**Introduction From The President**

The Voice of the Customer (VoC) is and has always been a key imperative in the design and delivery of an upper quartile customer experience. It is a key source of data that can be used in the positioning of an organisation's broader brand proposition to its target audience. By informing its policy on such things as sustainability and ethics it can influence the degree to which prospective customers will even consider the organisation as a supplier. VoC is also a valuable input source in the more focused activities of product and process development and improvement, price positioning and channel distribution. It also provides feedback for staff skills development and the efficacy of the channels and places through which customers choose to engage with the organisation.

There are some organisations in some sectors, like financial services, utilities, transportation, energy and government who appear to have decided that ignoring the VoC is a sensible strategy especially those that seek to use their customer base as a live test laboratory for artificial intelligence(AI) experimentation to cover their CX failures in spite of unstructured VoC reminding them that many AI chatbots et al demonstrate a higher propensity of Real Stupidity (RS) than they contribute to the delivery of a satisfactory customer experience.

What is VoC? One definition is
Voice of the Customer or VoC is a process that describes and quantifies your customer's feedback about their experiences with and expectations of your products or services.
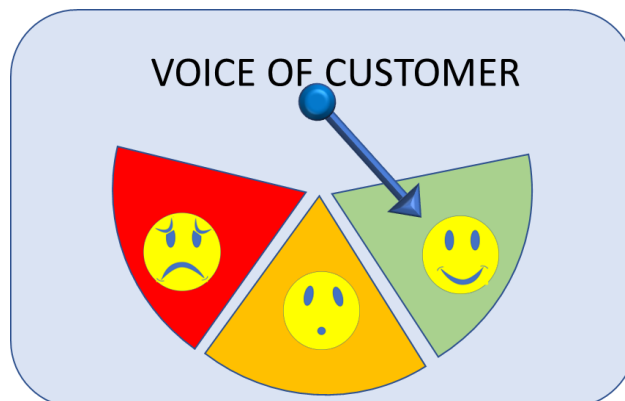
VOICE OF CUSTOMER

So where are we today with the market's understanding of the importance of the VoC and the performance of the market to use it for the mutual benefit of the organisations and their customers.

Is Voice of Customer Important?

> *"If you had some magic power and were able to discover exactly what customers are craving, and if you also knew how to produce their dream product at a low price, then you would be guaranteed to get rich! Therefore, capturing the exact Voice of the Customer is like striking gold."*
>
> *- Kai Yang, Author of Voice of the Customer: Capture and Analysis*

This quotation is taken from the Gainsight report
The Essential Guide to Voice of The Customer

https://www.gainsight.com/guides/essential-guide-voice-customer/

Which provides clear insights into the importance of the VoC. Going beyond the fact that the core truism for delivering a positive customer experience, especially for commercial organisations, is that there is only one source of revenue – the customer. Capital may be sourced form many different channels but revenue comes only from the customer. The report points out

Voice of Customer helps businesses hone their product or service into something that customers truly want and will continue to invest time and money into. Instead of just collecting data, VoC focuses on understanding it. Why? Because if you know customers are having problems, it should be your goal to get to the root of it. On the flip side, if you know where customers are finding enjoyment in your product, you should want to find out why so you can expand on it. There's more to Voice of the Customer than sending out a survey and hoping for a good response. If you have dreams of becoming a champion gymnast and pay a coach top dollar to train you, you'd expect them to tell you when your form is off, right? That's because constructive criticism is necessary for improvement. VoC best practices stress that you ask probing questions and not just set yourself up to receive positive remarks (which can still be useful, but we'll touch on that in a sec). Are customers unhappy with the price point? Do they have trouble using your product? Does your service actually make life easier or does it just stress them out? While the responses may not be all smiles, they reveal insights that drive change.

A business that is truly invested in a VoC program will listen to every customer, act on their responses, and analyze the data to improve processes. By being attentive and responsive, you can mitigate rough patches for future customers and get immediate value from customers with positive feedback. Without a VoC strategy, businesses miss out on valuable opportunities to leverage happy customers and assuage dissatisfied ones. The former can create new business opportunities and the latter is paramount for reducing churn. Customers are very responsive to positive and negative treatment, and a little can go a long way for both. A study by Oracle on the impact of customer experience states:

> *46% of consumers were pleased when an organization responded to a customer's negative comment.*
> *89% of consumers began doing business with a competitor following a poor customer experience.*
> *24% of consumers who had unsatisfactory service interactions shared their experiences through social networks .*

What is Voice of the Customer's role in Customer Success?

