Feedback Surveys: 10 Best Practices and Tips to Increase Response Rates
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These days, most customers’ inboxes are filled to the brim with emails requesting their feedback, making the feedback survey somewhat of a hard sell. That being said, surveys are still one of the most effective methods for attaining data from consumers and can be extremely valuable when aligned with strategy, analysis and research. To help your brand increase survey response rates, and the accuracy of the responses, we’ve compiled a list of tips and best practices:

Value Your Customers’ Time and Make Surveys Short

New studies show that the average human’s attention span now hovers at around 12 seconds1, meaning that you don’t have much time to grab your customers’ attention, much less keep it once they’re engaged. Suffice it to say, show them you care by making surveys as short and to-the-point as possible. Two key points to help you achieve this include:

Rotate question sets
By rotating question sets, you can gather a wide range of feedback from customers without inundating them with too many questions. It’s good practice to narrow your list down to 20 essential questions that can be rotated into 4-5 question sets with every individual survey. That means some customers get asked questions about overall satisfaction, for instance, while others get asked about customer service representatives. Meanwhile, you get the breadth of information you are looking for while customers get a simple and quick 4-5 question survey.

Additionally, make sure that on certain channels, such as IVR and SMS, you know which responses have the same intent. For example, our SMS surveys allow a variety of user inputs to be treated as equivalent and acceptable responses. That is, any of the following comments: “Excellent,” “excllnt,” “Five,” “5,” “Perfect,” or “xcellent” are categorised as a perfect score 5/5.

Have a concise and compelling call to action
As with all marketing, make your call to action clear, concise and compelling. You may need to test your headings to see what works, but once you find that magic mix of words, you’ll not only improve response rates but you’ll show customers that you take their time seriously. For example, rather than the standard “take our survey,” state in the subject heading what the survey is for, and in the body, reiterate this while telling the customer what they stand to gain from completing the survey. Some brands have even taken to telling customers how the surveys are going to be used to improve operations, or have shared how past surveys were able to change operations for the better.

Ask Questions that Generate Responses You Intend to Act On

It can be tempting to get creative with questions, or to ask for information that is interesting to certain parties in your company, but logically, you should only ask questions that are drivers of satisfaction or that incorporate drivers of what you want to track, measure or improve. Why? Because you are sending out this survey for a purpose, and that purpose is to improve your business in some manner. Are you trying to benchmark certain aspects of customer service like friendliness, knowledge, wait times or issue resolution? If so, use the same scale and wording in your questions. Alternatively, if you are trying to improve one specific area such as call centre resolution times, then ask a question about the expediency of your service, or about agent knowledge. Customers want to know that their feedback is going to make positive changes for the company, so keep this perspective in mind when designing your question sets.

Get Personal

In our age of information, the necessity for getting personal with customers is paramount because it shows that you care about them, pay attention to their past experiences with your brand, and are up-to-speed with your customer experience initiatives. With that in mind, make questions relevant to your customers’ past experiences with your company. For example, rather than asking “How was our service?” (which leads to a generic response with no actionable information in it) you can address the customer by name with specific information about their past interaction. Here’s an example:

Brands can reach customers on an increasing range of channels in our modern day, so they must ensure they are using the right timing and channel for their surveys. For instance, if a customer has filled out a comment form on the company website, it would be logical to email them back with a survey, or to use a live chat to offer the survey. In other cases, immediacy is integral to accurate and critical feedback, which is why SMS is emerging as a leading response rate choice. In fact, in some cases, SMS surveys garner up to 20% higher response rates than CATI and email surveys. Why? Because customers are most likely to want to give feedback right after an interaction. So, for instance, if they’ve just purchased a phone from a brick and mortar location and had either a great or horrible experience, a text sent as they are walking away will be more emotionally enticing than an email sent or call made one week later.

Make Surveys Channel Appropriate

Creating a personalised survey will always bring increased response rates as consumers will invariably respond better to questions that are more overtly specific to them as individuals. Leading companies personalise questions around a variety of data points, including age, gender, contract length, ARPU, location, role, products or services purchased.

Add Open-Ended Questions and Use Comment Boxes

Open-ended questions can result in richer information, especially when asked after a structured set of closed-ended questions that target specific elements of the experience. In other words, by priming the customer with questions that promote critical thinking about their experience, and then offering them a space to answer freely afterwards, you are creating the breeding ground for detailed information about the customer experience that closed-ended questions just can’t grasp. Additionally, current analytics technology is so advanced that it is able to decipher critical customer sentiment from unstructured online or text comments, and it can turn this sentiment into data that can be easily consumed and understood by CX professionals. This, in turn, offers CX professionals quick, yet powerful information on the customer experience, uncovering important issues such as "long wait times" or the "website [being] down." More broadly, open-ended questions or comment boxes show customers that you want to hear more from them, and that you care about ALL of their concerns, lengthy or not.

Act on Feedback

How frustrating is it when you give someone constructive feedback several times, and they keep making the same mistakes? Answer: VERY FRUSTRATING! Make sure that if you are collecting feedback, you act on it. The best brands take survey feedback and immediately route it to the right teams to ensure follow-through takes place. For example, if a customer rated a particular customer service representative poorly via a SMS survey, this low score should trigger an alert that gets routed to a manager who can make sure that the customer gets a callback to rectify their concerns right away. This shows your brand’s willingness to improve and care for the customer.
Avoid Repetition and Coordinate with Communications Departments

Nothing says, ‘I don’t pay attention to you’ like sending customers multiple types of content and surveys with similar information in them. The best brands coordinate surveys with other corporate communications to avoid email/survey fatigue, and to ensure that there is no repetition in messaging—which can be a headache for consumers.

Taste Your Own Medicine

There is no better way to know if your survey is painful for customers to complete than to take it yourself. Doing so can help you understand why certain questions need to be eliminated or why certain questions are confusing and unclear.

Make Sure Customers Understand Questions and Are Finishing Them

What seems clear to a CX expert might not be clear to the common consumer. Identify poorly worded or confusing questions by sample testing both internally and externally. Also, identify if customers are skipping questions, not finishing them, or are assigning random responses—because these all are indicators of poor question quality.

Know the Signs of ‘Survey Fatigue’ and Act Appropriately

Customers burn out from taking too many surveys, and suffer from what is known as ‘survey fatigue.’ From deleting and blocking your emails to writing irate comments in their responses, these are indicators of a customer who has had enough. This doesn’t mean that you have to stop sending them surveys altogether. It means that you need to assess the amount of communications customers are receiving from your brand, the type of surveys you are sending them and the frequency in which they are sent. There is always a way to create better surveys and question sets — and those who take the time to do so will sway their customers away from survey exhaustion towards survey invigoration. The key is to make surveys meaningful, useful, actionable and valuable for both the customer and your brand.