
BPIR Management Brief : Vol. 2 Iss. 1 - Customer Satisfaction Surveys

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Welcome to the latest issue of the BPIR.com Management Brief that provides short, easily digestible research summaries based on specific topics or tools. Summaries include comments from experts, case examples, and survey analyses. Topics for the briefs are based on those submitted as requests through our members' Research Request Service. Read and absorb, then pass on to your staff/colleagues to do the same.

Customer Satisfaction Surveys - definition

A survey designed to obtain customer feedback on satisfaction with an organisation's products and/or services.

The stage

Over the last couple of decades measurement of customer satisfaction has received considerable interest as organisations attempt to determine what their customers think about them. An overall aim is to use this information to develop strategies that will differentiate them from their competition. It is an important measure as, theoretically, customers must be satisfied if they are to repurchase or recommend the organisation to others. Although there are many ways of determining this information the best way of assessing customer satisfaction is by asking customers directly. This is usually done through a customer satisfaction survey.

However, not all surveys are effectively undertaken or the results used to drive organisational strategies and improvement. Many writers also believe that surveys are not the best method of collecting such important information with 'symposiums', focus groups and the like, being more effective methods, and there is also a movement towards measuring and managing customer perceived value in place of, or at least in tandem with, customer satisfaction measurements.

Whatever method of collection is used, to be most effective:

- The organisation should determine why it wants to collect customer satisfaction data and how it intends to use this information;
- Senior management should drive the process;
- Collection, analysis and use of the data should be integrated into strategic and organisational plans;
- The data that is collected should be linked to strategic and organisational plans and measure what the organisation is aiming to achieve;
- Baseline data should be collected to provide a benchmark for measuring improvements;
- Results should be widely distributed and action plans developed to make required improvements;
- Data collection should be a regular event.

Expert Opinion

Customers are most organisations' main source of revenue but with the variety of activities that occur in organisations it is easy for their 'voice' to get lost or for assumptions to be made. Craig Bailey (2002) founder of Customer Centricity (a customer relationship consulting company) notes "Make no mistake, business is about numbers. In my opinion, there are two sets of numbers that every company must track and manage: the financials and customer satisfactions levels. If executives of a corporation only care about the financial indicators, the company will lose sight of their source of revenue - the customer". As a result, it is wise to track and manage customer satisfaction metrics (perceived performance against expectations) as well as other measures, and companies are encouraged to include customer satisfaction results among the key performance indicators that are reviewed by executive leadership on a regularly planned basis.

An understanding of customer satisfaction can be gained through the use and analysis of customer satisfaction surveys (CSS). Surveys are a valuable tool and can provide a wealth of information back to an organisation on how their customers perceive what they do. Measuring customer satisfaction levels via surveys enables organisations to obtain feedback on how they are performing, on what they could change or improve as seen through their customer's eyes.

CSS's can be used as market research tools and are frequently part of product/service improvement programs that can then be used to improve the quality of processes within an organisation that have an end effect on the products, services and relationships offered. Customer surveys may include the use of questionnaires, personal interviews, telephone surveys, on-line form completion, and seminars to monitor customer satisfaction. Systematising the use of these tools can then provide a baseline for comparing results over extended time periods and enable fact-based decision-making.

Typically, during a survey, a group of customers (mostly past or current, but sometimes prospective) are asked specific questions in order to gauge their judgements about the organisation, its products and/or services offered, processes, and staff.

Conducted effectively, a CSS can provide a wealth of information that can assist organisations in meeting and measuring the mission, vision, goals, and strategic plans. They also enable organisations to communicate with, and respond to, their customers in ways that can increase customer satisfaction, loyalty, and future revenue. However, Bruce Katcher (2003), a specialist in conducting employee opinion and CSS's notes that "Improperly conducted, such surveys do little more than provide interesting but not very useful information". Jeffrey Cole, Assistant Vice President Global Quality of NCR Corporation and Mark Walker, Vice President of Walker Information (2003) take these thoughts further, "The shelves of corporate America are littered with binders full of survey results. They're fine looking documents (although they're probably longer than necessary), full of wonderful charts, graphs, and tables. Many, however, are collecting dust! Sure, they generated some excitement for 24-48 hours. But, six months later, any improvement

projects have either augered into the ground, crashing and burning, or have simply vanished with a wimper -- fallen victim to shifting priorities, the latest re-org, or basic lack of interest". In such instances Bailey suggests that there are two options:

1. "Stop the survey process (save your money and your customers time)..." or
2. "...leverage the customer satisfaction survey results as a catalyst for continuous improvement".