If your VoC program isn't tied to Customer Success, you're doing it all wrong. Customer Success is meant to help your customers achieve their desired outcome while using your product. The customer feedback generated through VoC programs dictates these desired outcomes, making it a crucial component in Customer Success strategy. This article on the value of VoC notes that best-in-class VoC users experience:

> *10-times greater year-over-year increase in annual revenue*
> *55% greater customer retention rates*
> *23% decrease in year-over-year customer service costs*
> *292% greater employee engagement rates*

A Voice of the Customer program can also greatly enhance the effectiveness of your Customer Success team. The individual approach to gathering customer feedback garners valuable information that helps Customer Success Managers (CSM) perform their job more efficiently. Ask questions like:

- Is our product easy to consume?
- Are we truly creating value?
- How do you define success?
- Are we helping you achieve that definition?

The Basics of Voice of Customer Programs

Voice of customer programs can include a wide range of tasks, from collecting data, to extracting insights, to putting them to work in your customer lifecycles. We've created a simple, three-step strategy upon which you can build your VoC program. Following this framework will give you the power to act quickly and drive significant impact from your VoC efforts.

1. **Listen:** Capture insightful feedback by giving your customers frequent opportunities to submit feedback.
2. **Act:** Follow up promptly so customers know that they are heard. Quicker response to customer feedback results in a greater impact.
3. **Analyze:** Assess progress against goals and measure improvement to keep the program on track.

Technological advances have drastically streamlined Voice of Customer processes. Software with VoC capabilities can automate many daunting tasks, such as reaching out to thousands of customers, addressing replies en masse, aggregating data, and much more. When used alongside Customer Success software, VoC data can be a powerful storyteller. It can help to identify trends, create individual customer health scores based on responses, and much more.

3-Step Approach to Capturing Your Customer's Voice

This concise approach to Voice of the Customer expands on the three core components to reactively close the loop, proactively improve consistency, and predictably deliver value.

Step 1: Listen

The information gathered in this stage will determine the success of your entire VoC program, so while it sounds like we're exaggerating when we say, "This step is super important," we mean it. Gathering useful, actionable feedback depends on three things: asking the right person the right question at the right time. Finding the right person Before you go sending out surveys left and right, VoC best practices suggest creating customer personas. Building standard personas help to easily define who is involved with your product and the level of their interaction. This will take the guesswork out of finding the right person to answer your questions. You wouldn't ask a project manager how the sales cycle was, just as you wouldn't ask a CEO about the ease of use of a product they don't frequently interact with.

Asking the right question Once you've built your personas, it makes asking the right questions a lot simpler. A good rule to keep in mind is to only ask a question that you're ready and willing to take the initiative to solve. There are two main types of feedback we'll be focusing on

Direct feedback: *Feedback received directly from clients, commonly through surveys. Some examples include NPS scores, lifecycle Customer Satisfaction (CSAT) scores, transactional CSAT scores, community posts, etc.*

Indirect feedback: *Feedback generated by the ways clients are engaging with your product. For example, usage data, support data, and other behavioral metrics.*

Combining direct and indirect feedback gives you a holistic look at an individual's perception of your product. They work together to fill in the blanks that would be left if you only relied on one type of feedback. For example, someone could send indirect feedback in the form of a negative NPS score, but not give any other feedback explaining why they chose that answer. Taking a look at their indirect feedback, you notice that they have multiple support tickets that concern a particular aspect of your product. You can infer that their unhappiness is a result of the trouble they've had with that part of your product and start a dialog based on that. Finding the right time to ask When you reach out for feedback is just as important as who you reach out to. Your timing can directly affect the answers you receive. Align your surveys with important milestones along the customer journey. This also ensures you don't let an unhappy customer stay that way for too long. For example, a critical juncture in a customer's lifecycle is right after they've completed implementation. Send out a survey within a few days of the end of their implementation to get their current sentiments about the process and how comfortable they are now that they are on their own. Another common practice is following every support ticket with a one-question survey to close the loop. Asking if they're satisfied with the support they received lets you know whether or not you need to reach out and offer additional help. You've created personas, decided what feedback you want, and identified ways to ask for it. Before we send you off to the next step, there's one last thing to keep in mind: the bane of VoC—survey fatigue. This can happen when you send too many surveys in succession or fail to set accurate expectations for the amount of time your survey will take. Using your personas, establish a cadence for your surveys so you can be confident that you're reaching out to the right people at appropriate intervals. If a survey is longer than one question, write out how long it'll take so people know what they're getting into. Fail to follow both of these best practices and your customers may ignore your surveys, leaving you with nothing to show for it.

