



SPEAKERS' CORNER

Iain Regan

“Choosing the most effective way to measure customer satisfaction has long been an issue for companies. Many have used their own internal measurements, or have asked consultants to devise bespoke programmes to assess customer satisfaction levels. Contact centres have long used simple, standardised measurements such as the percentage of requests that are immediately dealt with, known as First Call Resolution (FCR), or the duration of customer calls, known as Average Handling Time (AHT).

Though these measurements can be useful, they can place an undue focus on how quickly and efficiently individual tasks have been achieved rather than on a customer's overall satisfaction. It is not necessarily the case that if all the protocols of customer interaction are followed in a timely way, a happy customer is a foregone conclusion.

Progress has also been made with the advance of survey-based approaches. One of the most popular has been to ask customers to rate different parts of their customer service experience through a Customer Satisfaction Index (CSAT) on a simple rating scale ranging from one (poor) to five (good) to highlight areas for improvement. A call to a customer immediately after they have finished their interaction gives an instant snapshot of whether they are happy with how their contact

Measuring customer satisfaction more effectively

unfolded. This instant feedback provides benefits, especially when implemented with email requests for comments.

Other more sophisticated variations on CSAT, such as Customer Delight Index (CDI) and customer focus groups, gauge whether customers are comparatively happy with their service. However, measurements for a CDI vary, often depending on the product or service offered, and there are no standard benchmarks for its measurement.

However useful these indices are, they are no substitute for

Promoters are loyal customers who will continue to buy a service or product and recommend others to you. Passives are satisfied but are generally unenthusiastic. They are likely to be susceptible to offers from competitors. Detractors are dissatisfied and can be a toxic influence on a brand through negative word of mouth. By asking the simple question 'Would you recommend us?' NPS gives a score that reflects all the factors of customer satisfaction: value for money, reliability and customer service standards.

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asking a customer directly, 'Are you happy?' Assessment models looking at customer satisfaction levels have for too long fallen short of the holy grail: a customer who will recommend your service to a friend.

Net Promoter Score

Since the long-term objective of any business is growth, it stands to reason that one of the most cherished agents of growth - customer referrals - should be the ultimate measure of customer satisfaction. A customer who will go so far as to advocate on your behalf can be a powerful source of new business. But how can you determine if a customer who is 'satisfied' would actually serve as an 'advocate?' Enter the Net Promoter Score (NPS), which segments customers into promoters, passives and detractors. The score is reached by subtracting the number of detractors from promoters.

Given the extremely high level of churn in the mobile industry, (up to an average of 30 per cent annually) and the importance of peer recommendations, especially among younger consumers, it is essential that mobile providers identify the factors that transform a satisfied customer into one who actively recommends a brand to friends.

Firstsource has helped transform the NPS score of one major mobile provider in the UK. Each Firstsource customer service agent conducts approximately 20 surveys a month that ask the simple question: 'Would you recommend the company to friends and family?' These questions are asked through an automated system, which also gives customers the chance to leave a voice recording adding some further feedback. All of those that award the client a low score are called back to find out why.

There are many scenarios in which customers may be satisfied with certain service levels or offerings yet refrain from recommending the company to their friends. One example is a company that is in the process of migrating from a legacy brand to a new brand. Customers of the legacy brand may assign a high CSAT score, reflecting years of experience and depth of brand maturity, yet evidence a low NPS score, reflecting the real or perceived absence of future-oriented investment in the legacy brand.

Previous negative encounters with customer service representatives can weigh on a customer's mind during an interaction. They may already be expecting a negative engagement. This means that even if an issue has been resolved, it doesn't necessarily translate into a willingness to be a promoter for a company. It is therefore crucial to identify those sources of irritation for customers and solve them.

Lessons learnt

One insight from our NPS work has been the importance of informing customers about their query and whether it is near to resolution. With this in mind, Firstsource has worked with a mobile provider to introduce SMS reassurance messages that let customers know that a task that they have mandated has been completed.

