

WHAT ARE YOUR
CUSTOMERS
THINKING?



A WHITE PAPER

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What are Your Customers Thinking?

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Executive Summary

Feedback allows you to know what products or services your customers want or need in addition to the ones you already provide.

You can deduce only so much from your customers' purchasing behavior. Knowing what they think will be the difference in moving your business forward. Customers don't often volunteer information about their changing tastes, likes, goals, and ambitions; you have to ask them. Knowing these things can help you meet the needs of your ever-evolving customer base.

Market More Effectively

Asking the right questions of your customers will allow you to know what they need to hear from your marketing message.

Create Additional, Targeted Products or Services

Feedback allows you to know what products or services your customers want or need in addition to the ones you already provide.

Remove Products or Services That Waste Resources

By identifying areas where your resources are overextended, (costing you money or employee energy) you can eliminate what's not as profitable as other services or products.

Improve Customer Service Processes

Based on customer responses, you can identify areas to improve your customer experience.

Improve People Resources

Ask the right kind of questions to discover the gaps in the skills or training of your workforce.

How to Gather This Information

This white paper will help you know your customers by identifying who they are, gathering good intelligence on the things that matter, and understanding what to do with that information once it's collected.



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The Power and Purpose of Knowing Your Customers

Ultimately, the goal of marketing is to sell, whether it's a product, a service, or an idea. You want your target audience to buy. Knowing and understanding your customers will help you understand and deliver a message that allows them to see your brand as the answer to their problem.

Brands that know their consumer base can tap into their loyalty when the message is spot-on. You don't get to that level of perfection by accident. It takes effort to reveal the desires and needs of your customers that will become the anchor points of any brand messaging.

Think you know your customers well? Some major brands thought they did, and it led to some big public failures in 2017. Pepsi, Dove, and Papa Johns all miscalculated their audience and suffered through public relations nightmares.

What can we learn from their failures?

Stay away from political statements.

Pepsi has a long history of using celebrity endorsements and commercials featuring Hollywood or music A-listers doing what they do. They made a big blunder in 2017 when they attempted a Black Lives Matter and Police Lives Matter mash up with Kendall Jenner.

They missed the biggest piece of data about their customers. According to a survey done by A4, a marketing industry group, 57% of consumers do not want politics in marketing. We can analyze the Pepsi ad and try to dissect how it could have been done more effectively, or we can listen to the data and not create the ad in the first place.

When you know your customers and what resonates with them, you hold sway with them. When you don't know your customers, marketing to them becomes anybody's guess. You might feel like trying what everyone else is doing, yet end up wondering why the tried and true isn't working.

Knowledge is power. Knowing your consumer gives you the ability to craft a message that is exactly what they needed to hear at the exact moment they needed to hear it. You'll know what formats to use to reach them, allowing your call to action to affect them at the ideal moment.

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Identifying Your Customers

Knowing your customers starts with knowing who they are. Identifying all you can about who they are and how they live will help you start to understand what message will resonate best with them.

Customer Profile

Start by knowing what your ideal customer looks like. Whether you sell to individuals or businesses, they have a profile. From location and income to interests and community involvement, all of their information matters.

Look at your current customers and create a high-level description of who's buying, when they're buying, and what they're buying. If you can, also look at your competitors' current customers and create a description of them too. What are the differences?

You are not your customer, as Facebook soon figured out. Originally designed for college students, once the social media site was opened up for public consumption, the data showed that two-thirds of adults age 30 and older have Facebook profiles. These statistics have helped Facebook become a giant influence. Take a cue from their playbook: know your customers well enough to make a difference for your brand.

Customer Persona

Create a fictional character that is your ideal buyer. What do you know about them? Where do they live, how much do they make, and what stresses do they have that will bring them to your brand for relief? Once you have a persona laid out, how closely does that fictional character resemble who is actually buying from you?

Those differences are gold nuggets of potential data. You need to figure out why your ideal customer is not walking through your door. This data could also reveal that your ideal customer is not who you originally thought they were.



Gathering Good Intel on Your Customers

Through a combination of active intelligence gathering and smart listening techniques, you and your employees have the potential to reveal amazing details about who your customers are.

