



Focus on Your CX Program to Improve Your Response Rates

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Clients frequently ask me how they can improve their response rates, which is a significant issue in the customer feedback and market research arenas. As consumers, we are inundated with survey requests looking for our thoughts on recent experiences. Many experts, including our own, have written prolifically on this topic, covering things like list hygiene, sample vs. census, visual appeal of the invitation, subject line, formatting, time estimates, and so forth.

However, while learning how to better build and sustain better response rates is important, I believe the obsession with them is misguided and stuck in traditional market research methodology. The problem with fixating on response rates is that it focuses on the volume of surveys you get back and not on the quality or representativeness. It's more important to ensure you are inviting the right people (or the right mix of people) that truly represent your business. The quality of the feedback you are getting is much more important than how many people answered a given question or the statistical significance of that sample size.

BUILDING BETTER RESPONSE RATES THROUGH CX

The answer to building and sustaining higher response rates from customers lies more in the actions taken by your customer experience (CX) program. There are two critical things any company can do to improve its response rates that have nothing to do with research tactics/mechanics or the look and feel of your invitations and surveys, and they tie back to the inner and outer loop concepts described in the Net Promoter SystemSM.

The first is having an effective closed loop system that responds to customers and addresses their issues if they give you negative feedback. This is known as the inner loop. When customers feel heard and that their issues are being addressed, they are much more likely to provide feedback again in the future. Additionally, there is plenty of documented research showing that customers who have an issue that is resolved to their satisfaction give higher satisfaction scores than customers who

didn't even have a problem in the first place. So, there is additional incentive to provide this closed loop response.

Immediately Respond to Customers and Address Their Issues

The second item has to do with the actions your company takes on the collective feedback you are receiving to drive improvements in the customer experience and communicate those back to customers. This is the outer loop. When customers see that their feedback is listened to and that it drives changes that they benefit from in the future, they are more likely to continue to provide feedback.

Drive Business Improvements Using Collective Feedback

Feedback is the lifeblood of a CX program's ability to learn about changing customer needs, wants, and expectations in order to deliver faster growth and profitability for your company. Giving

customers a true incentive to provide feedback, by using that information to enhance the experience they have with your products and services, will do more to increase your medium- and long-term response rates than any other tactic.

BUILDING TOWARD EXPERIENCE IMPROVEMENT

Shifting your focus away from response rates and toward the areas I've identified here may feel unnatural to traditional market researchers, but it's the best way to deliver on both the business and customer goals that I mentioned in the preceding paragraph. It also allows you to achieve a more holistic goal than honing in on response rates can allow for, and that's building bold, human connections with your customers as people, not just customers.

Building those connections is fundamental to continuous Experience Improvement (XI). Our framework around this idea consists of five steps: designing your program with your end goal in mind, listening to customers, understanding their feedback by combining it with customer profile and both operational and financial metrics, transforming your customer experience

based on that feedback, and realizing better business outcomes. Focusing solely on response rates keeps your organization stuck in the listen phase. Focusing on building those connections and closing the inner and outer loops: that's what gets you to meaningful transformation and, ultimately, better business outcomes.

What do those outcomes consist of? Accelerated customer acquisition. A more loyal existing customer base. Unveiled opportunities to cross-sell within that base. And, last but not least, a chance to lower your cost to serve. Thinking about response rates in this way will get you Experience Improvement, and Experience Improvement will get you to these and other goals. The work is continuous and usually difficult, but pulling it off successfully is possible, and it all starts with focusing on your CX program instead of your response rates.

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