A Colorado-based managed network solutions provider found that knowing the status of repair or activation was equally as important to customers as the time it took to resolve the issue. Following this feedback, they developed systems to provide status

updates throughout the repair and activation process - resulting in an increase in customer satisfaction of 23 per cent. The company also decided to appoint a 'project manager' as a single point of contact for customers while they were attempting to activate a line.

Firstsource also works with customer service representatives to increase their sensitivity to a customer's satisfaction level during a call. A simple tick sheet has been introduced so that agents can rate the success of a particular call. This estimate is then compared with a customer's results for the same call. Over time, the disparities between customers and customer agents have been reduced through 'calibration sessions', in which staff examine detailed feedback on their calls.

The lessons are clear. If firms are to gauge the attitudes of their customers accurately, they have to focus on the entirety of experiences throughout the customer lifecycle - and not just on customers' impressions of each isolated transaction.



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SPEAKERS' CORNER

Tim Morgan

“Since Apple unveiled the iPhone 4S much attention has focused on Siri, the phone's voice recognition 'personal assistant'. While the technology is undoubtedly impressive, the real question for me is, are consumers ready for Siri?

Speech recognition is nothing new. The core technology has been around for a while and several companies, including Apple, have tried to apply the technology without much success. Voice recognition was introduced in the '80s for dictation within a limited domain and later on the computer desktop, to navigate through the user interface. You could 'manipulate' the computer by saying things like "Open Microsoft Word" or "Change font to Helvetica 10-point bold". But no one did. Adoption was limited, and still is today, even though the semantic layer has improved

Could Siri finally mainstream speech recognition?

tremendously. Two primary reasons unite these failings: the technology isn't intuitive enough, and people have to change their behaviour to use it.

Changing behaviour

We have become accustomed to manipulating tools, computers and devices using our hands, whereas, if you are having a conversation with someone on the phone, you are more inclined to use your voice. Speech recognition and its counterpart, Interactive Voice

IVR self-service channel. Which mode of interaction will win? If we're used to manipulating our smartphone by touch and type, will we change our instincts and speak instead? It's too early to tell. There appear to be some obvious scenarios in which it could work well, such as in hands-busy, eyes-busy environments such as cars. But there are challenges here too: background noise interference, and social concerns, such as talking in public to conduct our personal and private business.

convenience - then consumers will simply revert to what they know best.

Sweet-talked by Siri?

The biggest factor in Siri's favour is the strength of the brand itself. As we've seen with the iPad, the fact that Apple is introducing this technology could be enough on its own to redefine the market and change the way consumers behave.

As you would expect from Apple, Siri is not a standard, run-of-the-mill voice recognition application. What makes it different from anything we've seen in the past is that it marries speech recognition (recognising the spoken word), natural language understanding (assigning meaning to that spoken word or phrase) and search (concept mapping across domains). All integrated within an intuitive, user-friendly interface that has become the hallmark of the Apple brand.

Apple is not the first mobile brand to experiment with voice recognition, or 'personal intelligence-led' handheld devices for that matter. With

the likes of Google investing heavily in the voice capabilities of Android, as well as its Voice Search, the foundations are certainly there to push the technology into the mainstream.

Does Siri have what it takes to succeed? Will it be another game changer from Apple, or is the iPhone 4S destined to join the scrapheap of products that have tried and failed to crack voice recognition technology? Only time will tell, but if history is anything to go by, Apple is wise to label it beta software.

“If the barriers to using Siri outweigh the benefits, then consumers will simply revert to what they know best”

Response (IVR) systems, have found a natural home in customer service centres, where there is almost an instinctive desire to interact by voice. For example, if your customer service call is answered with a question - "Hi, welcome to organisation X, what product are you calling about?" - you are likely to respond verbally. The smartphone effectively blends the computer desktop and the

While I appreciate that Siri was not designed to replace physical manipulation completely or to be used on every occasion, the point is that for the technology to become ingrained in our everyday lives it has to be habitually used, almost instinctive. If the barriers to use outweigh the benefits - which in most cases with voice technology are improved speed and



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