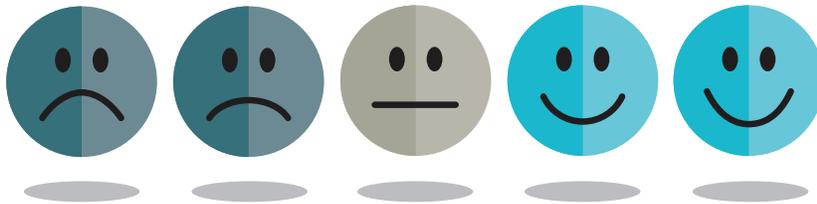
Comment Cards Not Just for Restaurants

The most common place you'll see a comment card is in the food industry, but that is not the only place to take advantage of the quick feedback capabilities of the unassuming comment card.

Comment cards are a great tool for getting quick feedback regarding your customers' experience with their visit to your establishment or event. Find out if they were fully satisfied with your employees, with your products or services, and if they have any suggestions for improvement.

Quick feedback is the expectation.

The standard format for comment cards is to ask five to ten questions on quality or satisfaction with a rating system for answers. Then, there are a few fill-in-the-blank questions that usually inquire about how you can improve your services or products.



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Frank's Transmission Service decided to change their comment card as part of their checkout process. They had been using a simple postcard with seven questions measuring a customer's satisfaction level on all stages of service as well as their probability of recommending their services to others.

The old card used checkboxes with a rating of 1-5. About 17% of their customers filled it out. The new card switched the checkboxes to images of the gas gauge in various states of full to empty to represent the 1-5 ratings. The uniqueness of the fuel gauge images drove up the percentage of customer responses to 52%.

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The Goal

Customer feedback must serve a purpose. Satisfaction rate is a good start, but it doesn't always give you the most useful information. You want to know three things:

1. If this customer will purchase again

2. What they might purchase

3. If they will tell their friends

Design your questions to give you this information.

Bonus

There is always a golden nugget that would help you better understand your customer. Figure out what that bit of information is and include that on your comment card.

An independent hotel in a mid-sized city uses these two questions on their comment cards that are left in the rooms in addition to the standard satisfactory ratings:

1. Was your stay for business or leisure?
2. What was one thing you loved about our city that would make you want to come back?

After a full year of collecting this data, their marketing team had a clear road map of the events of the city, both for business and for pleasure that they could incorporate into their marketing. They capitalized on the main attractions and created increased interest by adding similar activity ideas to their seasonal advertising.

Surveys

More Information

Surveys allow you the opportunity to gather more information than a postcard-sized comment card. Their purpose goes beyond customer satisfaction and digs into the very heart of information gathering. Surveys are about statistics and probabilities. You use a survey when you want to confirm an assumption or figure out what you don't yet know for certain about customer behavior.

A survey can be given to your customers to discover additional details about their likes and dislikes about your products or even your competitors. They don't have to be part of a customer experience to be effective. A direct mail campaign is a perfect way to conduct a survey.

Unlike comment cards, surveys should stay away from rating questions (i.e. "on the scale of 1 to 5"). You have the opportunity to get specific with the kind of information you want to know.

Every question you ask should be an actionable question.

Keep the survey as short as possible and cut the fluff. There's no such thing as a question you "should" include. It's your survey; ask exactly what you need to know.

Know Your Goal

What is your reason for sending a survey? What do you want to do? Are you thinking about expanding your product line? Are you looking for new opportunities to attract customers? Whatever it is, keep your questions on point.

Rewards

Surveys take effort, even short surveys. A thank you gift, discount coupon, or other incentive is the perfect way to reward your prospect or customer for completing your survey. Sometimes people will complete a survey without any return compensation, but those that include some kind of incentive are more successful.

Return

Consider how a survey will find its way back to you. If you mail them out, how do you receive them back? Return postage is a great option. If you have a retail location, perhaps have customers return the survey for their reward, whether that is a free item or discount on their purchase.

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Turtle Mountain Rescue, a non-profit animal rescue, had been fundraising to build a shelter. Though they had more than 11,000 Facebook followers, more than 100 active volunteers, and a mailing list of more than 2,000, they were more than two years behind in their fundraising goal.

