

Measuring The Chimera: Customer Satisfaction

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From Webster's Dictionary:

chi-me-ra : Pronunciation: kl-'mir-&, k&-
noun. Etymology: Latin *chimaera*, from
Greek *chimaira* she-goat, chimera; akin to
Old Norse *gymlr* yearling ewe, Greek *cheim*
1 a : a fire-breathing she-monster in Greek
mythology having a lion's head, a goat's
body, and a serpent's tail **b** : an imaginary
monster compounded of incongruous parts
2 : an illusion or fabrication of the mind;
especially : an unrealizable dream <a fancy,
a *chimera* in my brain, troubles me in my
prayer -- John Donne>

Your average customer could be worth over \$40,000 over their lifetime. (This assumes a 30-year life cycle for a building, with its related service calls, equipment replacements, and so forth.)

Do you know what would then be vital to know?

What puts a grin on that \$40,000 face?

Unless you conduct customer satisfaction surveys, you don't really know. You might have a "gut feel" for, but without hard data, you could be wrong. Surveys remove doubt.

I recommend written and telephone surveys. Larger companies should also consider focus groups.

Focus Groups: A focus group can be composed of eight to 12 of your customers cho-

sen at random. It should be moderated by a neutral facilitator. (It is very important that you do not perform the role of facilitator yourself, as this will taint the results.) Engage a professional market research company for this purpose.

Let the facilitator bring your customers to an evening session at a neutral location (restaurant, hotel or the facilitator's office) and let them interview your customers and draw out comments — good and bad — without you being present. (If you conduct the session the facilitator's office, there may be one-way glass which permits you to observe from an adjacent room.) The facilitator should provide you with an audio tape of the session (video is better) and a written summary, including recommendations.

You should thank your customers for their participation with a letter and a gift (such as a pen and pencil set, or a gift certificate for dinner, etc.) but do this **after** they have had their say.

Telephone Surveys: These can be done by anyone on your staff who has been **properly trained** in how to do them. They should be short (three questions or so) and brief (two minutes or less).

Here is a sample set of questions:

1. Did our technician arrive at the promised time?

2. Did they explain their findings and your options satisfactorily?

3. Was the fee about what you expected, more than you expected, or less than you expected?

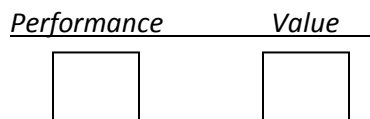
If your telephone survey uncovers a problem, get involved immediately and resolve it.

Written Surveys: Written surveys are powerful means to measure customer satisfaction and reward your people.

I recommend a dual-axis survey, in which you ask customers for an appraisal of your performance and a rating of how valuable such performance is to them.

For example, one of your questions on an installation survey might read like this:

Was your property cleaned to your satisfaction when our crew finished?



On the survey form, you would ask the customer to assign ratings of 1 to 5, where 1 is very low and 5 is very high.

Take all the surveys for a given period of time and average the performance and value ratings of each item you are measuring. Then plot the results on a graph like the one at the end of this article.

The most important quadrant on this chart is the upper right quadrant [Q1]. Why? Because you are doing a good job on those things the customers say are important to them.

Where is the most dangerous quadrant? The upper left [Q2], because you are doing

poorly in areas the customers deem important.

Quadrants 3 and 4 [Q3, Q4] are in the “Who cares?” zone. Whether you do well or not is not important to your customers.

The dual-axis survey can be a powerful management tool. Every measure that falls in Q1 can be celebrated (to thank those who put you there, and to build morale). The points that fall in Q2 can become performance improvement objectives for the managers responsible for those areas of performance.

To be effective with written surveys, follow these guidelines:

1. Use clear printing on quality paper.
2. Since your early results will probably have several measures falling in Q3 and Q4, don't print a lot of surveys until almost all measures fall in Q1 and Q2.
3. Use a different form for each department of your company.
4. Have your field people give the customer a form on every installation and service call.
5. Make the form easy to mail back: self-mailing with postage paid.
6. Keep it short - no more than 12 questions.

See the graph on the next page.

