

Business was being lost, and no one knew it

InfoQuest Stories Tale #3

Gilbert White had been the General Manager of Atlas Copco Construction Tools of Canada for less than a year when he decided it was time to get a complete handle on customer perceptions of his company. When he ordered an *InfoQuest*® Customer Satisfaction Survey in July of 1997, it was with the combined hope that his efforts up to that point would be validated, and that he'd gain a solid sense of direction for his second year at the helm of the company.

One of the decisions Gilbert had made after assuming his position was to upgrade the company's telephone system. Upon his arrival, there were but two phone lines in place to take calls from customers placing orders. Simple maths made it clear that the volume of business they were doing around the country required more capacity than they had. Upon questioning, a number of customers wholeheartedly agreed that he needed to do something - busy signals being the most frequent result of efforts to place orders. On that basis, Gilbert bought a new system that upgraded their order desk capacity to eight lines. An answering system was also installed for those occasions (which he assumed would be rare) when telephone traffic outpaced the number of inside sales people that might be available. He was confident that the days of customers getting busy signals were over.



Thus, he was unprepared for survey results which clearly indicated it was his customer's view that none of the phone system problems had been resolved. Not sure how that could be, he tried calling into the system himself for several days - from the road, from home, even from his car. Most of his calls were greeted with busy signals. Gilbert White was not too pleased.

He called Bell Canada and demanded that someone come out to determine what the problem was. A few days later, the cause was identified.

When the new phone system had been installed, each of the eight lines were supposed to be tied together so incoming calls would "roll" from one line to another in case of a busy signal. The loop had never been connected; consequently, six of the eight lines were operating independently of each other. Outgoing calls could be made on each, thus there was never any internal indication of a problem. However, what nobody knew (except for a great number of frustrated customers) was that incoming calls were only being serviced by two lines. Whenever more than two calls came in at once, the result was the same - a busy signal. Adding insult to injury was the fact that customers had gotten so used to a problem that had been around for what seemed like forever, they had quit complaining.

For Gilbert White, the bad news was that a major source of customer discontent had gone unchecked for longer than he or anyone in his company realised. The good news was, *InfoQuest*® identified the problem and enabled him to fix it within days of receiving the survey. Obviously there was no way to assess how much business the company had lost, but no one doubted that losses had occurred.

There was one additional bright spot. Once the problem was resolved, Gilbert was able to begin every subsequent customer conversation about the survey with the words, "let me tell you what we've already done....."