



Get
to
it!

Missing [in]action

In earlier issues of Customer Insight magazine I've written about the importance of encouraging customers to take part in your surveys by warming them up.

An important element of the warm up is letting customers know that taking part is going to benefit them in the end because improvements will be made based on their feedback. This is the incentive for them to take part ('What's in it for me?').

That's easy! Customers tell you what they want and you take action. Except...most organisations don't find it easy. If it was the world would be filled with content customers.

Knowing where to start, taking those first steps towards taking action, can be bewildering, especially when faced with volumes of feedback from customers. This is why so many organisations spend a lot of time splitting and slicing results into endless segments. It's a subconscious delaying tactic.

In this article, I'm going to share some tips to help you get the ball rolling on the action front. This includes some tough love. We'll get that bit over with first.

If you are not actually taking action, unless the reason is that you are in the throes of making plans, then you really need to get a move on.

If you are not taking action because you do not trust the research you need to change your approach quickly and stop wasting money.

There is simply no justification (excuse!) for doing nothing. In 99.9% of cases, doing anything is better than doing nothing. Be wary of overthinking and stalling action taking.

In a nutshell:

- *If satisfaction is low or falling; you need to take action.*
- *If satisfaction is high or improving; you need to maintain momentum and build on your success.*
- *If your satisfaction scores are improving and you are not taking action; this is down to good luck. I can assure you it won't last forever. There are no free lunches in CSat. Take action.*
- *If you are taking action and your satisfaction scores are falling... there is probably a legitimate reason. I will come to this later.*

If your excuse is 'It's too difficult'. Well, what can I say? Yes, it can be difficult but where would we be if we gave up on everything that wasn't easy?

Taking action is as difficult as you make it. If 'difficult' scares you or puts you off then choose something relatively easy to change to give yourself a fighting chance. Some thrive on 'difficult'.

If your excuse is: 'I don't know what to do'. This is honest but it's no reason to give in or give up. It shows a blatant disregard for your customers to ask them what they think and then ignore what they tell you. You would be better off not asking in the first place.

With the excuses out of the way, when it comes to taking action where do you start?

It's about you

Have a think. Do you have the clout to drive change? Unless you are in a role of seniority or have been openly tasked with putting together an action plan, you may need to think about enlisting a sponsor. Without authority and support, driving change will be difficult. What they say about 'support from the top' is true.

Do you have a genuine interest and desire to drive change? Making changes is not for the faint hearted, you have to want to change and you need to have a recognition and understanding of the skills (whether or not you possess them) required to make change happen.

Assuming you're up for it and you are committed to taking action, here are some pointers that might help you on your way.

Decide what to focus on

- At TLF Research we present our clients with *Priorities for Improvement (PFIs)*, to get them started. These are changes that, based on the survey results, we believe will deliver the greatest benefit to the organisation.
- Our recommendations are usually based on selecting only two, three or four PFIs. This is because, practically, there is a limit to how much change can be accomplished without spreading resources too thinly. Also, customers may not notice lots of small changes; they are more likely to notice more substantial changes.
- The area of focus needs to be appropriate for your organisation; this may mean focusing on areas that are most strongly linked to your organisation's vision or strategy. For example, for some organisations this may mean focussing on a specific product or customer type.

Decide whether you are aiming for a marginal gains or quick wins approach

- *Decide what approach will work best for you. Are you going to tackle what is quick and relatively easy or work on a change that will have an impact on the most customers or key segments of customers?*
- *What approach will suit you best 'marginal gains' or 'quick wins'? Dave Brailsford, British Cycling coach, was coaching a team that was performing very well and he had to look for lots of tiny changes (marginal gains) that would add up to a more significant change. If your organisation is already performing extremely well, this approach may suit you best.*
- *For an organisation starting further down the ladder, that is not performing quite so well, it makes sense to concentrate on a smaller number of larger scale changes that customers will be more likely to notice.*
- *It is often sensible to focus on 'quick wins' first to get some traction. 'Quick wins' can be identified by considering what changes will have the strongest impact on customers compared with the time and cost required to implement these changes. Let customers know what changes you've made; they'll want to know.*

Decide who is going to own the improvement (You may choose to do this before deciding what to focus on)

