Customer Experience Management

10 tips for the successful
development and execution of
Voice of the Customer Programmes

Chris Bland
Research Director
SPA Future Thinking

SPA Future Thinking

Introduction

Voice of the Customer Programmes, sometimes referred to as Customer Feedback Programmes, have the ultimate goal of ensuring the delivery of a great customer experience; to maximise customer loyalty and consequently to improve business performance.

They are widely used by many organisations in many customer centric industries and are designed, implemented and executed to help these companies understand their customers' needs, attitudes and experiences and to drive immediate action on customer feedback.

Building a comprehensive Voice of the Customer Programme has many interconnected elements. Within this document we have outlined the 10 best practices for developing, implementing and running Voice of the Customer Programmes which will define the future success of your programme.

You will read how to design a successful programme to capture feedback from customers to apply to organisational improvement to achieve greater customer retention.

1 Make the customer feedback part of the brand experience

Your customers will give you feedback on your products and services if the right feedback channels are available to them. Therefore you should be aware of all available touch points between your organisation and the customer.

Offer your customers as many channels as possible for collecting customer feedback and allow your customers to provide their opinions about their product and service experiences. This could include transactional surveys, social media i.e. twitter and Facebook, word-of-mouth, internet blogs and forums, review sites, direct communication with employees, call centres, etc.

2 Make the voice of the customer tangible on the internet

Your customer is talking about you and to you; in countless internet forums, blogs, on social networks and review sites. These communication streams clearly detail your customer's views and provide in depth detail on the quality of your products and services.

It is therefore essential in today's environment that your customer feedback programme embraces and integrates the monitoring of social media and tracking of blogs etc. By actively monitoring discussions about your company you can identify current topics, spot overall trends and opportunities and vitally, you can intervene and manage specific customer issues.

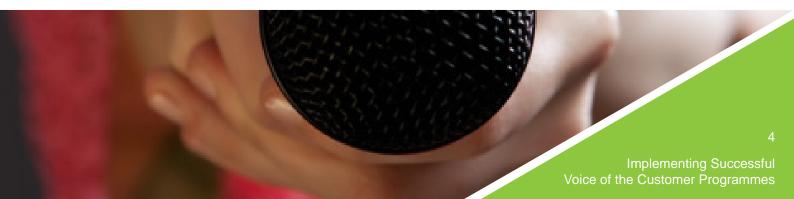**3** Design appealing and engaging survey experiences

Any survey of your customers should form part of the overall customer experience. Therefore any feedback survey should invite customers to a dialogue about the brand experience through more conversational questionnaires. For example the use of open-ended questions allows the customers to tell their story about the experience.

Therefore, when executing customer satisfaction surveys avoid long lists of statements about internal processes, which are potentially not relevant to the customer. The survey should be created in a form that the customer can provide open and relevant feedback in terms of their experience. Customers should have a certain degree of control over the length and the content of the survey according to the relevance of the transaction. Multiple forms of response should be offered to the customers, e.g. telephone, mobile, online, SMS, postal, IVR, etc. In online surveys customers can be engaged through the use of rich media techniques, i.e. more visual, interactive and dynamic questions and through the personalisation of the survey experience.

4 Close the loop on customer feedback

Customer dissatisfaction and disloyalty is very often a gradual process. By immediately identifying any negativity as it arises we can address specific issues and convert customer satisfaction into loyalty.

Understand the requirements of your customers at all times. The use of real-time pre-defined triggers on surveys detailing customer concerns will provide frontline staff the opportunity to resolve the issue to drive customer satisfaction and retention. The implementation of a formal process including predefined responsibilities, action planning tools and escalation processes will help to resolve customer issues early. In order to close the customer feedback loop it is important to inform customers about the resolution activities, let customers track the activities and gather feedback on the final resolution.

5 Use smarter techniques to unlock insights from unstructured and unsolicited data

By only using conventional structured data from surveys the more rich insights will be missed. The use of sophisticated analytics tools will provide greater understanding about the relationships between customer decisions, their motivations, their sentiments and their true reasons for satisfaction and loyalty.
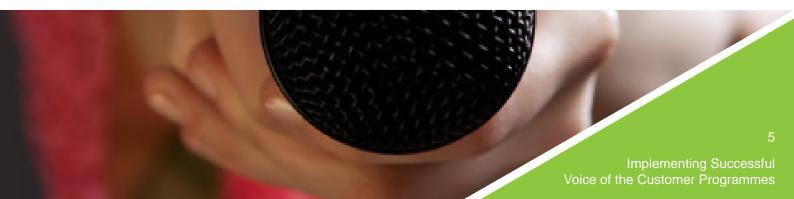
Surveys, comment fields, call centre transcripts, inbound e-mails, social media posts and tweets exhibit a comprehensive pool of information and insights. Additionally posted videos, podcasts and other sources of unsolicited feedback can be insightful in more closely understanding your customers. Smart techniques such as text analysis and sentiment analytics harness rich stores of unstructured data. Combining this with traditional data sources will provide valuable insights to help you better understand customer experience and behaviour. This in turn will help support and inform strategic and operational decisions.

