

Signature Press

EVALUATING, UNDERSTANDING AND ACTING ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS



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By John Ely
Hotel & Motel Management

I've done it. I know you have too. We've all seen the comment cards lying on the desk when we check into a hotel or sit down to dinner. You've probably even received a survey via e-mail after visiting the service department at your local car dealership. It is easy to ignore them when the service meets or exceeds my needs. However, when the service doesn't meet my expectations, I tear the room apart to find one of those cards!

Comment cards are tools that can help evaluate priorities for you and your staff. For those of you already utilizing comment cards or some type of "voice of the customer" research, I commend you. If you're not, the time to start is now. Customer loyalty is paramount to the bottom line – even more so in these trying economic times. It's more expensive to find a new customer than keep an existing one, and right now most marketing budgets are suffering.

So, how do we know if a customer is loyal? We need to ask. It is so important to hear from customers, both the good and especially the bad. Properly handling customer complaints is a great way to turn angry customers into loyal ones. It allows you to demonstrate your personal character as well as your company's values.

In-room comment cards work well, but there are other more effective methods such as phone follow-ups, focus groups, online surveys and even on-site interviews. Some online surveys I've taken have been displayed when I logged-on to the hotel's high-speed Internet connection. What a great way to get "timely" feedback! It also can generate more

interest because you can offer an incentive for filling it out right there online. It's tough to match that with a card lying on a desk.

OK, you have the information, now what? Obviously, acting on customer feedback is even more important than collecting it, but you'd be surprised to see how many clients don't take the time to put a strategy in place for implementing change based on customer feedback.

Start by sharing the comments with appropriate employees and departments. Don't be afraid to let staff know about shortcomings. How else can they then improve service? At the same time, if the comments are good, you should share them with everyone involved. Next, enlist customer-facing employees to come up with solutions or changes. They're on the front lines and can typically offer the best and easiest remedies. Finally, reply back to customers on the changes under way. Be careful to avoid the generic form letter full of empathy, but no action. You may even offer a discount or some incentive for the guest to return.

Customers love to know that you care about them, but we can't expect them to seek us out if there are problems. In fact, most won't complain when something goes wrong, they simply don't return. If you make it easy for the customer to provide feedback, and then act on the data after it is collected, you'll be on your way to building the kind of customer loyalty that maintains and even grows a business.