Step 2: Act
Step number two focuses on providing value for your customers. Value doesn't need to be a three-year long process that has to go through multiple approvals and plopped onto an annual plan. When it comes to Voice of Customer, value happens immediately and at a grassroots level. It requires a quick response, strong tactics, and a shared company mindset to truly show customers that you are listening and adapting. Act on feedback immediately Voice of Customer best practices stress a "closed-loop" form of communication, meaning that all customer input should be addressed and resolved ASAP. Don't wait until Step 3 to close the loop! Respond quickly to make the most of the situation, whether it's positive or negative. An unanswered positive response is just as wasteful as its negative equivalent. In NPS terms, these Promoters are valuable adVoCates for your product. The longer you wait to thank them and stoke the fire that is their adVoCacy, the greater chance they may slip into becoming Passives or worse, Detractors. Using a high-touch/low-touch model can make customer outreach more digestible. This blog post by Lincoln Murphy does a great job of explaining the difference between high-touch and low-touch and the benefits of this bilateral approach. High-touch customers, important accounts that require a high level of communication, tend to receive one-on-one attention. Low-touch customers, smaller contracts that may not require as much attention, can be effectively reached through one-to-many (1:Many) communications. Provide resources that help close the loop at scale Reading about VoC is one thing, carrying it out is another. And we get it—spending your whole day getting berated by unhappy customers is nobody's idea of fun. Motivating team members to do that all day can be equally gruelling. That's why we suggest creating VoC playbooks, or a set of best practices that your team can use to streamline how they address customer feedback. This is a highly effective way of standardizing customer outreaches that can grow with your company. Strengthen your playbooks and outreach strategies by providing team members with as many resources as possible. Customer relationship management (CRM) software is a valuable tool with myriad capabilities. For your outreach team, it reveals insights about a customer's health which can then be used as talking points. Instead of having to rely on their own instincts when mediating situations, pre-populated emails give team members confidence and save them time. Keeping support documents organized and easily accessible enables team members to quickly share them with customers in need. Create a culture that values feedback In order for feedback to become reality, your entire company, from sales to services to product development, needs to view VoC as a priority. This can be a challenge for established companies, but it's necessary. Encouragement from management is key for this mindset shift to happen. Departments need to realize the importance of feedback and feel the motivation to act on it. Once this realization occurs, standards can be set and feedback can flow smoothly.

Step 3: Analyze

Now that your feedback loop is closed, you should have a good bit of data to work with. To simplify things, we've divided this step into three buckets: business analytics, outreach analytics, and program insights. Business analytics includes all the metrics you want to track and benchmark against. It's for internal use and will give your teams something to report on and be held accountable to. Data in this bucket can include NPS trends and follow-up response time. For example, track your NPS score to see how it trends quarter over quarter. Outreach analytics reflect the performance of your customer outreach attempts. You can take these metrics and use them to optimize your outreaches against industry benchmarks. Examples include the performance of surveys, the number of recipients, the number of emails sent/bounced/clicked, and unsubscribes. Combine direct and indirect feedback to create a holistic health score across subjective and objective measures. This health score will give you a high-level view of customer health and enable you to easily identify at-risk customers. An important metric to keep an eye on is the number of people who didn't respond to your survey. Unless this number is jarringly low, it's sometimes overlooked. Don't ignore it. Instead, dig deeper. Maybe you need to change your messaging, or perhaps certain people aren't interacting with your product at all and you need to find a way to engage them. Outreach analytic data is powerful and tells a story, all you need to do is look at it at different angles to glean a wealth of insights. Program insights are gleaned from both business and outreach analytics. Use these insights to identify strategic priorities to improve your overall strategy. For example, text-based answers can be extremely valuable but hard to analyze at scale. Some software, like Gainsight, have analytics tools baked in that help to extract tone and intent. Using this technology, identify themes in feedback to get a better overall view of your customer experience. Then, apply these learnings to your strategy and track your results.

