

Why Customer Insight Matters to Customer Service Leaders

Part 2

By Martin Hill Wilson (guest blogger)



Why a Voice of the Customer Program gives focus

We need to recognize that the world today holds unique challenges for customer insight work. One key characteristic is the sheer volume and diversity of customer feedback, often enabled by advanced technologies. At almost every point in any interaction or transaction cycle, brands now ask us for our opinion or experience.

But how is that used to generate insight? It's still an evolving issue. Add to this the volume of unsolicited 'social chatter', and many feel they are drowning.

I'm a big fan of Voice of the Customer (VOC) initiatives. A VOC program can provide both focus and organization to customer facing teams when looking for new 'post-silo' models of [working together](#).

- **Customer Experience** - For Customer Experience leaders, VOC provides a welcome and practical milestone to sink their teeth into. VOC programs can also be sponsored directly by Customer Service organizations.
- **Marketing, PR and Customer Service** - Equally you might find that the ownership issue of social customer service between Marketing, PR and Customer Service provokes a broader debate about collaboration using the rich mix of customer insight that social channels provide.

Whatever the motivation, VOC is groovy! These programs encourage cross functional sharing. And more importantly, they help you leverage customer feedback from numerous touch points. Having a diversity of data sources helps you generate a broader and more realistic perspective on the customer experience.

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For instance, how does customer insight vary by channel? Voice customers (e.g., from call centers and in-person interactions) and social media customers can sound very different. What does that reveal? I'm always more convinced when issues show up consistently on more than one media.

Assuming you invest in **Interaction Analytics**, then this is the route by which Customer Service can ascend the greasy pole of corporate hierarchy into the 'Strategic Club'.

How so?



Reducing failure demand is great. Innovation is even more valuable

At the beginning of [Part 1 of this article](#), I said that Customer Service had inherited the ‘sins of the organization’. They’re often unable to ‘prove’ their root cause analysis around failure demand (i.e., new demands driven by the failure to meet customer needs or expectations). Well run analytics can deliver that proof. Numbers talk and others have to listen at the very least.

Yet reducing failure demand is only part of the value. The other thread of gold is innovation. What are customers telling us about their needs and thus untapped opportunity? Not just the next killer product they are indirectly hinting at, but upsell and cross-sell potential, as well as brand advocacy.

Think about the typical sales process in B2B. In today’s world, prospects will have completed 70% of the sales cycle via online search, word-of-mouth and recommendation before needing to directly interact with a company.

That puts a radical spin on what value the fully loaded costs of a field sales force can now deliver. I don’t pretend to know the answer to that. However, if I were an SVP of Sales and received regular analysis from the VOC team on this evolving behavior, I would no doubt become indebted to them for helping me evolve my next generation sales strategy.

With the vast majority of the sales cycle taking place online, VOC analytics can deliver insights that help sales teams design “next generation” strategies for acquiring and retaining customers.

Parting thoughts

There is a second part to the story of the smart CEO who’s leveraging a VOC dashboard ([mentioned in Part 1 of this article](#)). After a few executive sessions, in which vague one-minute departmental reports are replaced with useful debate about what the customer insight dashboards are telling them, our wily CEO ups the stakes.

She introduces the cross charging ‘game’. If the source of an issue that Customer Service deals with comes from another team, then they get charged for causing it! For instance, who owns the cost of educating customers in how to use the product? Marketing, Manufacturing, R&D? Maybe even Learning & Development. Let the debate begin!

Imagine how those with functional-based incentives react when they get charged... running Customer Service could become close to a zero cost operation, because action for failure demand would be resolved at the source.

There is much ongoing debate as to what a customer-centric organization really looks like. For my money, I’ve just described how a business can make the transition.



Martin is a long-standing member of the UK customer service community. He has served as consultant, facilitator, director and CEO for a variety of brands. He also participates as conference speaker and blogger in his role of passing on best practices and next generation thinking in customer service and social business.

He currently work as an independent under the Brainfood brand with a range of clients focusing on customer related strategy assignments. This increasingly includes social media and social business integration. Learn more about Martin at www.brainfoodextra.com/about.

Let's Talk

Beyond the Arc, Inc. is based in Berkeley, California.

Toll-free: [1. 877.676.3743](tel:1.877.676.3743)

Email: info@beyondthearc.net

Website: beyondthearc.com

Blog: beyondthearc.com/blog

Social:    