

Viewpoints

Essays from leading experts on market research



MarketingWeek

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2008 | VP, Maritz Research Europe
2007 | VP Millward Brown Optimor (Kantar)
2003 | Head of global solutions, Research International (Kantar)
2000 | Chief strategy officer, Carat Interactive (Aegis)
1996 | VP Market Facts (Aegis)
1992 | Director, TNS
1987 | "Rocket scientist", Ministry of Defence



Customer experience measurement: the next generation

The way we go about measuring and managing customer experiences needs to be transformed. How can we develop the insight department of the future?

Customer experience management is about closing the loop between the feedback customers give and the experiences they get. The feedback must be acted on, to bring about change within an organisation and to improve customers' experiences.

But, with the advent of the digital age, businesses are losing control of customer feedback as people share their views about brands and experiences openly for all to see. This means the ways we go about collecting and collating information need to change, as do the roles and responsibilities of customer insight departments.

Right now, the three main parties involved – customers, customer facing staff and insight departments – aren't satisfied with the state of affairs.

- Customers want to know how their data are being used and what they are going to get in return. They want to tell us about the things they think are important. They can do this via any number of chatrooms, review sites and social networks, so why take the time to fill out boring questionnaires?

- Customer-facing staff don't always feel that the customer feedback reports they receive are useful. Too often, these teams focus on alternative ways of improving their scores rather than improving the customer's experience.

- Insight teams are inundated with information from many different sources; what they really want is fewer figures and more direction.

In a perfect world, customers would want to give feedback with confidence that they would get a return. The feedback process itself would contribute to a positive experience. Customer service teams would value feedback and act upon it, and insight teams would operate in an environment where all information sources were integrated, aligned and distilled, resulting in consistent action. ●

ategorisation framework



Organisations need to measure and understand the gap between their brand promises and the experiences of their customers.

10 positive things you can do today

1 Web harvesting
Find out what people are saying about your brand on review sites, social networks, blogs and chatrooms. Be careful: you should not look at this in isolation, as online sentiment can be unrepresentative of your target market. Use convergence analysis to see how these comments line up with other sources of information.

2 Textual analysis
Textual analysis software allows us to make more extensive and effective use of open comments from all kinds of feedback, from surveys to web harvesting, which in turn gives us more opportunity to let our customers talk about what they want to talk about.

3 Adaptive questioning techniques
We have to accept that sometimes people don't remember anything about an experience, so we have to skip detail. One example of an adaptive questioning technique is to ask about memorable moments – only if the respondent remembers something good or bad about an experience do we then ask them what it was.

4 Look at the bigger picture
So many organisations treat brand and experience independently. But it is a combination of communication-driven images and direct experiences that influences people's choice and loyalty decisions and their behaviour. We need to combine brand and experience in the same analysis, in order to properly determine the drivers of profitable behaviour and create more accurate return on investment models.

5 Understand your brand delivery gap
Organisations need to measure and understand the gap between their brand promises and the experiences of their customers. This way they can prioritise investments between communications and operations as well as within them.

6 Create a common framework to integrate data
Different sources of information are often organised and categorised in different ways. Companies need to create a common, harmonised framework so they can categorise information from any source into the same buckets. This simple task, if well thought through, enables comparisons to be

made between survey data, complaints, web harvests, feedback from frontline teams and any other source of information about customer experiences.

7 Convergence analysis
Not all information should contribute the same weight of importance to our overall conclusions. Sources need to be scored on robustness, representativeness and clarity of message. Does the message come from a few dozen people or a few thousand? Do the participants speak for all of your target market or only for a small minority?

8 Don't report – communicate
Communicating the findings internally and getting them acted upon is a major challenge for many organisations. Different end users will inevitably want different things. Alternative channels, such as newsletters, videos, workshops and training sessions, are better ways of communicating than a research debriefing.

9 Share data publicly
The concept of publishing ratings and findings for everyone to see is contentious, but marketers have little or no control over this. People are already sharing their views and opinions online, rating and ranking brands on review sites, social networks, blogs and chatrooms. If we don't share information in a controlled way, it will simply get out in an uncontrolled way instead.

10 Blueprint the customer experience
Map out the links and connecting paths between operations, communications, employees, customers and financial goals. Starting with financial goals, agree on the kinds of behaviour you are looking for to achieve these goals, and determine what experiences and brand opinions people need to have for them to behave in these desired ways. This cascades down to internal processes. The goal is to have a guide for what we need to do in terms of operations, communications and staff-customer interactions to deliver the right images, experiences and opinions.

Utopia need not be a dream. In a brave new world, insight teams need to be part of the next generation of customer experience management, in which all stakeholders are happy to participate and from which everyone gets something in return.