https://www.gainsight.com/guides/essential-guide-voice-customer
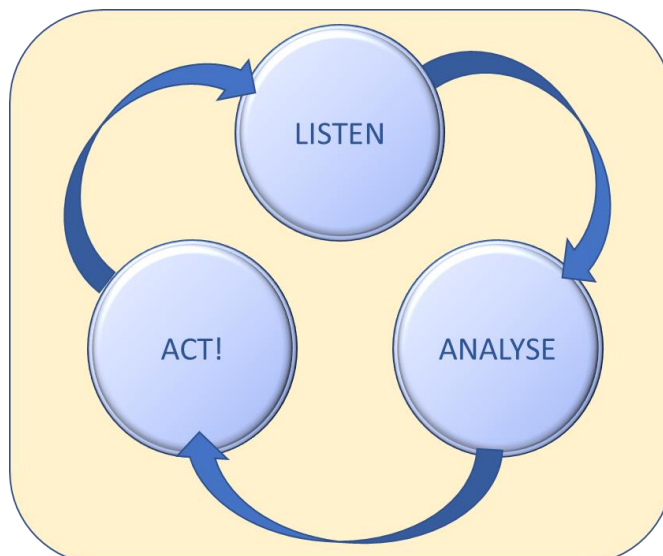
Do Customers Believe that Organisations Listen to Them?

According to a study from Hubspot it seems that around 42% of organisations cannot listen to their customers as evidenced by the fact that they do not survey their customers and thereby have no listening channel open. Perhaps it accounts for some customer scepticism

People are very skeptical of companies that say they prioritize customer interests over their own.

12%

Of people believe company messaging that says it puts the "customer first".

blog.hubspot.com/service/customer-service-2019

HubSpot Service Hub

As part of a *larger research effort* we surveyed over one thousand customer service agents across the world to understand how they use customer data.

Which of the following statements applies to your business? (Select all that apply.)

Statement	Percentage
We survey customers to get feedback	58%
We track customer satisfaction/happiness	57%
We monitor online review sites and social media posts	48%
We have a formal customer advocacy program	19%
We track customer NPS scores	17%
None of the above	16%

The report goes on to say

Power Has Shifted to Customers
A tight customer focus is critical to growth -- in part because customers today have unprecedented power in the buying process.Today, your customers are much better informed than ever before.
76.2% of customer service professionals agree that customers today are more informed than they used to be.
A smarter consumer expects more from your company -- and the data we uncovered backed up this trend in consumer behavior.
 87.8% agreed that customers have higher expectations than ever.

What Does the Modern Buyer Want?
People today are clearly changing, but what do these empowered consumers want? We asked a series of questions to understand what they look for when evaluating products. This one may be obvious, but 95% of respondents do research online when they have a need for a new product or service. We've all known this for a while, but what exactly are consumers looking for when they conduct this research?
Top 5 Needs During Online Research
> *Product information (demos / explainers) (52%)*
> *Reviews and social proof from users like them (44%)*
> *Discounts and deals (42%)*
> *Customer examples / Case studies (33%)*
> *Educational content / strategy / best practices (32%)*
For these reasons, It's more important than ever before to provide information on your website about what your product or service will deliver and how much it'll cost. But most businesses websites do a good job of that. What they don't do a good job of is delivering social proof.
https://blog.hubspot.com/service/state-of-service-2019-customer-first

What is important to customers will vary from sector to sector and even organisation to organisation. Knowing what you customers unique needs and preferences are requires listening to their voice

Is Listening a Skill?
According to a report by HB International listening to the VoC is a skill that should also be extended to the Voice of The Supplier (VOS). The performance of the supply chain is of course a critical factor in the delivery of a positive customers experience and the continuing success of all parties is a matter of mutual interdependence. Perhaps the old metaphor about the message behind the reason the human animal was created with one mouth and two ears could be transposed to organisations to encourage listening to both suppliers and customers.
From the HB International report
The Value of Listening: Appreciating The Voice of Your Customer and Your Supplier
Listening. A vital skill that is often overlooked. As the foundation of many relationships, the skill of listening poses a significant role in your business, customer, and supplier relationships. Is your company looking to strengthen relationships with your suppliers and/or your customers? Through effective listening, you gain the ability to truly appreciate what is being communicated to you by your customer while simultaneously turning around and implementing those thoughts into your business. While you may not believe that "your customer is always right," being able to understand their expectations and demands while ensuring your business needs are being met provides a unique and valuable relationship.