A local real estate agent, who often helped organize events for the rescue, funded a direct-mail survey. They discovered that the fundraising links were often missed on social media. With this new information, which confirmed their suspicions, they were able to change their focus, boost their fundraising dollars, and are in the process of building their new shelter.

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Hold an Event

The Gathering

Asking customers for their opinions and thoughts at your live event is a moment to take full advantage of. While they are happy and enjoying your hospitality, it is a great time to do a little research on what makes them tick.

At the annual fall teacher's conference, the major sponsor of the conference held a dinner on the first evening. As part of the dinner, the teachers were given a series of question cards that were different colors. During different moments of the evening, teachers filled out one of the questions for a chance to win supplies for their classrooms and gift certificates from the sponsor's retail locations. The sponsor received actionable information from their dinner with one segment of their target audience.

Reviews

In Their Own Words

Gather all reviews that you can from all the digital resources your customers use. They will tell you what some of your customers think. But what about the rest? Just like sending out a survey, you can send out a response card with your direct marketing campaign that simply asks for a review.

Laurel M, a real estate agent for one of the most recognizable realtor companies in the nation, includes a request for a review card with return postage as part of her follow-up thank you kit. The card includes the choice of either mailing the postcard or going online and writing a review on Google. She says 70% of her new homeowners send the card.

Face to Face

Point of Contact

Every time you interact face to face with your customers is a valuable opportunity to listen to their feedback. Often, however, people are more likely not to want to hurt your feelings and are more likely to downplay any negative experience they have had.

Creative Tips

A Milwaukee credit union set up a comment table in the lobby to find out what customers thought of mobile banking on their phones. They modified an old safe to act as a receptacle for the comment cards.

There's no reason to use a cookie cutter design with all the same questions as everyone else. Mix it up and show your uniqueness by using great design and color on comment cards and surveys.

Use Graphics

No matter what you're designing, a survey or comment card, images and unique graphics, like Frank's use of gas gauges, stand out and your customers will pay attention.

Color

Use pops of color within the design to catch your customers' attention. They are more likely to read the questions and fill out the form if it is printed in color.

Short Questions

The shorter the comment card or survey, the more likely the customer will complete it.

Inside the Box

Create a unique receptacle for comment cards or surveys.



What Knowing Your Customers Actually Means: Next Steps

Customized Solutions

Based on what you know about your customers, what they buy and don't buy, what they say and what they don't say, you will be able to adjust your offerings. You may find information that allows you to customize your particular solution in a way that no other brand is doing to satisfy a need that you recognized first because of your hard work gathering data.

Location Location Location

Savvy leadership with customer knowledge leads to offering the right products at the right locations. If you have multiple locations or a single location, knowing what your region needs and doesn't need is part of the success equation.

Price Matters

You could find that adjusting your price in one direction or the other could lead to higher profits.

Features

Identifying features that have been under-marketed can almost be like creating new features without the research and development. We often overlook the obvious only to realize that it's not always obvious to our customers that our products include such features. Listening to your data will help uncover gaps in your messaging and enable your marketing materials to become more effective with an adjustment to your message.

Better Warranties

Customers are always concerned with reliability and consumer protection. Knowing your customer could reveal concerns that could help you adjust your warranties to fit your customers' expectations more closely or help protect your bottom line more comprehensively.

Growth

If knowing your customer can help with any or all of the above, the end game of growing your business is a clear possibility. You'll know just who to target and when to make sure that growth is possible and sustainable.



Summary

Getting insight into what your customers are thinking takes effort. People usually don't remember to tell you the things that are useful to you. By asking them the questions that are important to your business, you'll get closer to knowing your customers.

Knowing your customers, their aspirations, challenges, frustrations, and motivations will help you understand how to communicate with them, what products to offer, and how to improve your services.

Multiple ways of gathering their thoughts will help you understand their needs and how you can best serve them and make your sales goals. People like to give feedback if it is convenient and entertaining. Clever surveys and comment cards go a long way to opening up customer communication.

About Your Sponsor

What kind of questions do you want to ask your customer? We would love to help you put together a survey or comment card that is as unique as you are. We have some ideas that will work great for your business and are ready to provide you with the resources you need to get to know your customers better.

When you are ready to get started on any print project, we are here to help. Our onsite designers are experienced and great at creating projects that you'll be proud to hand out. We can provide you with professional products and design services.

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