

Getting to Know You

Why Voice of the Customer Matters

by Gina Collia

Customer complaints are not new. In fact, they are part of a very long tradition dating back almost four millennia. According to what is thought to be the world's oldest surviving letter of complaint, written in Akkadian cuneiform on a small clay tablet dating to 1750BC, the merchant Ea-nasir supplied substandard copper ingots, added insult to injury by being rude to his customer's servant, giving him the 'take it or leave it' treatment, then refused to give a refund. 'What do you take me for, that you treat somebody like me with such contempt?' writes Nanni, the justifiably disgruntled customer.¹

The tale is as old as the hills, but the ending nowadays would be quite different. Nanni closed his letter by promising, 'I will not accept here any copper from you that is not of fine quality'. Ea-nasir was lucky; as long as he improved his service and product, he could avoid losing his customer. He got a second chance. Today, Nanni would google alternative suppliers and be well on his way to the finest grade of copper, not to mention a tailored customer experience, in a few quick and painless clicks.

We live in the age of the customer. Nowadays, customers have a world of choice before them, the ability to pick and choose who and what they engage with, and to decide when and how they do so. And they can do all of it at the press of a key. You don't even have to deliver substandard metals to end up in trouble; a misjudged tweet, an inappropriate image on Instagram, a scathing review, or just being very boring can damage your brand irreparably, often in an instant. If you want to stay ahead of the competition - to survive, in fact - obtaining customer feedback and acting on it is vital.

Stop Marketing to Goldfish

We've all heard the claim that the average adult human's attention span is now less than that of a goldfish, and many believe it. Despite the fact that the goldfish myth was debunked several years ago,² the claim has been repeated *ad nauseam* since it first hit the news in 2015, based on a report by the Consumer Insights team of Microsoft Canada.³

¹ Oppenheim, A. Leo (1967), *Letters from Mesopotamia: Official, Business, and Private Letters on Clay Tablets from Two Millennia*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, pp. 82-83.

² Maybin, Simon (BBC News, 2017), 'Busting the attention span myth'. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-38896790>

³ The eight-second claim is based on information cited within that report from a third party - Statistic Brain. See Consumer Insights, Microsoft Canada, 'Attention Spans' (2015). <https://dl.motamem.org/microsoft-attention-spans-research-report.pdf>

It turns out that goldfish have been much maligned by the claim too, but that's a topic for another day. In any case, it is not the human attention span that has driven change in our behaviour as our lives have gone digital. There's simply so much vying for our attention nowadays that we can afford to pick and choose what we spend our time on, and we have become adept at doing just that.



Microsoft Canada's research found that:

'While digital lifestyles decrease sustained attention overall, it's only true in the long-term. Early adopters and heavy social media users front load their attention and have more intermittent bursts of high attention. They're better at identifying what they want/don't want to engage with and need less to process and commit things to memory.'

So, we humans have become more adept at processing information quickly when searching for content that we wish to engage with. We know what we want, and we know when we haven't found it. We are hungry for more information, but we are not willing to waste time on things that are boring, pointless and unrewarding. In short, we pay attention for as long as we are given good reason to do so.

When Was the Last Time You Enjoyed Being Bored?

It's not enough to grab your audience's attention; you have to produce content that will continue to hold it. If your content is boring, no matter how quickly and concisely you

deliver it, your existing/potential customers will recognise that fact within seconds and move on. If it is mediocre, not relevant, uninformative or badly produced, they will move on. So, it's not messaging speed that you should be focusing on; you should be focusing on audience engagement and content quality and relevance. When your customers ignore your advertisement, delete your email or fall asleep while trying to read your white paper, it's not their brains that are deficient; the fault lies with your content.



Whilst it is true that ‘we never get a second chance to make a first impression’, making that first impression a positive one is only the first step in the process. The more your customers engage with you in a positive way, the more likely they are to buy your product or service, and the more likely they are to be loyal to you. If, on the other hand, you make no attempt to engage with your customers, you will lose them, because winning their good opinion takes a lot of work, but losing it takes no work at all. And, to paraphrase Jane Austen’s Mr Darcy, their good opinion once lost is lost for ever.

Remember You’re a Human

Human beings crave human interaction. They want to be understood. They want their needs anticipated and catered for. They want to be made to feel special. If you want to create strong, lasting relationships with your customers, you need to remember that they are human beings first and customers second, and you need to make your awareness of that fact evident when you interact with them.