Voices Working Together
How well do you know your customer? Your supplier? Effective communication is incredibly beneficial for all parties. Whether you believe it or not, your supplier is an extension of your business, and they play a vital role in the services you are providing your customer(s). Essentially, your chosen supplier is working alongside your business to supply a deliverable encompassing pre-established customer requirements. Coupled with the fact that not all suppliers manufacture the same, identifying and communicating a customer's expectations to their selected supplier allows for transparency and open communication into the relationship.
Having the ability to openly communicate and understand your customer's expectations of their supplier(s) invites businesses to target specific supplier characteristics and qualify certain suppliers based on their demands. On the positive side, an opportunity to involve your customers in the supplier selection process allows them to share their supplier expectations, possibly leading to a higher likelihood of success and ownership in their selection.
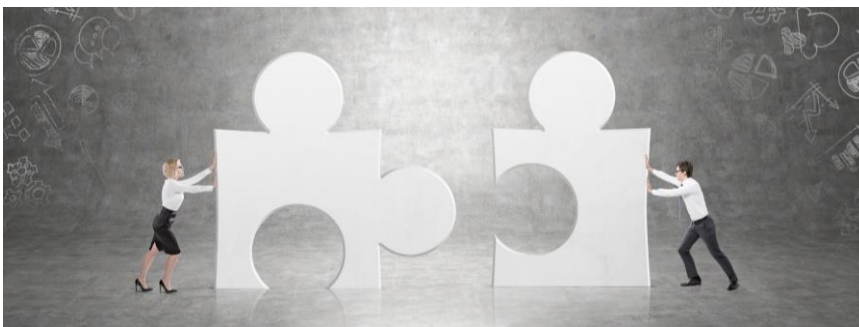
Understanding your customer's expectations will also provide insight into which suppliers to use and which ones to avoid. Deciphering which supplier best meets the needs of your customer? Internal conversations with your customer may assist in differentiating amongst suppliers to ensure your customer's project is in the right hands.

Unfortunately, there are times when production does not meet the customer's requirements or an experience with a particular supplier isn't meeting expectations. In this case, it's essential to listen to your customer with understanding. Eliminate the guesswork. The time you take to listen to your customer and thoroughly comprehend their concerns will provide an opportunity for growth and invite you to take necessary action and solve the specific concern. Neglecting or disregarding customer concerns may lead you to longer lead times, production complications, and mistrust. In any event, never assume for your customer or your supplier, but respond with constructive feedback that incorporates details of your discussion. Your customers and suppliers need to know that you're paying attention and taking the initiative to address these concerns.

Gathering Valuable Insight: Capturing What's Most Important
How well are you able to differentiate information? Are you able to pull specific details from a conversation and itemize the information according to its importance? Transparent and honest discussions with customers provide an opportunity to flag areas of concern, share celebrations and are a great way to continue building a relationship. Internal conversations with your customers are a golden opportunity that will set the tone and expectations of your relationship. How often should you have these conversations? Add that topic to your next meeting. Establish a level of trust that encourages productive conversations and enables critical thinking and problem-solving. Whatever you and your customer are discussing, whether it includes topics such as payment terms, finances, project budgets, product specifications, or quality control, these internal conversations are precious.

Active Listening in a Virtual World
Many businesses are adapting to upcoming technology and implementing it into their everyday routines. Email, phone calls, and text messages enable conversations to happen within seconds, eliminating the need for face-to-face interactions. While we appreciate quick responses and the ability to receive answers immediately, it poses the question, are you truly engaged in the conversation? Are you showing that you're actively listening or that you are genuinely involved in the discussion? Are you comprehending what is being said to you?

Unfortunately, our global pandemic crippled in-person interactions, causing businesses to look elsewhere for face-to-face interactions and ways to engage with their customers and employees actively. Opportunities to engage in a virtual experience have allowed companies to continue using technology while simultaneously engaging in a more immediate interaction but more physically distant. Fortunately, these virtual interactions encourage active listening through prompt email conversations and text messages; virtual meetings promote facial expressions, eye contact, and non-verbal interactions, the same types of responses that in-person meetings promote. However, just with anything else, cell phones ring, emails ding, and text messages interrupt our thought process leading to disruptions and misunderstanding within our conversations.

Whether you're involved with an in-person or virtual discussion, active listening with your customers and suppliers allows them to feel heard and appreciated. Active listening works to prevent miscommunication, as you are strongly encouraged to ask questions and provide feedback to clarify your understanding. When you respond appropriately, you are adVoCating for an interactive dialog and facilitating the conversation. Incorporating active listening into your conversations will assist in establishing rapport, respect, and trust, not only with your customers but with your employees and suppliers, as well. Giving your speaker your undivided attention may seem like a given; however, allowing your text messages and emails to wait might seem even more overwhelming. Just know that the time you take to listen and value your customer's opinion is much more valuable than causing disarray and diverting your attention to a message that can wait for your response.

