



CASE STUDY

Transforming US Cellular

Creating an Effective Experience Improvement Program Where
Customer Feedback Drives Action

RESULTS

- <5 average number of seconds to respond to feedback
- 400% increase in customers providing feedback
- 50% decrease in the cost of the program
- 5x increase in shareholder earning

As the fifth-largest wireless carrier in the United States, U.S. Cellular not only provides industry leading innovations and excellent coverage to over 5 million people, but they also have an important emphasis for the ones that truly fuel the business—the customer. Based in Chicago and powered by 5,400 employees, the company founded in 1983 still prides itself in values that elevate the customer experience. U.S. Cellular's intention is to serve and keep rural areas in mind; the places on the map otherwise neglected by exceptional coverage. Success in doing so is attributed in part to 4 customer care centers, the driven pride employees have for overall success, and leadership action.

Surveying a Neglected Customer Segment

For more than 35 years, U.S. Cellular has maintained the focus on serving markets that are not served by others. Across the map, leaders ensure their associates have the knowledge and training to provide consistency and

informed decision making on behalf of consumers. In effort to do so, a tracking program of some form has been in effect over the last 10 years.

The old program started with a phone survey, based only off transactions. Either in a call center or in-store, a record would be generated, random samples selected, and then eventually a phone interview would take place. Difficulties in gathering the data and utilizing the comprehensive responses were apparent in the outdated program.

Painstakingly, the call average would often be lengthy and frustrating, with questions and follow-up questions taking an average of 45 minutes per conversation, never giving the customer a clear way to express opinions. In sections of the survey where customers wanted to express their thoughts on corporate policies, for example, the closest place they could voice their thoughts was in a category focused on employees they had previously interacted with. This created a “bleeding” effect that didn’t provide answers that were relevant to specific topics of concern. The impact from responses would rest heavily on, essentially, the incorrect areas.

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The frontline teams could not follow up with customers effectively due to lag time, so response action was sparse. Realizing the program was outdated and neglected, it was determined that the most effective collection of customer feedback would require more direct, revised channels of the survey. The change was desperately needed not only

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CUSTOMER INSIGHTS LEAD, JOHN LEWIS

to better serve their customers but was driven also by the need to reduce the cost of their current VoC program phone survey.

Designing a Program Driven by Feedback

With intentions of modernization and quicker results, U.S. Cellular partnered with us with the intentions of modernizing their program to get feedback faster and to be more efficient. “We wanted to provide the frontline a star level of call center feedback in a more real-time fashion; get our leaders access to the data in a timelier manner,” said the Customer Insights Lead, John Lewis.

“It was time to modernize and make some improvements. That was really the driving force for bringing the team in.”

Focus groups were held in Tulsa and Greenville, using the old survey as a measure to gain a better understanding of how questions were being interpreted and how response rates could improve.

In these focus groups, U.S. Cellular was able to hear from competitors as a part of the sample. The intelligence gathered showed what was important to customers of the competition, providing the groundwork for determining an outreach that would be relevant to existing customers as well as potential ones.

The focus groups were only the first step in the process. After gaining a better understanding of what the old survey was like, the drafting of a new one began.



Within each survey there were three sections: company, the call itself, and the experience of the store. With the “bleeding effect” in mind, the purpose of these sections was to allow customers to choose their preference on what they wanted to talk about. Implementing an omni-channel approach, customers could choose to take the survey through SMS, email, or phone. Issues that couldn’t be expressed before, now had a place contained within a newly improved online experience.

Implementing new dashboards for each survey was a priority for the team. Although dashboards had always existed, the redesign was crucial to make sure the new data was displayed in a way that met the needs of all stakeholders.

Interviews with executives and area managers from all U.S. Cellular teams were held to see how they were using the

dashboards in order to determine what works and what doesn’t for the frontline teams. Adjustments were made as they were determined. New dashboards were built with near-time recording to reduce the time it took to get the data to team members from a minimum of two weeks to a 48-hour maximum lag time.

Positioned for Continuous Success

“As long as the field is happy, I’m happy,” John Lewis relayed, “Keeping former systems in place with the data and communications were about the changes I expected to see. With a new modern program in place we’re now able to explain the differences in our program data based on methodology change vs. change in performance. Where we are now is very different than where we started.”

Case studies are illustrative only and do not imply an endorsement of any particular product or service. Each customer’s situation is unique and results will vary.

To demo a product or to contact us call:

NORTH AMERICA
1-800-530-4251

APAC
+61 (2) 8397 8131

UK & IRELAND
+44 (0) 1494 590 600

GERMANY
+49 (0) 40 369 833 0

or email us at sales@inmoment.com