

## **Independent Surveys To Do or Not To Do - That is the Question**

The data needed to optimize the performance of a company resides outside their walls – with both customers and prospects. Gathering this data honestly, objectively, accurately and timely is critical to a company. Unfortunately, many companies are making very good decisions based upon very bad data. Information utilized in the company usually comes from internal customer facing departments; Sales, Marketing, Customer Service/Support, and possibly external from Distribution Channels. While this data may be somewhat useful as one input, it is seldom accurate. Customers and prospects are typically not totally honest with company personnel directly. Add to this human filters, interpretations and individual agendas, and your end result is data that can be extremely misleading.

Surveys have become pervasive in our society. Surveys, *properly done*, can be the springboard that launches a company to the “best in class” category we all strive for.

Properly done is the operative phrase here. Once a company decides they need to gather data directly from their customers and/or prospects, the task has just begun. Several critical decisions now must be made:

- In-house vs. Outsourced
- Survey vs. Quality Monitoring
- Objectives
- Survey design

### **In-house vs. Outsourced**

Only the largest, industry segment leaders can get away with conducting their own surveys. Consider the large auto manufacturer who conducted 3 identical service related surveys simultaneously. The surveys were professionally designed (more about this under “Survey Design”). One-third of the surveys were outsourced, one-third conducted by Corporate Headquarters, and one-third directly by a dealership. Predictably, the response rate conducted by the dealership itself was quite low. Customers simply did not

want to “confront” a business directly that they would be returning to. While the response rate was higher when conducted by headquarters (people felt the organization was so huge that they wouldn’t be singled out), the response rate conducted by the independent third party was significantly higher. The bottom line: we the people want to talk about our experience; we just don’t want to talk about it with you. Very large companies can, however, obtain a large enough representative sample to be useful. Mid-size and small businesses are best served by outsourcing.

## **Surveys vs. Quality Monitoring**

We’ve all heard it; “Their service has gone downhill so badly I’ll never deal with them again.” Many companies do “customer satisfaction” surveys once a year, or even twice a year. While this is better than doing nothing, they still miss the boat. These companies should be doing Quality Monitoring. The damage that can occur in between surveys can be enormous.

Surveys are appropriate when a company has the need to gather data on a specific occurrence. “Did your last upgrade to your product improve performance?” Market research for future products or enhancements is another good example for a survey. Quality Monitoring, however, while utilizing survey techniques, is persistent and consistent. Quality Monitoring is an on-going, real-time process which affords the benefit of immediately discovering when processes begin to take a downturn, and allows corrective action to be taken before there is a negative impact on the company. If you begin losing customer loyalty and don’t discover it for several months, chances are you will never regain those customers. If the market shifts, and your “tried and true” sales message is tired and no longer resonates with your prospects, waiting until there is a revenue shortfall is disastrous.

Companies who do surveys when they should be doing quality monitoring are doing themselves a disservice. First determine which technique best fits your desired results, then search for a company specializing in that area.

## **Objectives**

Comprehending the difference between surveys and quality monitoring, the objective of a survey becomes obvious. With quality monitoring, however, defining objectives becomes more intricate. The best results derived from quality monitoring are when it is done throughout all customer/prospect facing organizations, such as Sales, Marketing and Service/Support. This is not to say that one department alone should not conduct quality monitoring, however, the “fix” needed as defined by the resulting data may require cooperation from other departments.

The overall objective of the company is no secret. You want to sell as much as you can, have 100% customer satisfaction, and do it profitably. Consider the company whose customers are satisfied with the Support Department, but their customer happiness is still low. Why? Quite possibly the product or service is not meeting expectations. Why?

Was the product oversold to begin with? Or were there future expectations simply not met?

Almost all companies tout a quality message. Few do much about it beyond lip service. It takes time, effort and money to truly be at the top of your market segment in quality. Quality monitoring is for those companies that are serious about quality and want to reap the rewards the market bestows on top quality products and services. Quality monitoring is most effective when viewed as an integral operating procedure within a company. Business objectives are set for each customer-facing department. In marketing, are you designing a solution the world wants, defining a message that resonates, and obtaining top quality leads? In sales, are you delivering that message in a clear, concise, and digestible manner? Is the support organization meeting customer expectation? The departments need to meet on a regular basis and review the latest results, and take coordinated actions to continually improve in all areas.

## **Survey Design**

Developing effective surveys is a science. Many companies are not doing themselves any favors with the surveys they use. This is particularly true when using survey techniques to do quality monitoring. There are many types of questions that can be asked. For example, should you solicit yes/no responses, rating responses, assumptive multiple choice, etc. Maybe the information you desire requires a combination of these. And how many questions to ask also has to be given careful consideration.

A skilled, experienced survey designer knows not only how to best utilize the many different techniques to optimize response quantity and quality, but also how to ask questions that are unambiguous. It is a fatal survey error that asks one or more questions that are open to interpretation. The responder may very well be answering a question relative to their interpretation, and therefore rendering the response useless, and possibly damaging to your company if acted upon. A good survey designer will never ask you “what questions do you want to ask?” A good survey designer will ask you what you are trying to accomplish and what data will help you accomplish that, then design questions that will give you the desired results. There are several web sites that can assist you in designing surveys should you chose to do them yourself.

## **Conclusion**

Human nature is what it is. People don't talk much about mediocre products, services or support. Rest assured they do talk – a lot – about either good or bad experiences. And for the most part, they don't talk to you. But they do talk about you. Avoid doing a poor quality job of quality monitoring. Call in the experts; it's well worth it.

For more information on Quality Monitoring visit [www.contact-101.com](http://www.contact-101.com)