As many businesses have chosen to continue working remotely, active listening is a skill that we all must continue to practice and develop. Keep in mind that active listening doesn't just require a verbal discussion, but it is an opportunity to provide feedback and check for understanding through various mediums.

It's about genuinely reacting to your speaker and showing that you are honestly engaged in what they have to say

https://hbint.biz/the-value-of-listening-appreciating-the-voice-of-your-customer-and-your-supplier
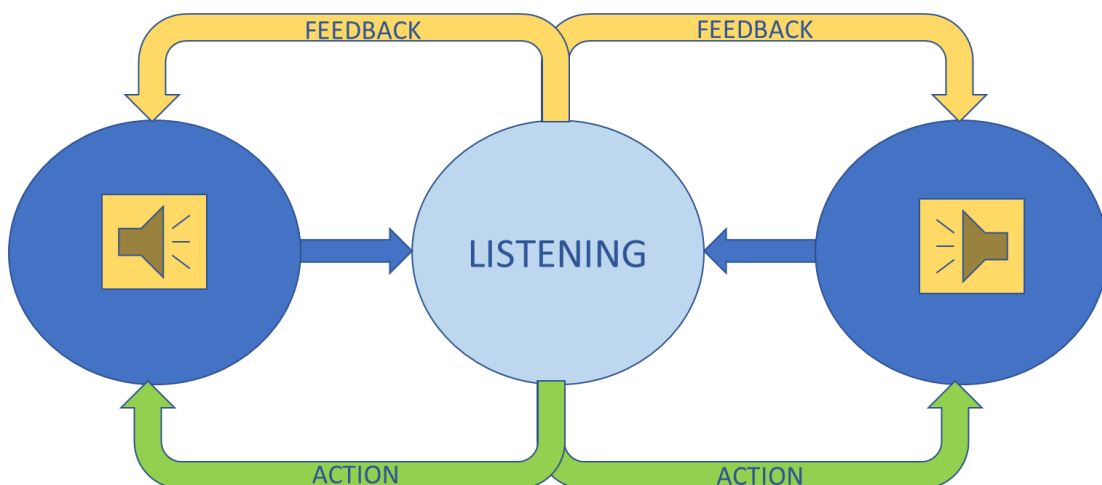
So What is the best way to hear the Voice of the Customer?

First question is perhaps why do it? Gartner suggests
The American research and advisory company Gartner said that Voice of the Customer programs will be one of the most important strategic investments in the next five years for companies, as there will be more than a 30% annual growth
*."**VoC is being seen as a strategy that a company must have,**" said Jim Davies, Gartner's director of research.*
10 ways to conduct Voice of the Customer research
There are a lot of ways companies can approach conducting Voice of the Customer research. You can choose from a variety of individual methods — which we'll detail below — and you may often choose to draw on multiple research techniques to ensure a holistic picture of your customers.
1. Interview customers
Customer interviews are one technique you can use to gather VoC data. While interviews are inherently time-intensive, they often glean some of the most valuable feedback. By going directly to the customer and conducting an in-depth interview, you open the door to really personalized, in-depth research. You can conduct ad hoc customer interviews, survey a representative sample of customers, or hone in on a particular customer segment to interview. Whether in person, over the phone, or through video chat, interviewers have the opportunity to dig into the customer's responses and pull out additional insights that other VoC research techniques may miss.
2. Survey customers
Customer surveys are one of the most flexible methods for gathering Voice of the Customer data: Surveys can include three questions posed immediately after signup. They can be in-depth, 100-point questionnaires sent to your most engaged customers via email. Or they can be everything and anything in between. Surveys are also an eminently scalable option for VoC research. Once the questionnaire is built, you can use it to survey as many customers as you can get to fill it out. Plus, surveys are one of the best techniques for gathering both quantitative and qualitative feedback — you can easily include quantitative ratings along with open-ended qualitative
Keep it short.To just capture customer sentiment in a matter of seconds with one of six microsurvey types, including NPS®, multiple choice, or a simple thumbs up or down.

