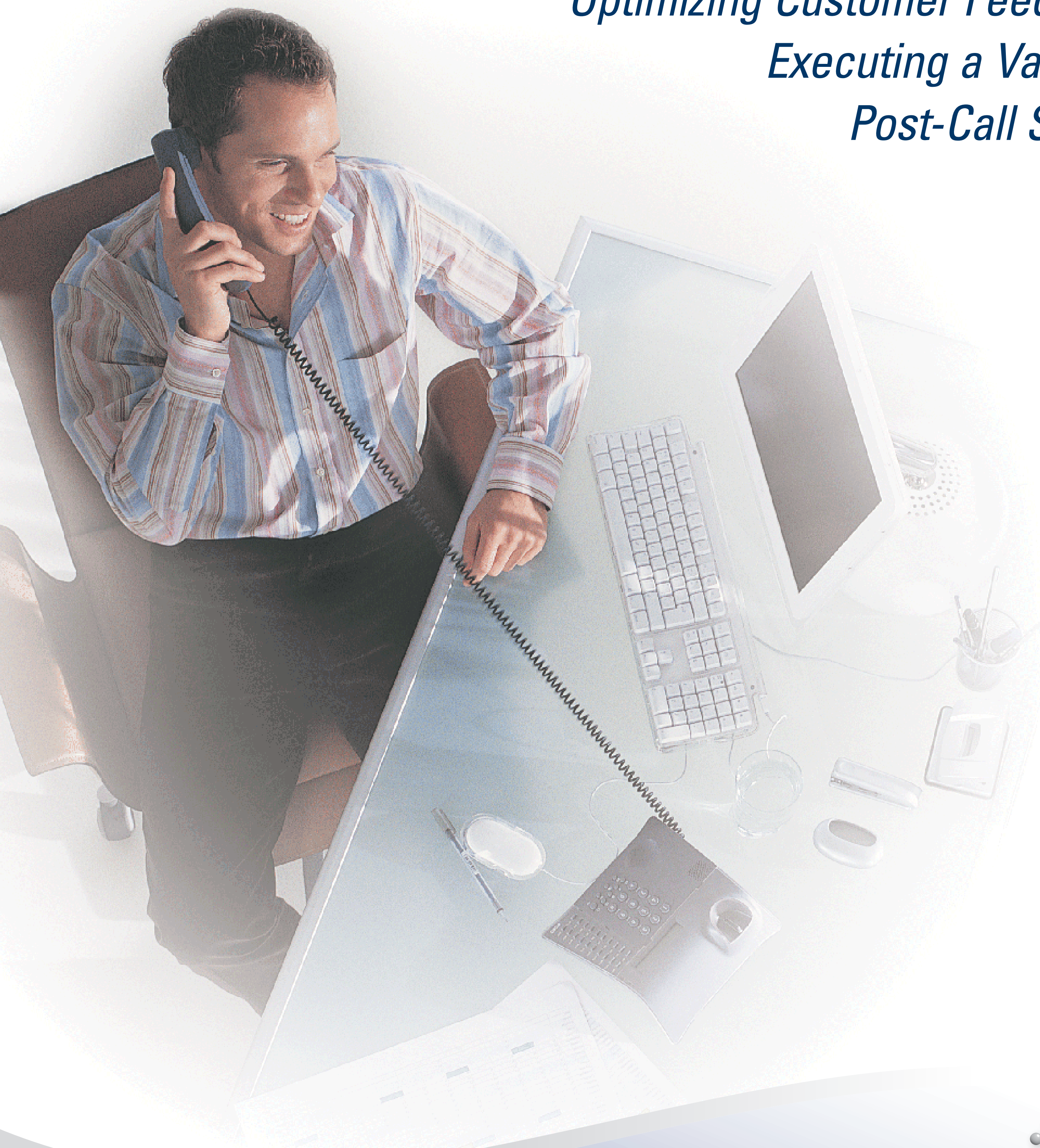
Optimizing Customer Feedback: Executing a Valuable Post-Call Survey



Autonomy etalk White Paper

Autonomy etalk®

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While valuable customer relationships take months, if not years, to build, they can be placed at risk the second a customer calls your contact center. To maintain enduring customer relationships, you must be able to capture the feedback delivered through your contact center and use that input to drive positive change in your organization.

Organizations that are trying to improve the customer experience must be able to gather feedback immediately and directly from the customer. According to Gartner, customer feedback surveys are "especially important for learning about end-user dissatisfaction before it gets escalated to senior management" (Report: User Satisfaction surveys are Essential to IT Service Desks, 3 October 2006).

