Listen To Your Customers

In my last column I reminded small business CEOs that how a customer feels about their experience with your company is vital and that all your “customer experience” efforts need to keep in mind the “why” of what is done. I wrote that the “why” in question is the goal of adding value for customers, value that can run the gamut from hard-nosed results (“I got my invoices within 30 minutes of requesting them”) to idiosyncratically tender feelings (“I really felt cared for by that agent”).

Customer experience is more important than ever. Businesses that aren't focused on delivering on the promise of good customer service are seeing their customers leave in droves. In fact, 66% consumers will switch companies if they have a bad experience, according to a report by Accenture.

So how do you know how you are doing? How are your customers feeling about their experience with your company? Listen to your customers.

The Internet has given businesses a vast treasure of data on customer experience, but aggregating that data and turning it into something actionable takes a lot of time and fine-tuning to get right.

Social media platforms have been both a blessing and a curse for businesses. They give you the ability to speak directly to your customers without having to go through the intermediaries that traditional marketing and advertising required. But consumers in turn have gained a powerful voice to speak out when they feel like they have been wronged by a business.

To help you get a better handle of what customers are saying about your business online, you should implement a social listening tool. Social listening will not only give you access to conversations happening about your business but also help you determine the overall sentiment of those conversations.

The real problem many businesses run into on social media is that they spend an inordinate amount of time talking at their customers in the form of offers and promotions without taking the time to listen and engage.

If you don't think that your customers notice, you probably are wrong. Daniel Newman, best-selling author and CEO of V3B, noted in a recent article that businesses shouldn't be blasting their customers with marketing messages; instead, they should engage with them about what can be done to improve the business.

"Although pertinent data can be gathered from social media platforms, the main focus should be on listening to the customer," Newman wrote. That's where social listening tools can help.

Ask for feedback. Your business shouldn't just sit back and listen to the unsolicited feedback it is receiving on social media. It should also be actively seeking feedback in the form of online reviews and customer satisfaction surveys.
On the surface it might seem that all that feedback from various sources would be redundant, but the data you compile from each is essential to improving your business's overall customer experience.

Specifically, customer satisfaction surveys will give you a quantitative view of how your business is operating at a 30,000 foot level. They will give you insights into general trends regarding what is working about your business and what you need to improve.

Online reviews, on the other hand, will give you qualitative, in-depth data about individual customer experiences in real time. That is important because such data can help you catch problems as they arise, before they become systemic and far-reaching.

Analyze data and implement improvements. Having access to all this data and not using it to improve your product, service, or customer experience would be a huge mistake. Thankfully, we live in an era where we have access to data analytics solutions to help you break it down and make it easier to understand._The consumer is constantly changing and evolving, and so should your business._

Make it on-going. As with many things you do, monitoring and measuring customer experience at your business is an ongoing process.

If you stop paying attention and making improvements, your customers will notice—and well leave you for your competition. But if you are constantly striving to enhance your business and offer the best possible experience, you will build trust and loyalty while creating vocal advocates for your business.

And having advocates on your side can be valuable. No matter how hard you try to create marketing messages that resonate with your customers, they will always pale in comparison with recommendations from peers.

Since the rise of social media and online review platforms like Google or Facebook, those recommendations don't even have to come from someone they know, because a vast majority of consumers now place as much trust in online reviews as they do recommendations from family and friends.

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