3. Pay attention to social media

As a way to communicate with customers, social media can be invaluable to the VoC process. Connecting over social media often allows for a more informal, two-way, and real-time conversation versus email or phone calls. Social media also opens up the opportunity for social listening. While customers may regularly engage with your brand on social media — and those interactions are a valuable source of VoC data in their own right — the more potent source comes from social listening. By monitoring how customers talk about your brand and your product when they aren't speaking directly to you, you can get a more honest, unfiltered view of their feedback. Similar to surveys, social listening can help you identify customers you wish to conduct more involved VoC research with. And social listening isn't limited to the popular social media platforms. You can also find valuable feedback on online forums and communities and websites like Reddit and Quora.

https://www.globalreach.com/services/social-media-marketing---smm

4. Listen to recorded customer calls

Whether they're sales calls, demos, customer support calls, or something else entirely, any calls your team has with customers are a gold mine for Voice of the Customer data. Wherever customers invest in your brand by actually spending time on the phone, you're likely to find really helpful feedback.

6. Measure your Net Promoter Score

Net Promoter Score is a common metric for gauging customer loyalty that simply consists of asking customers how likely they are to recommend your business or product to someone. While you won't get a ton of contextual VoC data directly from an NPS survey, you can get a broader

7. Conduct focus groups

Focus groups, similar to customer interviews, are often done in person. The primary difference is that focus groups involve a small group of customers, instead of being conducted one-on-one. The group of customers is gathered together along with a moderator. From there, the moderator presides over a (often free-flowing) discussion about the brand, product, or industry. As a source of Voice of the Customer data, focus groups are one of the best ways to conduct more exploratory research — in their discussions, groups may often touch on things your company may never have thought to ask about. Plus, the back and forth between customers can help to draw out consensus and deeper details that other research techniques may gloss over. Focus groups can also be useful when the feedback required is more specific: seeing how customers perceive a particular new product, for example, or gauging their reactions to a rebrand or advertisement.

8. Offer a feedback form

Regardless of whether you're actively seeking Voice of the Customer feedback or not, it's a good idea to have a form available where customers can share their feedback at any given time. This is separate from your Customer Support operation, and it can be an invaluable way to keep a pulse on how customers feel about your brand and product. Often hosted right on your website, a feedback form allows customers to share their thoughts whenever they arise. That's useful because it provides unsolicited feedback — meaning each customer who submits a form was inspired to do it, whether by positive or negative experience. Feedback forms can also help you catch emerging trends on the Voice of the Customer, even when you aren't actively looking for them.

9. Talk to customer and supplier facing employees

With all the emphasis on going out and soliciting customer feedback, it's easy to forget that you have employees within your team who are already well-versed in the Voice of the Customer. Team members who talk with customers/supplies regularly are often your best window into the customer mind. That includes, most notably, your Support team, who spend the majority of their time with customers. When problems arise (like a software glitch or a product deficiency), your Support team will often be the first to know and the first to identify widespread problems from isolated issues.

Other teams, like Sales or Buying, are also on the front lines of listening to customers' and suppliers' needs and trying to match them up with what you offer. They can offer invaluable details on

fatmawatilauda70555

10. Map customer behavior and UX

Distinct from most of the previous methods we've covered here, this technique is more about understanding the customer experience from an analytical perspective. Here, you want to understand how customers behave versus what they say or perceive. After all, what customers say they want and how they behave don't always match up.By using tools designed for website analytics (e.g., Google Analytics), product analytics (like Amplitude and Mixpanel), and user experience mapping (like Crazy Egg), you can get a sense of how customers move throughout your website and, where applicable, your product. You can also measure how changes to your website or product affect customer behavior. For example, if you see that customers fall out of the ideal customer journey at the same touchpoint, you can identify points of friction and test to find the best solution.
https://www.helpscout.com/blog/voice-of-customer

So What Benefits are Available from VoC ?
This is the view of Shap Hyken in his Forbes Magazine article
Six Ways Listening Improves The Customer Experience
It takes at least two people to have a conversation, and one of the keys to a successful conversation is listening. Being a good listener can create trust and confidence. It is a helpful skill in both personal and business relationships. Listening doesn't have to just be between people. It can be between a brand and its customers, or its employees. It's a different kind of conversation. Customers and employees are talking, sharing feedback and opinions, and companies are listening intently for opportunities to capitalize on what they learn. Brands that listen well respond by doing something with the information. Their response isn't in words, it's in taking action on what they "hear." HundredX, a company that creates listening/feedback software for enterprise business clients, surveyed more than 500 business executives and found that 94% believed the following statement: "Listening to customer feedback is increasingly critical to the bottom line." It is the fuel for customer retention, employee fulfilment and the growth of a company. Rob Pace, CEO , is adamant about creating a listening culture, and he shared six ways that listening can improve business performance.

