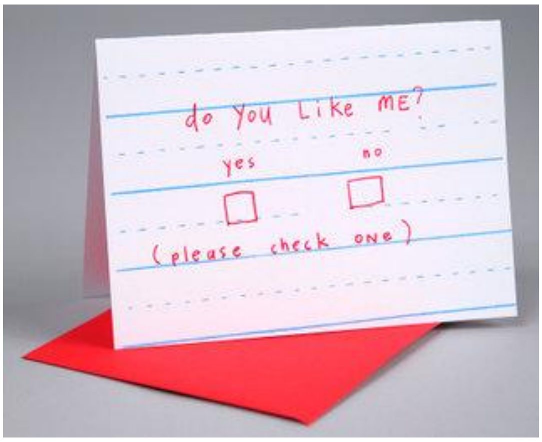
Why the annual ‘do you love us’ survey doesn’t work.

Do your customer satisfaction surveys measure up? Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you ask customers to comment only on what they have experienced first hand because you want reliable data, not guesses?
- Do you collect feedback promptly after each customer interaction while the activity is fresh in their minds?
- Do the proper teams and employees who actually do the work or provide the services receive data about their performance?
- Do you report customer data alongside financial data in order to understand the link between customer experience and financial performance and how it helps you make the right investment decisions?



If you answered yes to all of the questions above, you are a very rare breed. Experience suggests that the majority of organizations use a crude and elementary approach to gathering vital customer data. Periodic (often annual) surveys are sent out months after the actual customer transaction takes place. This is what we call the ‘annual do you love us survey’ and with it comes many pitfalls.

One of the biggest mistakes is having the mind-set that measuring customer satisfaction is enough. Knowing whether or not your customers are “satisfied” is certainly useful information, but it is more important to know how well you are performing in those areas that your customers consider to be of utmost importance and how that performance drives loyalty and repurchase.

Because most surveys are sent out infrequently and are designed to gather as much information as possible at one time, they tend to be extremely lengthy and time consuming. Who has the time to complete an extensive survey about a transaction that took place months ago? Most people just hit the "delete" key or toss the survey in the garbage can. Those customers who are kind enough to try and help you out by completing the survey tend to get "question fatigue" and make guesses or just select an "Agree" button for every question. The resulting data is therefore questionable.

Periodic surveys also limit the opportunities for data driven improvement. An annual survey means only one data driven learning and improvement opportunity each year. In a competitive market, can you wait a year for an opportunity to improve? Even a monthly survey schedule means that data can be out of date, particularly when the capture and processing of that data adds weeks to the cycle. If a customer is dissatisfied (and remember, most don't complain – to you), how long can you afford for them to be walking around with a grudge? Quickly identifying and addressing unspoken complaints is an effective way of improving loyalty, but speed is of the essence.

For many, action planning is also limited by access to the data. Paper based reports and charts bound in documents as thick as telephone directories make widespread circulation difficult. Even if the information is presented in spreadsheet form, finding the right data set poses problems. There is rarely an easy way to find the right information or navigate around hierarchical views of the data.

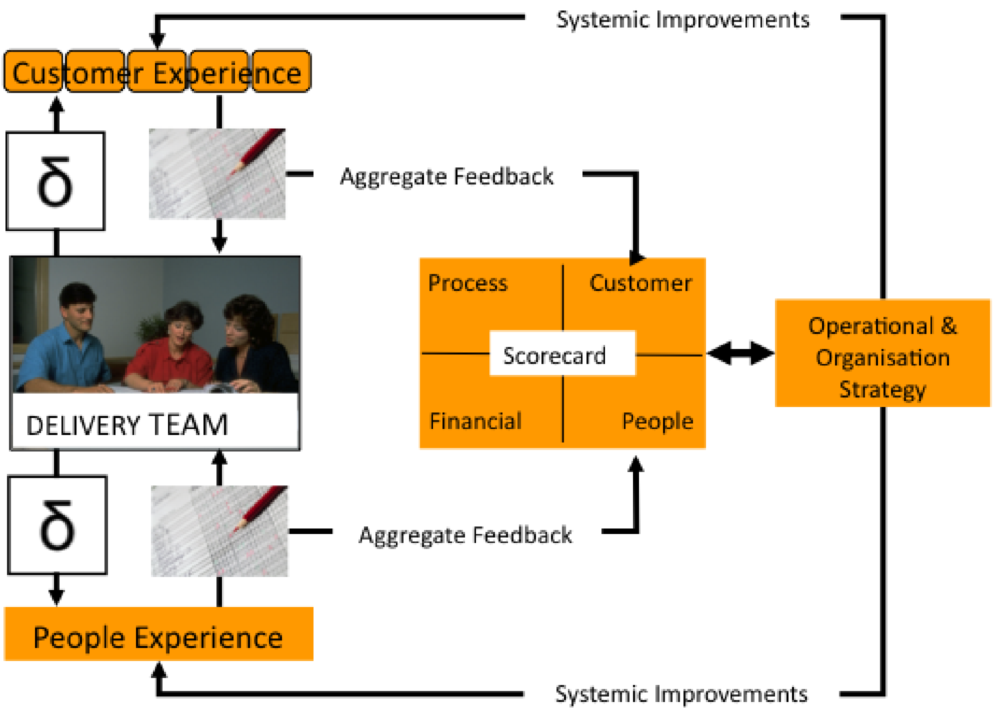
Many companies say they want to be customer focused. A few companies (such as Pitney Bowes Business Insight, GE and Rackspace) have embedded a customer driven approach to continuous improvement into their cultures. For them, regular collection of customer feedback at key points of customer interaction is the fuel that drives continuous improvement.