CSS information must be meaningful, usable, and lead to improvements if it is to be leveraged fully and classed as best practice. The information that a survey can provide includes customer perceptions on:

- What features they like best about current products and/or services and what features are unnecessary;
- Which products and/or services hold the most interest to specific customers, or groups of customers;
- What new products/services they want/need or expect;
- Their satisfaction with day-to-day services provided by the organisation;
- The quality and strength of their relationship with your organisation;
- Billing, warranty, complaint management, account management and service issues;
- Knowledge, general performance and helpfulness of the organisation;
- The organisation and staff's responsiveness;
- Their future purchasing plans;
- Their loyalty and commitment to your organisation, product and/or service;

Quantitative values, generally percentage figures or overall ratings, that result from respondents providing rankings (e.g. least to most important) or a numerical figure (e.g. 1 through 5) to specific attitudinal statements or product/service attributes can provide an indication of trends in satisfaction and allow for easy correlations to be made. These figures can help to identify, in a numerical format, the drivers of customer satisfaction for the organisation. It has been generally believed, over the last decade, that the higher/lower the index number is for a particular attitude or attribute, the more loyal the customer is, the less likely they will be to move to the competition, the more satisfied they are, the greater the chances of increasing the companies revenue is etc.

CSS's can be used to feed into formulae that produce a numerical 'index value' to indicate the overall level of customer satisfaction of an organisation. Information used in the formula may or may not include other key measures that indicate a satisfaction value. Such an index can be benchmarked against other similarly designed indexes from other organisations allowing vital comparisons to be made that can lead to understanding performance in the market, this intelligence can then be used strategically.

The interest in benchmarking levels of customer satisfaction between organisations is illustrated by the existence of two independently operated indexes, the American Satisfaction Index and the European Satisfaction Index. These indexes administer independent surveys to the public in regard to companies throughout the two continents.

Considerable value can be gained from knowing such information and being able to determine key drivers of satisfaction. However, Lawrence Crosby and Sheree Johnson (2002) of Symmetrics Marketing Corporation in the USA note "If a customer loyalty index is to serve any purpose in guiding management decisions, it must be a reliable indicator of customer attitudes and intentions" and "Effective customer measures must be adapted to the peculiarities of the firm and the firm's strategies". They stress that standardized, do-it-yourself (DIY) surveys and survey templates that can be found in such places as the internet may not be effective as "A concept like customer loyalty can be quite different depending on the industry and a given firm's strategy, value proposition, and target segments".

The index number(s) is but one indication of customer satisfaction. Crosby and Johnson also comment "Unfortunately, some companies have spent millions of dollars on customer surveys, assuming improvements in a customer satisfaction metric would translate into better customer retention, increased market share, and greater profitability" and "The factors driving satisfaction aren't necessarily the same ones driving customer loyalty and business results" with companies now tracking value, loyalty, relationship strength and what they want the customer to do e.g. consult their organisation on their needs and wants, treat the organisation as their first port of call, purchase X percentage (%) of their products/services from the organisation.

Every survey, and measurement that the survey aims to collect, should have a clear and rational goal and pay attention to the areas where satisfaction is high as well where there are problems. For example, the survey should assess the customers' perceptions of the company's performance in terms of the various drivers of satisfaction and loyalty. Where possible the drivers of customer satisfaction - which customers consider to be the most important - should be converted into operational measures within the organisation. Typical drivers include product or service cost, product or service quality, after sales service, value for money, your price vs. your competitors price, responsiveness, on time delivery performance etc. Measures such as recommendations to others and repeat purchasing can also be used to indicate satisfaction. After establishing such a baseline (or benchmark) a company must set measurable and achievable goals in terms of where it wants to be.

Katcher has identified seven guidelines to help establish a useful survey programme - one that will provide meaningful input into an organisations strategic planning process:

1. Establish clear, quantifiable objectives related to your strategic plans i.e. the survey should be developed with specific objectives in mind, it should test these objectives and provide data to assist with future planning;
2. Any survey and improvement programme will only be successful if senior management are involved. This includes setting the survey's objectives, monitoring the data gathering process, interpreting the results, and actively implementing the solutions;
3. The survey must provide an opportunity for customers to voice their opinions, both positive and negative. Customer input in the survey design and development process will ensure that data is collected on issues of

importance - conducting pre-survey interviews with customers and asking front-line employees for their input are two ways of achieving this.