Human decision making is not based solely on logic, facts and figures. Human beings are complex, emotional creatures, and ‘Emotions constitute potent, pervasive, predictable, sometimes harmful and sometimes beneficial drivers of decision making.’⁴ As Bryan Kramer explains in his book *There is No B2B or B2C: It's Human to Human*.⁵

‘Businesses do not have emotion. Products do not have emotion. Humans do. Humans want to be part of something bigger than themselves. Humans want to be included. Humans want to feel something.’

Only by making a human-to-human connection can you build long-term trust and respect. And only by building long-term trust and respect, by genuinely engaging and working at the relationship, will you retain your customers’ attention and loyalty. Fail in these things, and there’s better content, a better experience, a better and more meaningful relationship just waiting for them around the corner. In fact, these days they don’t have to turn a corner; now, they just have to swipe left or right, touch a screen or press a key and they’re gone.

The personalised Customer Experience

Customers have come to desire, indeed expect, personalised experiences. And they have come to expect personalisation throughout their interactions with a company: from their very first encounter with it to their last. They’ve also come to expect a deeper, more meaningful experience. If those expectations are not met, they will go elsewhere, whether they are in the process of deciding on their first purchase or their fifteenth. While customers do care about the cost and quality of your product or service, customer experience has overtaken both price and product as the key brand differentiator. A recent Hubspot statistics report found that customers ‘would rather invest in a brand that focuses on their needs and constantly provides value beyond the initial purchase’.⁶ Also, according to Forbes, 96% of customers will leave you if you provide bad service.⁷

But to be able to offer personalised experiences and build customer relationships, you need to understand the goals, needs, desires and concerns of your audience.

⁴ Jennifer S. Lerner, Ye Li, Piercarlo Valdesolo, and Karim S. Kassam (2015), ‘Emotion and Decision Making’, in *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 66:799-823.

⁵ Kramer, Bryan (2017), *There is No B2B or B2C: It's Human to Human*.

⁶ *Hubspot Annual State of Service in 2022*, Hubspot. <https://blog.hubspot.com/service/customer-service-stats>

⁷ Hyken, Shep (2020), ‘Ninety-Six Percent Of Customers Will Leave You For Bad Customer Service’, in *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/shephyken/2020/07/12/ninety-six-percent-of-customers-will-leave-you-for-bad-customer-service>

Get to Know Your Audience

Obtaining customer feedback can give you vital insights into what your customers think of your company, product or service. But it goes beyond that. If your customers feel that they're part of the conversation, and that you value their opinions, they will be more engaged and far more receptive to your message.

Whether you're planning a marketing campaign, looking to improve your customer service, launching a new product or looking to update an old one, the first thing you need to do is open your ears wide and listen to what your customers have to say. Indeed, in this modern, digital world, where customers have increasingly high expectations of the companies they engage with and switching to another provider is usually so quick and painless, a good Voice of the Customer (VoC) program is vital for your company's survival.

What is Voice of the Customer?

The clue is in the name. It's all about hearing what your customers *really* think about your company and its product or service and acting on that information. It's about carrying out effective research that enables you to bridge the gap between your customers' expectations of your company and their *actual* experiences with it.



Customer feedback can be acquired from various sources, including surveys, 'phone calls, interviews, focus groups, direct mail and email. It can be gleaned from online reviews and ratings, from comments on social media and from website analytics. This

information can then be used to improve the customer experience, improve your product or service, improve efficiency and aid in employee training. Having a better understanding of your customers will help you to differentiate yourself, be more competitive, enhance your brand, create powerful messaging for marketing, and increase customer retention and sales.

A good VoC programme will help you to provide content that is relevant, in context, informative, engaging, published at the right time and in the right format. It can help you to produce content that will grab the attention of your audience and retain that interest, motivating prospective customers to make that first purchase and motivating existing ones to remain engaged and loyal.

Open Ears Make Happy Customers

Listening to your customers' feedback will enable you to adapt to cater to their current needs. By keeping those ears open, you will be able to adapt to their *changing* needs also. And by maintaining a finely-tuned VoC programme, and by focusing wholly on the needs of your customers, you will be able to deliver unique experiences to each individual human being that engages with you, rather than providing a one-size-fits-all service that falls far short of your customers' expectations.

If you would like to know more about the Word Ferret Voice of the Customer service, please [click here](#).