For those still relying on surveys driven by the calendar and not the customer, a different approach is needed. First, much of the data collection has to be event driven – referencing the specific interaction between customer and company. Highly focused event driven 'micro-surveys' (five to eight questions) issued to customers who have recent, first hand experience of an interaction raises both response rates and the reliability of the data collected. Careful design of these micro-surveys and the capability of underpinning systems allow data from different surveys to be aggregated, building up a comprehensive picture of overall performance.

A new approach to collecting the data has to be matched with changes to the use of the data.

The primary audience for customer data is the people responsible for the work. Customer information is an essential requirement of continuous work based improvement. Today, technology allows organizations to put role specific customer feedback data on every desktop. Work teams can analyze the customer's view of their performance and drive continuous improvement. Low scores from an individual customer that implies real dissatisfaction can be flagged for immediate follow up, providing the opportunity to nip a potential customer defection in the bud. Such responsiveness often has a significant impact on repurchase intention.

Managers can look at performance across the organization, recognizing good performance and focusing attention and investment on correcting weak areas. They can review customer data alongside financial and other operating data, looking for the connections that provide insights into the systemic issues of performance. Someone has to take responsibility for designing a feedback system that links to the company's overall measurement framework, as described in the diagram below.



So where to start? Here are our ten steps for putting your feedback system in shape:

1. Map out your customer journey and for each key interaction ask, "What matters most to the customer?"

2. Use these answers to develop a suite of event driven surveys.

3. Identify like themes across these surveys (e.g. staff attitudes, responsiveness, overall satisfaction, repurchase and recommendation intention) and use common questions to enable performance tracking across the customer journey.

4. Use CRM data and triggers to automate the deployment of event driven surveys, with personalized content.

5. Identify the business process owners for questions in the surveys and use this as the basis for role relevant reporting.

6. Create automated alerts to notify process owners and account managers of any customers that report low satisfaction, thus ensuring a quick response to issues and maximizing the opportunity for service recovery.

7. Build reporting mechanisms that deliver actionable data to drive change. Remember it is the actions driven from feedback that improve the customer experience, not the feedback itself.

8. Pass key feedback results back into CRM to maintain a single view of the customer. This also facilitates the integration of feedback (attitudinal) data with transactional and financial (behavioural) data to identify the actions that really make a difference.

9. Use league tables to highlight best practices and set up a learning culture.

10. And most importantly, ensure that feedback is translated into the actions that improve customer experiences and drive up financial performance.

Our advice is simple.

Stop measuring satisfaction and focus on performance across the customer journey. Kill the 'annual do you love us survey' and its monthly offspring; collect specific event data as they happen and combine that in CRM to build an overall picture of the customer experience.

Recognize that managers are the secondary audience: the real audience is the people who do the work because this is where performance is delivered. These steps will go a long way to giving customers what they want – performance, not merely satisfaction.

So, does your approach to customer measurement really measure up?

***David Jackson** is the CEO and co-founder of Clicktools and is a recognized expert in organization design and customer focus. If you would like to learn more about how Clicktools products and services can you improve your customer experience, please visit [www.clicktools.com.](http://www.clicktools.com)*