4. Actively encourage customers to respond and make it easy for them to do so:
 - a. Use multiple methods e.g. mail, internet, telephone surveys;
 - b. Provide an incentive to reply e.g. a gift or gift certificate, a donation to a charity;
 - c. Over-communicate e.g. send personalised letters regarding the importance of the survey, follow up with a phone call of thanks or a reminder if a response has not been received by the due date;
 - d. Personalise the survey to different customer groups so that you avoid asking irrelevant questions;
 - e. Make it easy for customers to respond e.g. use postage-paid pre-addressed envelopes, toll free numbers etc.
5. Develop an action plan for the survey's implementation. The plan should outline not only who is involved in the surveys design and development, but who will review the results and be responsible and accountable for acting on them - this will include senior managers assessing the results against the vision, mission, goals and strategic plans for the organisation, and altering plans, strategies and processes as necessary;
6. Communicate the results widely. The results of the survey, as well as the actions that will be taken should be communicated to:
 - a. All customers, this will include acknowledgement of their participation in the survey and what measures will be taken to address any areas of concern;
 - b. Specific customers: customers with specific concerns should be contacted personally and be informed how their exact issues will be addressed;
 - c. Employees: including the outcomes of the survey and what their role is in implementing any opportunities for improvement that have been identified.
7. Establish an ongoing survey process and aim to make surveying customers how your organisation does business - not just a random event from time to time. By surveying on a regular basis trends can be tracked, and assessments can be made of the effects of changes made in response to prior surveys and the viability of the organisations strategic plans.

As a result of their 12 years experience in conducting customer surveys at NCR (an IT-based business solutions company in the USA), Cole and Walker have identified eight practices that have helped them to get the most out of their survey process:

1. Build it into the objectives: at NCR delighting the customer is paramount and the voice of the customer is represented in management objectives. To reinforce this, 'Delighting the Customer' is one of 10 objectives of the CEO and this cascades to the Heads of each Business Unit and their Leadership Teams. The CEO is also held accountable for results for this objective, as are Business Unit Heads, Leadership Teams and individual sales force members.
2. Leadership Team and Business Unit reviews: reviews re progress in Delighting the Customer occur monthly and quarterly.

3. Leverage technology: NCR uses technology to track progress towards their objective, conduct their web-based surveys, report the results of their surveys, and to manage the survey processes.
4. Refresh the process: the survey instrument, report, and process are 'refreshed' at 3 yearly intervals to ensure it remains benchmarked with best practice and is customer friendly, etc.
5. Treat every customer like they were your only customer: to assist in meeting their objective of Delighting the Customer, to build relationships and take greatest advantage of the survey process, a follow-up call or visit is made to every survey respondent. The purpose is to thank the customer for their feedback, review what the company is doing overall about the results, discuss their specific concerns or issues, and see what actions can be put in place to make the relationship even better. These follow up calls are tracked using technology and reported on at Leadership Team and Business Unit Reviews.
6. Build a network of internal consultants: at NCR they have teams whose role is not only to manage the logistics of the survey and the survey processes, but who are involved in making the results come to life e.g. by giving presentations on the survey, assisting in determining areas for improvement, and helping work teams make the improvements.
7. Build the links: to help cement the survey and its results into actions taken by the organisation NCR suggest building the CSS into key business strategies/processes e.g. the CSS becomes an integral measure in the company's Balanced Scorecard.
8. Custom views for different audiences: NCR suggest assessing the CSS reports that are issued and the audiences they go to in order to determine if improvements can be made e.g. different audiences need different levels of information and summary reports, presentations, web-sites etc may be more effective and useful for some recipients than full hard copy CSS reports.

There are writers who consider that there are better ways of knowing what your customers want and how they perceive you than through a survey process. Pam Mitchell (2003) a strategic planning consultant believes "Surveys may be effective for understanding how customers rate us in specific areas, but they do little to tell us what product features or additional services they may value or how they make buying decisions". Along with Mark Frigo (2003), editor of Strategic Finance Magazine, and Mark Graham Brown (2000) author of two best selling books on the Baldrige Award Criteria, the suggestion is made that alternative strategies to CSS are used such as 'customer symposiums', phone interviews, focus groups, 'think tanks', panels, face-to-face customer interviews, or a 'day-in-the-life of a customer' (where time is spent with key clients or key representative consumers to see just how products and/or services are being used). It is felt that these strategies may be better means of determining what customers want, and how the organisation can truly solve their needs and problems. Mitchell notes "The cost of a symposium with a small group is generally about the same as a marketing survey to the entire customer base. However, surveys are flat. You never get to ask 'why', and people hate to complete surveys. People love to attend symposiums. They generally leave energised by what

they have contributed and by what they have learned ...With a symposium, your sample size is much smaller, but the information is much deeper". To make this strategy successful she suggests:

- Creating an initial agenda and then soliciting additional agenda items from the participants;
- Having a group size of 8-20;
- Inviting prospective and current customers to obtain a broader view;
- Inviting decision makers and workers so that a range of needs, challenges and problems can be identified;
- Making it fun and using social activities - the information sharing and relationship building that occurs during informal activities is also valuable;
- Using an external professional to facilitate as this can help ensure increased productivity and outputs from the day but also ensure your organisation's 'neutrality'.
- Document the salient points and distribute these notes to attendees

It is also suggested by David Swaddling and Charles Miller (2002) of Insight - a consulting firm specialising in measuring and managing customer perceived value, that customer satisfaction measures really only reflect data collected about retrospective events from 'actual' customers. Prospective (future orientated) information is often not sought and prospective customers are generally never included. As such they state "Customer satisfaction questions usually focus on a past experience, because that's the orientation of customer satisfaction. A customer can only describe how satisfied he or she is with a prior experience...That's a valuable starting place for understanding how customers think but it's not nearly enough". They suggest that organisations should be collecting data on 'customer perceived value' (CPV) and the criteria and preliminary evaluations that may be used when making a purchasing decision. They define CPV as "The prospective customer's evaluation of all the benefits and all the costs of an offering as compared to that customer's perceived alternatives". The methods outlined above e.g. symposiums, focus groups etc can be used to obtain this type of information since questions can be posed more readily regarding impending purchase decisions and will give a clearer indication of loyalty, repurchasing etc than the usual data collected via CSS, and the insights gained will be more meaningful and helpful in strategic planning and developing strategic hypotheses.

Of course while the above infers there may be two schools of thought, the thrust and design of any CSS is of course entirely individual to the designer and there are no doubt many well designed CSS's that cater to both of these approaches and may still be called a Customer Satisfaction Survey.

Whatever method is used to determine customer satisfaction, needs, and wants, it is important that;

- The process is driven from the highest levels in the organisation;
- Reasons for collecting data are known and linked to strategic plans and goals;
- The information is used to drive improvements;
- Baseline data is used to provide a benchmark for measuring improvements;
- Results are widely distributed;
- Data collection is a regular event.

Research Data

In 1999 in Europe alone the turnover of client satisfaction surveys was estimated to be more than 320M EURO with an annual growth rate of around 15 % (HLP Development SA, 2004).

In 2000, in an effort to compare the advantages and disadvantages of online vs face-to-face in-depth interviews for collecting data, two identical semi structured interviews were conducted. Senior level students implemented the surveys using a 25 question, one page guide, entitled 'Internet Shopping' focussing on customer loyalty to internet sites. One interview was conducted electronically, sent via email with the questions imbedded in the email message, while the other interview was conducted face to face. A total of 24 interviews using each method was used for the results. Response rates, speed, and depth of information were used as comparison factors for the two methods of interviewing. The results showed that online participants were more likely to divulge personal information regarding themselves as well as take more time to answer questions. The analysis and use of the collected online data required less manipulation and processing than the face-to-face interviews. Online participants were able to review their responses, as well as control the amount of time used to answer the questions resulting in further thought and detail used to complete the questionnaire. Online data collection provided for immediate access to usable data for analysis and distribution. The study found that online semi-structured interviews for data collection was a plausible and advantageous alternative to face to face interviews because of time, financial, and participant considerations.

In 1999 an interview-based survey of 18 UK companies from 4 different industry sectors was carried out, the majority of the companies had more than 1000 employees. The individual companies were chosen because they were actively pursuing continuous improvement via self-assessment techniques or by other quality improvement mechanisms. The survey was carried out to try to identify factors that influenced the success of continuous improvement programs. In terms of how companies responded to and understood their customers, findings from the survey showed that in 56% of companies that undertook customer surveys and market research activities, the surveys were conducted by post, telephone, or in person. Only one company from the 18 surveyed used sophisticated software to track and schedule these customer contacts.