1. Listening Gets You Feedback And Data: Your customers can give you the best source of real-time feedback, and employees on the front line are typically the first ones to hear from customers. Together they can diagnose the good, the bad and the ugly and identify opportunities to create a better customer experience. Employees on the front line must listen to customers. Leadership and management must listen to the front line.
2. Listening Gets You Stories To Share: Most feedback methods produce loud-sourced data that is negative. There's an old saying that the squeaky wheel gets the oil. Companies usually debrief problems and complaints, but it's important to look at all feedback, the bad and the good. In addition to managing complaints, problems, etc., take the good feedback and stories and share them with employees and customers. Positive feedback should be shared on websites, brochures, and more. It can be some of your best marketing!

*3. **Listening Grows Customer Retention***: It's pretty much universally accepted that it's less expensive to keep existing customers than to acquire new ones. A survey by HundredX and YouGov shows that 88% of business executives believe that to be the case. What drives retention is listening, and just as important, acting on what you have "heard."

*4. **Listening Will Increase Customer Spending***: It's pretty simple: Make a customer happy and they buy more. And what makes them happy, in addition to a good customer experience, is feeling that they are being heard. The proof is found in social media. When a customer tweets (or posts on any other social channel), we must listen … and respond. HundredX cites a report from Applied Marketing Science that found that customers who receive responses to their tweets are willing to spend 3-20% more on average-priced items.

*5. **Listening Creates Brand Ambassadors***: When you make customers happy, they talk to their friends, family members and colleagues. This is amplified through social media. And, your best marketing is going to come from customers who sing your praises.

*6. **Listening Creates Employee Retention***: Customer feedback is gold — and so is employee feedback. Listen to your employees' suggestions and ideas for improving any aspect of the business, and act on the best suggestions. You will be amazed at the incredible suggestions your employees will give you if you simply ask and listen.

Rob Pace sums this up perfectly: "The capability to listen at scale will define best in class organizations. It starts with a cultural shift away from a broadcast mindset to listening. The ultimate objective is for the customer or employee to feel they were heard."

Make listening part of the culture of your company. The happiest employees and customers are those who feel that the companies they work for or do business with relate to them. And, that is because these companies listen.

The associated benefits of increased customer loyalty, greater and more frequent customer spending, higher levels of customer and staff retention and improved growth and profitability are all well researched and documented.

The Last Word

The inclusion of the supply chain in the VoC strategy does two things. It gives the organisation the ability to engage with a supplier both from the suppliers' perspective but also as from their perspective as a customer. In both the B2C and the B2B arenas, and no matter whether the supplier is a larger or smaller organisation, they both share the responsibility of satisfying the end customer. Their levels of success in optimising the available benefits is dependent upon the degree to which they work together.

As stated at the start the customer has all the money and in the vast majority of cases the customer chooses where to spend it.
The level of success achievable in the future is dependent upon two of the oldest truisms in service quality delivery

     1.   An organisation understanding what is IMPORTANT to customers
     2.   The PERFORMANCE of the organisation in delivering it

Every survey on the subject confirms that customers are
     Better Informed than at any previous time
     Have higher expectations
     Seeking better value
     Less tolerant of failure
     Have higher social and ethical standards
     Have the social media means to spread bad news fast
     Increasingly seeking prepurchase affirmation from such sources
     There have more power

Why wouldn't an organisation want to listen to their voices?

Recommended Reading

Consumer Trends Index | Marigold (meetmarigold.com)
https://www.gainsight.com/guides/essential-guide-voice-customer/
https://www.quickscream.com/listening-to-customers/
https://www.hrmguide.co.uk/communication/listen-to-customers.htm
https://countingup.com/resources/the-importance-of-listening-skills-in-customer-service/
https://blog.hubspot.com/service/state-of-service-2019-customer-first
https://hbint.biz/the-value-of-listening-appreciating-the-voice-of-your-customer-and-your-supplier
https://delighted.com/blog/voice-of-the-customer-survey-methodology-questions
https://www.helpscout.com/blog/voice-of-customer/
https://www.surveysensum.com/blog/voice-of-customer-VoC/
https://www.honestly.com/blog/voice-of-the-customer-methods/
https://www.forbes.com/sites/shephyken/2017/04/29/six-ways-listening-improves-the-customer-experience