



A two-prong approach to B2B customer satisfaction research

| By John Coldwell

B2B research is its own animal and those conducting B2B customer satisfaction research would be wise to understand how it's different from consumer research and what its purpose is.

First, remember that statistical validity is not important for a typical B2B customer satisfaction survey the same way it would be for B2C. Key account managers are already - or should already be - managing the relationships with customers so the survey cannot exist in a vacuum. Additionally, the number of respondents (read: customers) is small compared with B2C and each customer - and its needs - are unique. Therefore, finding a representative sample becomes less crucial.

When conducting B2B customer satisfaction research, consider obtaining feedback using two parallel systems. The first approach is a regular, event-based telephone call from your own staff to the customers at an appropriate time following the delivery of your products and services. This is to make sure that all went well and allows knowledgeable people to sort out any issues as quickly as possible. This phase of the research is aimed at the recipients of your products and services who may or may not be the decision makers.

The second approach is an occasional (every 12-to-24 months), in-depth survey of the decision makers to address all your systems, disciplines and procedures. The survey should seek out any "people" issues in your organization, as opposed to product

or service issues identified via the telephone surveys.

While the two phases of the research are different in methodology and sample, the *raison d'être* for any B2B customer satisfaction survey should be to increase profitable sales. Using a dual-system approach, potential increases will come from three channels.


1. Reduced customer churn

Identifying individual dissatisfied customers and finding out what contributed to the dissatisfaction allows you to do something about it.

2. Selling more to existing customers

Using share-of-wallet or percentage penetration figures will help identify key customers who could and should be spending more.

3. Increased prices

Customers who love you will, by definition, understand and value your company's contribution to their success. If you go the extra mile and your customer knows (and values) that, then you can take advantage of the opportunity to raise prices. 

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