6 Link customer feedback to other business data

In order to analyse and effectively assess the root causes of customer dissatisfaction and disloyalty and to identify the operational improvements to be implemented a holistic view and understanding of the customer experience is required. This can be achieved through the combination of disparate data into a single view.

Transactional customer survey data needs to be combined with data from other enterprise systems or other sources to be seamlessly integrated into one holistic system. For example, these sources could include other survey data, customer data, transaction data, finance data, operational metrics, etc. Additionally the combination of survey data with data from social media posts, tweets and internet forums will give you a great opportunity to understand the thoughts, emotions and motivations of your customers to better identify areas for improvements.

7 Communicate custom reports throughout the organisation

Transparency is one of the key success factors in the design and execution of every customer feedback programme. It is key to report online, in real-time and from one central portal. By creating individual user groups through role-based permissions the most relevant information and insights can be provided according to individual needs.
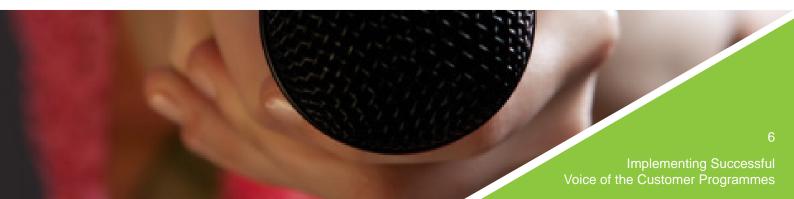
It is vital to ensure that the "right people" have access to the "right data" at the "right time". Big picture summaries and strategy relevant insights will be distributed to the executive management, operations managers will see detailed tactical reports and frontline staff should have access to easy to understand and actionable findings through interactive dashboards with drill-down capabilities to root-cause elements.

8 Shift the focus from metrics to diagnostics

Capture and analyse customer interactions and turn this information into meaningful, actionable business insights. Understanding what drives customer satisfaction and loyalty is therefore key.

Through the application of advanced analytics and techniques such as data mining key insights to predict future customer behaviour such as satisfaction and dissatisfaction can be generated to drive significant operational improvement. Advanced analytics such as driver analysis, predictive modelling, data linkage, text analytics, segmentation, forecasting, etc. will provide insights that help implement action plans and understand the impact of your business strategies.
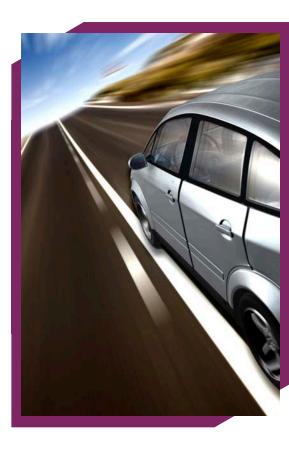
9 Implement a process to drive actions and improvements from the data

As a matter of course even the best data will not improve a company's performance if it is not continuously converted into actions. The customer feedback programme should be used to recognize new challenges early enough, to assess the relevance of specific issues and to implement a strategy for the conversion of improvement measures.

You will not improve customer satisfaction through short-term ad-hoc actions. Continuity and a systematic approach are vital. Therefore a customer feedback programme should move beyond simple satisfaction reports but should integrate easy to use customer experience and performance management tools for frontline staff with formal processes and procedures for implementing actions, e.g. best practice guide, target setting, action planning, closed-loop issue resolution, improvement planners, etc.

10 Make the customer feedback programme a strategic initiative

In order to make your customer feedback programme a success it is essential to be dedicated to feedback, have a dedicated team in place, get buy-in from frontline staff and have support from the top.

Within the organisation it is necessary that resources are available in all involved units and that executive sponsorship is achieved. In order to address issues on cultural factors or change management processes, HR should be involved from the beginning. Additionally the ROI of the programme should be figured out in the design phase to enable milestones and targets to be set.