In February 1999 a survey to 96 long-term care homes (either for-profit or not-for profit) in the Ontario Central West region of the Ministry of Health Canada was undertaken in order to understand survey implementation. This survey obtained 44 responses making a response rate of 56%. 61% of respondents stated that they conduct customer surveys including all municipal homes, 91% of nursing homes and 66% of charitable homes. Almost all respondents of homes that conducted surveys stated that the executive office of the facility was the catalyst for the survey process and viewed it as an important continuous quality improvement tool. Also, almost all indicated that their surveys were developed in-house by staff with little input by residents. The majority of homes surveyed

residents and their families rather than staff or volunteers. The results were communicated to residents, families, staff and their corporate office. 39% of respondents indicated that they did not conduct surveys because they were too expensive to purchase or produce in-house and also the Ministry of Health did not require them.

Measure and Evaluate Customer Satisfaction Survey Successes

In order to fully evaluate the impact of customer satisfaction surveys, it is necessary to undertake, where possible, a quantitative assessment of their impact and assign calculable values. Measuring the positive impact on the business will help to determine whether the methods used to undertake a customer satisfaction survey have been effective, what still needs improving etc.

The following provide some ideas on how customer satisfaction surveys can be assessed as well as providing some ideas on metrics that can be assessed from the survey results:

Survey Related Measures:

Survey size e.g. No. of samples (respondents) per survey. This measure gives an indication of the credibility of the survey results - the larger the sample size, the more reliable the results.

Number of survey questions e.g. No. of questions asked in survey. This measure can be a useful benchmarking question. When linked to the survey response rate or perceived success it can be valuable in terms of the design and development of future surveys.

Survey response rate e.g. No. of customer surveys returned as a % of total surveys sent out. This measure provides an indication of how well the customer survey was designed and implemented, and may also reflect on the importance placed on the survey issues by customers.

Survey frequency e.g. the frequency with which surveys are carried out. This measure indicates whether customer satisfaction surveys are regularly being undertaken. Leading organisations use this sort of information to help assess the efficiency of an organisations Customer Service Management process.

Communication of survey responses e.g. the frequency of customer satisfaction survey feedback distribution to employees. This measure provides an input for the analysis of a Customer Service Management process. This measure is more appropriate when an organisation surveys its customers on a regular and frequent basis.

Frequency of measurement of internal customer satisfaction e.g. the frequency with which internal customer satisfaction is measured within an organisation. This measure provides an input for the analysis of organisational health and provides a measure of the level of customer focus within an organisation.

Survey costs e.g. the costs associated with carrying out a single one-off customer satisfaction survey. This measure quantifies the cost of an individual survey. Results may be dependent upon survey design, but could be used in helping to assess efficiency within the customer

satisfaction measurement process. It measures the cost of undertaking the survey in terms of the time taken to develop, distribute, and collate returned surveys, and analyse the results. The resulting cost can then be benchmarked against other organisations or used to assess whether or not to hire specialist consultants to manage the survey process.

Customer satisfaction index e.g. a final figure of customer satisfaction resulting from a series of appropriate and weighted measures or indicators. It may be expressed as a percentage (%) or other numerical number. The index, an overall indicator can be calculated from measures or surveys of retention, service standards, perceived value, perceived quality, it may also include measures from other indexes. It is important to ensure that all measures included are linked to goals and strategies ie there must be an agreed reason to measure them.

One of the key benefits of the customer satisfaction index is that if a standard model is used to derive its value, it represents a uniform and comparable system of measurement. Values derived from standard models are frequently published in a number of popular magazines and journals. This facilitates systematic and meaningful benchmarking over time against other organisations by highlighting their success at what is a critical success factor common in almost every organisation. Within the organisation it very simply and clearly analyses strengths and weaknesses, supplementing conventional measures, such as productivity and price indices.

Survey Data Measures:

Customer satisfaction e.g. quantified customer satisfaction survey results. This is a measure of the level of customers' satisfaction with the purchased product or service and may be referred to as the Customer Satisfaction Index. It may be expressed as a percentage (%) or other numerical number.

Perceived product quality e.g. quantification of survey results. This is a measure of the customers' perception of the quality of the product or service and may be expressed as a percentage (%) or other numerical number.

Loyal customers e.g. no. of current customers not purchasing or intending not to purchase new competitor product as a % of total current customers, or % of customers of a particular duration or longer. This measure provides an indication of customer retention/loyalty. The first formula could be used where repeat purchase is not measurable due to the nature of the product or service offered. Typically this can be measured by a survey.