- *I touched on this earlier but the driver and coordinator of the overarching action plan needs the authority (and support from above) to collaborate, motivate and drive change.*
- *The 'driver' does not necessarily need to implement the change themselves, but they do need to coordinate those who are implementing. This may involve deciding who will be responsible for change(s) and or specific plans.*
- *Who will be responsible... a person, a department or a specific team? You may choose to allocate a team to each PFI or a team to oversee all PFIs. You may decide it is more fitting to put an individual in charge of each PFI. To some extent the best approach may depend what you intend to change and the extent to which it requires specialist knowledge or is based on specific relationships. It will also depend on your staff resources.*
- *Volunteers or conscripts? You will need to decide whether to ask for volunteers to get involved with change or not. If you ask for volunteers you may get those most enthused to make change putting themselves forward. However, if you choose your team you can select those with the most suitable skills and attributes. Use your judgement.*
- *What will the rest of the organisation get told about change? Change may affect everyone in the organisation, whether they are involved in making change or are impacted by the change. Be sure to consider how you are going to position change to employees. The best approach is to be positive and explain what is happening and why so no one feels left out.*

Decide on the timescales and targets (you may choose to call them goals, aims or objectives)

- You should have an end goal in mind but consider how long it will take to agree on focus, put together the team, write strategy and implement.
- Without timescales, change is likely to drift or it may not happen at all. The only way to keep a track on progress is to put timescales and targets in place to understand what needs to be accomplished and by when. Set milestones on the way to the end goal.
- Timescales should be realistic but you may opt to go for 'challenging realistic' or 'comfortable realistic'. Timescales should fit the nature of the activity, the ability of those making change and the culture of your organisation; some organisations are more bullish than others. Inappropriate timescales may demoralise employees.

Involve the right people. The owner(s) write the strategy and agree objectives

- Change will be made easier if the 'right' people are involved. This is not about job title or even seniority. It's about involving people who can appreciate what is involved and what needs to happen for change to occur. This may mean understanding internal relationships or processes linked with the end goal.
- Involving those who know what is involved in making change will ensure a realistic and thorough action plan is put together.
- The strategy needs to include the formulation of a written plan that includes what will happen, when, who will do it, and how success will be determined.

Implement the plan

- *If you have thought through what you are going to do sensibly then implementation should not be too scary. If it is scary maybe you haven't planned it thoroughly enough? (The 'Proper Planning' Ps, regardless of whether you go for the 4, 5 or 6 P version, are a cliché for a reason).*
- *Ideally, the plan has been developed through a collaboration which has involved those who are going to implement the plan being part of the process. For example, who better to be involved in developing plans for the front line than those front line employees who will be tasked with making it work.*
- *Put the plans in place and start making the changes outlined. Communicate and ensure everyone knows their role in the plan. Motivate employees and secure 'buy-in' by explaining what is happening and why. Be sure to provide regular updates. Be honest; where set-backs occur face them and consider how to address. It is also important to celebrate successes and maintain momentum.*

Track progress and review. Revise where necessary

- *Check progress and do not be afraid to amend plans if needed. However, do not take such decisions lightly. All being well, if plans are well constructed and thought through then amendments will be few and far between.*

Finally, I said I'd come back to this ('If your satisfaction scores are falling and you are taking action'). At some point you may end up in a 'state of flux'. At some time we have probably all been there to some extent.

It's reassuring to know this isn't an imaginary state of chaos. There is a model to describe what's happening during this period of change. In short, it is not unusual for things to get worse before they get better.

You will get through this and come out of the other side. It is useful to bear this in mind so a) the thought does not put you off taking action and b) when you enter this state of flux do not give up or lose faith in what you are doing.

With customer satisfaction there is a lag which means that it takes time before changes translate to improved customer satisfaction. In some case, scores get worse (customers do not always like change) before they get better.

Finally, anyone who knows me has probably heard this phrase a thousand times but I still like it: "An inch of movement will bring you closer to your goals than a mile of intention". [Dr Steve Maraboli] Or, in the words of Nike (who no doubt paid millions to shorten this phrase): 'Just do it'. [They came up with this in 1988]. If you don't trust me, trust Nike.



Rachel Allen
Client Manager
TLF Research

rachelallen@leadershipfactor.com