



# Darren's rant

- Q)** What's worse than not finding out what your customers think about you?  
**A)** Not finding out what they think properly.

The sad reality is that many organisations don't bother to find out what their customers think of them or how satisfied they are. Arguably worse is the fact that many organisations who do make the effort and investment to monitor customer satisfaction do it appallingly badly. This not only wastes time, resources and money, it can also seriously mislead the organisation. Since the whole point is to have insight into what customers really think of you – warts and all – so you can improve where necessary, getting inaccurate views from customers defeats the whole purpose.

This regular feature, as well as allowing me to rant about things I'm passionate about, will look at common mistakes many organisations make when trying to understand and monitor their customer experience.

*'Having trouble sleeping? Try our guest satisfaction survey'*

Staying in quite a number of hotels on

business means you get to experience all extremes. You become an expert on all the customer journey touch points from online room booking to check-out procedures. Many hotels take guest satisfaction and loyalty extremely seriously, which is exactly what Premier Inn do, in the form of a guest satisfaction web survey. Great, that's exactly what they should do. Except, the survey itself is the sort of nightmare an uncomfortable bed might give you.

After a recent stay (with which I should say that I was very satisfied), I was emailed a link to complete a guest satisfaction survey. Great I thought, my chance to give some feedback. However, I'm sorry to say that I soon found completing the survey very painful. At 118 questions long and taking me 27 minutes to complete (and I started rushing towards the end) I fear this is one survey that will not give Premier Inn an accurate steer on how I, and other guests, feel.

## My heart sinks as the progress bar crawls

When this ticked slowly from 19 to 20% complete, when I'd already spent about 15 minutes on it and answered about 35 questions, I slowly felt myself losing the will to live. I wondered what percentage of people who start the survey actually complete it? Anyway, I persevered and finally completed all the questions, feeling quite relieved that I'd reached the end.

## Asking the right questions

A fundamental of an accurate measure of customer satisfaction is asking the right questions. Unfortunately it's the biggest single mistake organisations make. That's because they approach the task from the inside out, looking at the survey from the organisation's point of view – asking what's important to them – rather than through the customer's eyes – what's important to the customer. Unfortunately Premier Inn



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have made this mistake. There are two problems with this approach. Firstly, the questionnaire almost always ends up far too long because managers tend to keep thinking of more topics on which customer feedback would be useful or interesting. At 118 questions covering a whole host of topics, I think it's fair to say that's what has happened here.

The second and more serious problem is that the questionnaire invariably covers issues of importance to the company's managers rather than those of importance to customers. This is fine if the objective is simply to understand customers' perceptions of how the organisation is performing in particular areas, but it will not provide a measure of customer satisfaction. For example, the Premier Inn survey asks about potential new products and how likely would a customer be to eat at one of their restaurant brands.

#### Driving customer loyalty

There's nothing wrong with asking questions like these to gather customer perceptions and insights. They're invaluable in helping with strategy and direction.

All essential market research and insight work. However the problem comes when these questions are included in customer satisfaction research since it's factors that are most important to me that determine whether I'll choose to book another Premier Inn. Fairly obvious things like how good was the shower, was the bed comfortable, was the internet connection any good, did I have a good night's sleep and was the room clean and well kept? But only one of these factors was asked about on the survey (a question about room cleanliness). *So in 118 questions, I still wasn't asked to rate my satisfaction with factors of most importance to me as a customer. The very ones that influence whether I'll book again.*

Instead the survey asks about products and services they think are important to customers and I'm sure gathers some useful market insights as to whether there is a demand for these products and services, but it doesn't give Premier Inn a reliable steer on customer satisfaction and loyalty, or the drivers behind it. With the desire to find out lots of customer and market insights the survey has ballooned to a ridiculous size which brings into ques-

tion the reliability of responses (towards the end I wasn't reading the questions properly but was just selecting an answer in a bid to get it all over with).

I just hope Premier Inn look at their survey methodology, don't add further questions which have no importance to guests, but maybe go and ask customers what's important to them when they stay in that type of hotel and build a shorter, more relevant questionnaire around that. Then use the survey results to effectively improve the customer experience and increase loyalty. 



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