Voice of the Customer Dynamics

By Michael St. Angelo

Everyone knows what a Customer Satisfaction Survey is and some people know how to use the information it produces. It is a set of questions that your customers are asked to respond to so that you may determine 1) if they are happy (or not) with your products and/or services and 2) how you can keep them as customers. The process is fairly simple. You determine what questions you would like to ask and then find a way to present those questions to your customers. There are various ways to do this including, phone interviews, focus groups, mystery shoppers, paper "ballots" that are mailed or handed out on the spot and online queries. The least expensive of these is the "online query" and in this still difficult economy, the one that most companies are now using. There are just a few rules to follow when you decide to survey your customers. It has been determined that for the best results the survey respondents should be:

1. **Independent** – people that have no ties to your organization and either are interested in helping you stay in business because they like your company or have a problem with your company and for various reasons would like to make you aware of that problem.
2. **Diverse** – people of both genders, all age groups, all/any ethnic groups, any religious persuasion, etc.
3. **Decentralized** – people that are not restricted by location, job function, status, industry, etc.

…and you should have an effective method for aggregating the information.

You can survive (even thrive) in a recession if you can react quickly to changes in customer needs, perceptions, and behaviors regarding your facilities, products, and services. These are the key components driving Customer Loyalty, Growth and Repeat Business and being able to react quickly will give you a huge advantage to stay viable and stand out against the competition. In any economy, it's very important to get ongoing feedback from your customers.

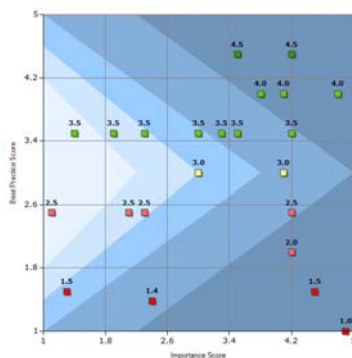**Ongoing feedback yields Strategic Impressions that are instantaneous and relevant**

The Voice of Your Customer is important not just to measure his/her satisfaction but to collect and weigh their opinions against your norms. Asking open ended questions that provide an opportunity to critique their interaction with your company will present you with a wealth of knowledge that could lead to an adjustment to your process that actually improves efficiency.

There is a new idiom that is being integrated into this landscape and it can make all the difference in terms of how quickly you can react to changes in your customer's behaviors. The term is **Drip Intelligence** and it was discussed in "Experiencing the Economic Rollercoaster?" an article by Eric Groves.

It should be noted that the Drip Intelligence methodology is not new. It has been used for several years in Business Process Improvement Programs in processes where there is a collection of activities designed to produce a specific output. It has been used in areas such as Benchmarking, Compliance, and Supply Chain Risk.

The closer you are to your customers, the more likely they are to turn to you when they need the products or services you offer. They need to know you are someone who cares about their needs and they need to know that you value what they think. Most of all they need to see you as

someone they have a relationship with and… **Drip Intelligence** fosters that relationship. The Voice of the Customer program you utilize needs to be able to roll the information gathered from customers into true business intelligence capable of providing on-line **real time** insight into your organization while instantly and automatically prioritizing areas for improvement. The key is "real time". You must continuously gather the information and instantly aggregate it into reports that are both strategic and actionable. You should be able to monitor your customers continuously and watch how they are reacting to business decisions being made…and then react instantaneously to changes in their needs, perceptions and behaviors. Periodic surveys are not enough. The timeliness of the information gathered is as important as gathering the information. I have been told by people that oversee Voice of the Customer programs that the information they receive is always too late to fix the problem. This tells us that these people recognize the need to continuously analyze the information and make adjustments on the fly. They realize the importance of **Drip Intelligence**.

The focus of any Voice of the Customer Program is to generate strategic and actionable business intelligence that can be used to better your organization. It must produce diagnostic and predictive outcomes that support strategic impressions for business decisions. In short it must provide data that is really relevant to the executives in the organization; data that they feel is hard to get and is essential to have every week. Or, if your system incorporates **Drip Intelligence, -** every day!

When investigating the use of various Business Intelligence Programs you should recognized that Customer Loyalty, more than perhaps any other single factor, is what keeps customers coming back.

This chart allows management to focus on channeling investment into areas that have the largest potential for immediate and significant improvement

The "Mystery Shopper" network is a tool that many companies use. The dilemma is; do the reports from mystery shoppers really match what your customers are saying, are they relevant for your business and are they timely? With **Drip Intelligence** you could, along with gathering intelligence from your customers, also gather intelligence from the Mystery Shopper Network and instantly compare what the Mystery Shoppers are saying with what your customers are saying. This is very powerful! With **Drip Intelligence** you may continuously keep track of and monitor your Mystery Shopper Network, continuously monitor and keep track of how customers are reacting to the business decisions you are making and be able to adjust your processes as well as the Mystery Shopper's routine "on the fly".

Drip Intelligence should be part of a cost effective web based Voice of the Customer Program that your customers use to tell you, in quantitative and behavioral terms, exactly what is driving their buying behavior, while providing enormous insight into your organization and continuously prioritizing areas for improvement. This application uses a proven methodology to determine the level of customers/patrons' (and/or vendors and employees) contentment with your company and then rolls the information gathered into true business intelligence capable of providing on-line **continuous** real time insight into your organization and prioritizing areas for improvement. Of course, this type program can identify gaps against specific customer perceptions and the correction of these weaknesses will lead to improved business outcomes. However, there is another distinct advantage in using the proper Voice of the Customer program. It should identify strengths in your organization that can be used as strategic advantage against your competition.

Successful businesses often lose the pulse of their customers and resort to guess work to make changes to facilities, products and services that are key components driving Customer Loyalty, Growth and Repeat Business. The smart companies make decisions based on continuous, organized, reliable and accurate data. That's Drip Intelligence!

Behind the byline
Mike St. Angelo is the President and CEO of NeuraMetrics, Inc. a firm dedicated to business improvement through the implementation of Best Practices and comprehensive assessments. NeuraMetrics Voice of the Customer Programs include Drip Intelligence. You may reach him at mstangelo@neurametrics.com. Or 904-246-9733