Rate of customer referral e.g. Number of sales or contracts won through referrals as a % of total number of sales or contracts, per period or,
% of customers who recommend the supplier to friends or colleagues or,
Average number of recommendations made per existing customer or,
% of customers who are willing to recommend the supplier to friends or colleagues or,

% of new customers (by number and value) that result from recommendations.

The measurement of referral sales or work awarded through referrals relates directly to the proportion of existing customers who can be classed as satisfied or more than satisfied. World-class organisations use this measure because they recognise the importance of a high customer focus, and that therefore the high volume of work or sales gained in this manner is highly desired. Measurement could be made at point of sale, in surveys, or included as question in product/warranty/guarantee registration

Value of customer satisfaction e.g. % overall value of customer satisfaction. This measure has no standard method for quantification, all organisations will stress some areas differently. However, formulae commonly include the weighted product of all the deployed customer satisfaction effectiveness measures.

Financial value of customer satisfaction e.g. revenue increase or decrease against % customer satisfaction increase / decrease. This measure quantifies in dollars the impact and therefore value of the level customer satisfaction. This information has been used by leading organisations to aid in their Strategy Development process.

Projected customer retention e.g. no. of customers over the past year who intend to repurchase as a % of total no. of customers. This measure provides an indication of projected customer retention/loyalty. This can be effective in the measurement of current customer satisfaction as opposed to measurements such as that of customers already lost. It is commonly measured via survey.

Example cases

Learn valuable lessons from these organisations:

Charter One Bank



Customer survey results aligned to incentives for improved performance

At CharterOneBank, Cleveland, an examination of its customer survey processes revealed that whilst the surveys gathered responses as to how customers felt about the bank as a whole, the data was used to hold the call centre representatives accountable for the brand rather than call handling quality. Scores would inform the individual representative of the need for improvement but no incentive was attached. The bank changed the process and began to mail 90 surveys per representative per month to customers who called in. Results were analysed and tabulated and incentives were attached for improvement. Once incentives were related to improvement the representatives' performance improved dramatically.

Farmers and Dealers Bank



Customer Surveys determine products and services

Farmers and Dealers Bank (Lake Butler, Florida) surveyed its customers to determine what products and services were of interest to them, and to gauge the bank's Community Reinvestment Act performance. The bank had a 13.3% response to the 4,977 surveys mailed. The 20-question survey was designed simply so that it could be answered quickly. As a result of the questionnaire, the bank extended lobby and drive-in teller hours and planned feasibility studies for services including ATMS (automatic teller machine services), financial planning, income tax preparation, and checking account reconciliation. The bank decided not to introduce cheque safekeeping, because of a negative customer response to this service.

Deck House Incorporated



Customer Surveys: Home design

In 1989, when a new president of Deck House Incorporated took over the home designer and builder in Acton, Massachusetts, his first move was to conduct a customer survey. As a result of the survey, Deck House designed a new line of standardised homes and improved the quality of its service before, during, and after construction. In 1992, only about 25% of Deck Houses were custom-built, compared with 75% in 1991 and the time it took to process a piece of business was reduced from 549 days to 370 days. The extensive changes were motivated by a customer survey that questioned each stage of the home-building process. For example, the Pre-Construction section helped the president to find out a lot about his sales force and the Product Section alerted the company to a number of weaknesses in its products. As the final stage in the questionnaire process, the president wrote a letter to each person who had responded to the survey and provided them with more detailed answers to their concerns.

Summary

Measurement of customer satisfaction is vital. It is a way of determining what customers think and enables strategies to be developed that aim to lead to improvements that will assist in ensuring customers

repurchase or recommend the organisation or its products to others. The best way of assessing customer satisfaction is by asking customers directly and this is usually done through a customer satisfaction survey. However this is not the only method with 'symposiums', focus groups and the like, also being used.

Whatever method is chosen, to be most effective:

- The organisation should determine why it wants to collect customer satisfaction data and how it intends to use this information;
- Senior management should drive the process;
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- The data that is collected should be linked to strategic and organisational plans and measure what the organisation is aiming to achieve;
- Baseline data should be collected to provide a benchmark for measuring improvements;
- Results should be widely distributed and action plans developed to make required improvements;
- Data collection should be a regular and well-planned event.

Note

Techniques and case studies mentioned or summarised in this article can be found in more detail via the BPIR.com along with the full text of most of the articles and reports in the reference list below.

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The full txt of these articles and reports can be found at www.BPIR.com.

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