you intend.

Customer Experience

Integral to building your brand, is defining customer experience. A business only exists with customers, so for many organizations, delivering a great customer experience is a top strategic objective. Every touch point that a customer has with your product or service is part of their journey with you and your brand. From the moment of inquiry to purchase to use, you want to meet or exceed expectations.

How can you tell if you are delivering? The best way is to ask. A customer satisfaction survey is a way to solicit feedback from customers about how they are experiencing your product. What are you doing well? What needs improvement? What makes a customer satisfied, or not? If there are issues, where are they occurring, and what is their cause?

Asking questions only gets you so far, however. Beyond this, you need to act. When tracking customer experience, this usually means closing the loop and addressing customer complaints as quickly as possible. With every customer complete or support team follow-up, you will be building a database of issues. While some patterns may be obvious or require follow-up, your customers will always manage to surprise you in the ways they use your product or service. As patterns begin to emerge, you'll learn which product or service changes may be necessary to best serve your customers.



Ask and keep asking

Surveying your customers along these three areas is only the beginning of your quest “to ask.” You may have pricing or feature preference questions; You may seek new innovation and co-create with your customer base. Beyond surveys, in-person or face to face interviews are another way “to ask.” For example, while surveys provide robust numerical data, complimenting this with focus groups or one-on-one qualitative interviews can allow you to dig even deeper with the customer. Here, rich insight can also emerge through customer narratives or detailed stories on how your product is being experienced. Sometimes what is needed is to hear directly from the customer. Having them in the room with you --even through a virtual focus group environment like video-- allows their story to resonate all the more deeply.

However you do it, success starts with a question and connecting with the people you do business with. Customers always appreciate knowing there's someone available to listen when they have something to say. Every personal interaction with a customer informs their experience, as well as yours, and serves as a chance to build stronger rapport and loyalty. In the end, you aren't just collecting information, but gathering ‘insights to act’ through conversations with the people you value most.