Summary

In summary, don't forget about:

Making customer feedback part of the brand experience

Making the voice of the customer tangible on the internet

Designing appealing and engaging survey experiences

Closing the loop on customer feedback

Using smarter techniques to unlock insights from unstructured and unsolicited data

Linking customer feedback to other business data

Communicating customer reports throughout the organsiation

Shifting the focus from metrics to diagnostics

Implementing a process to drive actions and improvements from the data
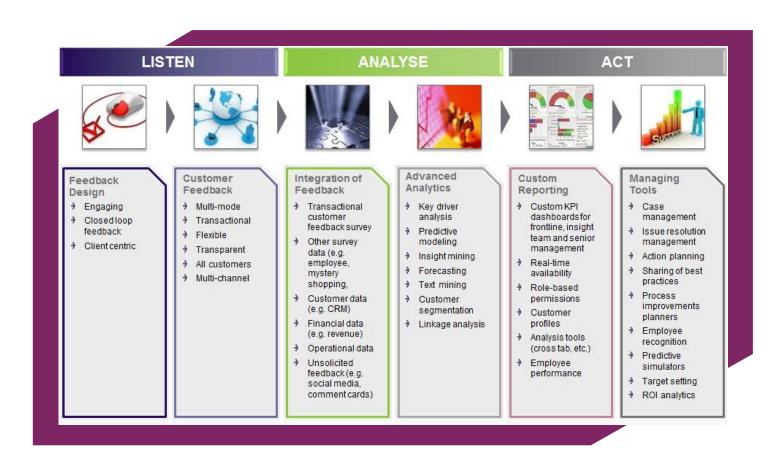
Making the customer feedback programme a strategic initiative

Our staged process of integrated Voice of the Customer enables your ability to:

→ Design customer centric feedback mechanisms

→ Engage with your customers

→ Integrate feedback from various sources

→ Manage the information and apply advanced analytics

→ Deliver actionable information and learn from insights

→ Drive immediate action from feedback to improve performance

LISTEN		ANALYSE		ACT	
Feedback Design	**Customer Feedback**	**Integration of Feedback**	**Advanced Analytics**	**Custom Reporting**	**Managing Tools**
→ Engaging → Closed loop feedback → Client centric	→ Multi-mode → Transactional → Flexible → Transparent → All customers → Multi-channel	→ Transactional customer feedback survey → Other survey data (e.g. employee, mystery shopping, → Customer data (e.g. CRM) → Financial data (e.g. revenue) → Operational data → Unsolicited feedback (e.g. social media, comment cards)	→ Key driver analysis → Predictive modeling → Insight mining → Forecasting → Text mining → Customer segmentation → Linkage analysis	→ Custom KPI dashboards for frontline, insight team and senior management → Real-time availability → Role-based permissions → Customer profiles → Analysis tools (cross tab, etc.) → Employee performance	→ Case management → Issue resolution management → Action planning → Sharing of best practices → Process improvements planners → Employee recognition → Predictive simulators → Target setting → ROI analytics

Chris Bland - Research Director at SPA Future Thinking

Chris began his career in Technology & Telecoms before joining SPA Future Thinking in 2006 to work with media and consumer clients. He is a firm believer in putting the voice of the customer into the heart of business decision, linking feedback to key business performance metrics.

Chris has helped clients design, define and launch new programmes, as well as manage and evolve existing programmes to meet new requirements. He has extensive experience of building customer experience studies for media clients including BskyB, Sky Italia, and OSN, the leading pay TV provider in the middle east; Advising on brand strategy, customer retention and how to integrate customer experience data to its' best business advantage.

chris.bland@spafuturethinking.com

+44 (0) 20 7843 9777

SPA Future Thinking is the result of a merger between a number of specialist agencies in 2010 and 2011, and has developed to become one of the fastest growing and largest independent market research companies in Europe, with more than 200 employees and offices in the UK, Germany, France and Italy and a partner network in 38 countries worldwide. With combined industry experience of over 40 years we offer thought leadership across a wide range of specialisms and we provide genuine expertise and understanding across a wide range of industry sectors.

For over a decade SPA Future Thinking has been providing strategic research and actionable insights to a number of leading automotive manufacturers. We offer both custom solutions and analytics and proprietary techniques to help guide the decisions that you make in areas like market development, new product development, innovation, customer satisfaction and experience, brand, communications, buying behaviour and more.

www.spafuturethinking.com