

Hospital Equipment Supplier Picks Siftwork for Post-Natal Check

Customer Satisfaction Measurement

Seeking feedback from customers is a requirement of ISO 9001:2000 and a commonsense marketing tool. More than that, customer feedback should drive everything the business does.

For many organisations with technical, scientific or medical products and services, it's a struggle to grow because new users and large projects are uncommon. So securing repeat business from current users is precious.

Positive perceptions take time to build and are highly valuable but negative perceptions grow fast and can be propagated very quickly at the current workplace, through job moves, at professional events and via user groups.

Yet, despite claiming in their literature to be customer-focused few organisations have a standardised methodology for measuring customer satisfaction and ISO 9001 does not offer any guidance.

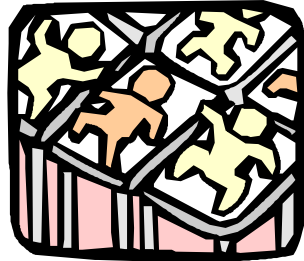
Customer satisfaction measurement projects are themselves customer communications and must be conducted professionally. It's key to employ a professional measurement team that knows about the quality standards, marketing disciplines and can relate to and extract information from the customer.

So turn now to Siftwork, we are a diligent, skilled and experienced resource: Clearly the top choice.

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Last year this supplier to intensive care units acquired a range of therapeutic equipment from a competitor. Because this equipment is quite literally, vital, continuity of services was imperative. Therefore our client planned a range of communications and integration initiatives to achieve a smooth transition.

Nevertheless, there was a risk of disappointment among users, engineers and buyers. There is not much growth in this market, and all the competitors are committed, competent and eager to scavenge additional market share. All the suppliers face fragmented NHS procurement policies and the selling job is not made easier when security considerations bar sales people and engineers from wards.

Despite the difficulties, to maintain or grow market share it's critical to nurture the loyalty and advocacy of all the users and influencers.

So, once into the execution period of this transition, the client sought to measure how the users and influencers were reacting and to identify both isolated and widespread issues as inputs to the quality improvement process.

Because of Siftwork's accumulated experience of customer satisfaction and quality measurement projects in hospital departments and other NHS entities we were asked to execute the project.

Unique Measurement Objectives

We established the following measurement and discovery objectives with the client

- Whether customers perceived a deterioration or improvement in the product, service and relationship 'packages' they received after the range migration,
- What was the current level of satisfaction,
- In the case of shifts in perception, or general dissatisfaction, the important issues to individual hospital departments,
- Which issues were widespread and which isolated,
- Siftwork's recommendations for resolution of the issues.

A Very Specific Approach to Sampling was Required

We faced two big and unusual sampling challenges.

Firstly, we needed to represent a majority of hospitals and Trusts that had been involved in activities around this specific range during the relatively short transition period. To ensure this we had to employ our skills to analyse the client's billing and service data.

Secondly, in contrast with the type of survey where the vendor sends out a card to thousands of users and motivated recipients respond, we had to achieve an agreed balanced penetration among the relevant job roles, seniority, geography and other attributes.

Questionnaire Planning and Design

Many studies seek to measure customer satisfaction on a simple scale of 1 to 10. Here our objective was to reach beyond numbers to discover issues, probe for details and anecdotes and report back to enable improvements where necessary.

Initially we wrote a wide-ranging

skeleton questionnaire to use face-to-face with a small sample of all our job types. Its objective was to discover the most important questions to ask in our later larger-scale survey. Subsequently we carried out a larger number of shorter telephone interviews across our list of target respondents in diverse job types and seniority across a significant proportion of user sites in England, Scotland and Wales.

A Sympathetic Research Process

Since interviews are customer communications they have the potential to enhance or disrupt relationships. What's more, many of our potential interviewees work at the patient's side in life-support activities. Therefore all the interviews were carried out by individuals with an understanding of the NHS organisation as well as an empathy with the staff functions.

Expert Analysis and Reporting

Each question had a qualitative and quantitative aspect. If a respondent felt a service had deteriorated we always probed for examples, justifications, comments and comparisons. In addition to interim reports, we met our client's most senior management for the final results presentation that included a summary presentation of the quantitative indicators and a small selection of the most important verbatim responses.

We also provided a mind-map-type presentation of all the verbatims grouped by function, for example, spare parts supply. For those in the client team who needed more detail we sent a complete set of verbatim response sheets from the face-to-face and telephone interviews.