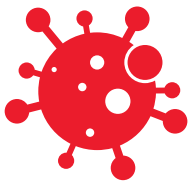


WHAT DOES
COVID-19
MEAN
FOR YOUR
CUSTOMER
RESEARCH?

what does covid mean for
your customer research?





WHAT DOES COVID-19 MEAN FOR YOUR CUSTOMER RESEARCH?

Over the course of 2020, we've seen some radical changes to customer experience and customer insight. Many clients have asked us similar questions about the impact of those changes, so we've put together this document to summarise what we know.

Are companies still doing surveys?

Yes they are, although there have been some changes. It's more important than ever to make sure that you understand your customers.

For event-driven surveys, we've seen more disruption to surveys in certain industries, especially in the early days when some events (e.g. repairs in Social Housing) were simply not happening. Where customer interactions are remote, most clients have kept their surveys going.

Relationship surveys have been affected in B2B markets, but again this varies by sector, and depends on the impact that lockdown is having on each client's customers.

Should we be doing research now?

We believe so, but you may need to consider how. Depending on the nature of your market and your relationship with customers, it may not be appropriate to go out with a like-for-like survey identical to previous years.

Our advice would be:

- **Make a judgement about what questions to ask on your relationship survey, to avoid the risk of seeming "tone deaf" to the current situation.**
- **Keep trackers going (or start them back up). Customers appreciate the chance to feed back on their experience, whatever the circumstances.**
- **Use online qualitative methods to make sure you understand your customers, their current circumstances, and how their needs may be changing.**

What impact has there been on scores?

Initially there was a definite "Covid bubble" boosting scores, as customers were pleased to see companies dealing with the impact of the pandemic. Many customers seemed to appreciate "moments of kindness" from the staff they dealt with.

This initial boost has dropped off, and customers are now scoring it as they see it. The impact has been positive for some organisations, and negative for others, depending on how they have been able to respond. The most important thing is that you have an accurate view of how your customers are feeling.

What should we do about our targets?

Targets should always be a strategic question, rather than something that is simply determined by survey analysis. Good targets start with a robust understanding of how satisfied your customers are today, and require a clear vision of where you want to get to, why (i.e. the business benefit of doing so), and how (i.e. which specific changes or improvements do you need to make). That logic still holds, but you may need to revisit your assumptions about your starting point, and possibly about which changes are possible.

Is importance changing?

In the short term, absolutely. Our research has shown that, as you would expect, customers will be more focused on hygiene, social distancing, and safe working practices. It's less clear how lasting those changes will be, but there is some evidence of lasting shifts in consumer behaviour. You can read our series of reports for more information on this.

We'd recommend that you should re-measure importance and/or use qualitative research to ensure that your questionnaires accurately reflect customer priorities.

What impact has there been on response rate, and what can we do to maximise response?

This has varied dramatically according to sector, methodology, and so on. In general, we have seen telephone responses being much more difficult than usual to get in B2B markets (for the obvious reason that most are working at home).

In whichever sector, moving towards a blended approach, combining different methods in a single survey, is often a good idea; and something we've been recommending since before the pandemic. We've found that, by working harder, we've been able to get good response rates in most cases.

The right answer for your customers will vary, but the principle should be to find the best combination of survey methods for them. That might be telephone, with a web backup; SMS to web; or individual QR codes on a postal survey. Get in touch if you want to pick our brains.

As ever, the best thing that clients can do to help is to provide an accurate database, and to invest the time in "warming up" customers ahead of the survey.

How have customers reacted to being surveyed?

The vast majority of customers we've contacted have been happy to be surveyed. Those that have commented on it have almost exclusively said that they were surprised, but pleased, to be invited to take part in a survey.

There are some customer groups who would need to be approached carefully or not at all (NHS workers would be one example), because of the demands on their time, but in general customers are as happy to be surveyed as ever.

What questions are people asking about Covid-19/lockdown?

Many clients have chosen to add a few questions, or even change their whole questionnaire, to reflect the impact of the pandemic. It's certainly a good idea to ask about perceptions of your lockdown performance, and to understand if there's any more you could be doing.

It's worth considering new qualitative research to make sure that you understand what your customers' lives look like in this "new normal", and that will also be the case when we eventually start to emerge from the pandemic.

What about the impact on employees?

One of the biggest challenges for organisations this year has been to manage the performance and culture of their employees, who in many cases are working from home much more than usual. As with customers, we'd recommend continuing your usual employee engagement research, but also using specific pulse surveys to address current conditions.

It's also a good idea to use online learning, video, and digital workshops to ensure that staff feel engaged and in the loop even when working remotely.



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