Automated post-call surveys give organizations near-immediate insight to customer opinions, allowing them to utilize the results to identify weaknesses in processes, people, and technology before more significant problems arise.

When executed correctly, surveys can provide useful information about contact center and organizational operations. Surveys can reveal customer, procedural, or product issues that may not otherwise be known, enabling organizations to address concerns before they become a crisis and identify market opportunities before your competitors do. In addition, surveys promote communication with customers and clients as well as within the organization. Surveys can encourage all participants—supervisors, agents, and customers—to become more proactive in evaluating and improving contact center performance and activities throughout the organization.

Most organizations employ some sort of survey method; however, they often fail to collect relevant information due to inopportune timing and poorly written questions. According to Gartner, organizations perform surveys too long after the call, ask the wrong questions, or do not take action on customer feedback (Report: Implement Customer Satisfaction Management Processes to Improve Revenue, 2 March 2006). These poor survey habits are major contributors to low satisfaction rates and discourage customers from taking future surveys.

In this white paper, Autonomy etalk will share with you a series tips, tricks and best practices to optimize customer feedback—from the planning to the execution, analysis and evaluation of a meaningful survey.

Creating the Survey

Creating post-call surveys requires an understanding of what you are trying to measure before you begin to gather the data. Determining the goal of the survey is crucial to writing successful questions that provide valuable feedback. Ask your customers exactly what you want to know. Do you want to know about general customer service? Or do you want to ask about a particular product or promotion? Gearing your questions toward a specific goal will help you get feedback you can use.

It is also important that the survey questions align with the quality monitoring program in place as well as the overall organizational strategy. Post-call surveys can provide an organization with immediate responses to business activities from an end-user perspective so that areas of improvement and strategic opportunities can be identified as early as possible.

The post-call survey should be brief and direct. The survey questions must be clearly understood by the customer taking the survey, and have a short answer-processing time. When designing the post-call survey, consider having three to four quantitative questions (multiple choice answer) and one or two open-ended questions (free response). Qualitative information received from open-ended questions can explain answers to the quantitative questions or provide further insight into the interaction.

There are many different survey scales that can be applied to the post-call survey. Autonomy etalk recommends the 5-point scale and Yes/No scales. The 5-point scale covers a range of responses, such as: 1. Poor; 2. Fair; 3. Good, 4; Very Good, 5; Excellent. Often, a 5-point scale can replace a Yes/No scale to elicit more specific responses.

Survey questions generally address two objectives:

1) Understanding the customer's perception about the delivery of service

2) Understanding the level of satisfaction with the product or service provided to the customer

These questions typically use the 5-point scale, even where Yes/No answers would be sufficient. Asking "How well did the agent resolve your problem?" will return more specific data than "Did the agent resolve your problem?"

Always introduce the scoring method prior to asking the question. For example, "On a scale from one to five, with five being the highest, how satisfied are you with the product or service you purchased?"

Sample questions regarding the service provided during the call include:

1. How accurate was the agent's knowledge of the product?
2. How courteous was the agent?
3. How satisfied are you with the time it took to resolve your problem?

Questions regarding product or service satisfaction may include:

1. How satisfied are you with the product?
2. How well does the product meet your needs?
3. How easy is the product to use?

Finally, end your survey with an open-ended question that allows the customer to expand on previous answers or suggest ways to improve their satisfaction. The qualitative responses often provide suggestions for improving weak areas or bring to light concerns that may not otherwise be apparent. Examples of questions are:

1. What can we do to improve our level of service?
2. In what areas can we expand our knowledge base?

Tip: Utilizing your resources will help you create the most effective survey. Ask co-workers to provide questions or test the survey on a focus group before you put the survey into effect.

Execution

Timing is key when it comes to executing a successful survey. One of the main reasons surveys do not produce relevant customer data is that too much time passes between the call and the survey. Many organizations deliver surveys in the form of outbound calls, email, and mailed questionnaires, hours or even days after the initial interaction. According to Gartner According to Gartner Analyst Esteban Kolsky, "feedback collected immediately after an event is 40 percent more accurate than feedback collected 24 hours after the event" (Report: Implement Customer Satisfaction Management Processes to Improve Revenue, 2 March 2006).

Surveys should be initiated immediately after a customer-agent interaction. Automated surveys allow the customer to take the survey while they are still on the phone following a service call. When customers have an option to take a survey directly after the call, they are more likely to participate. Accordingly, organizations that provide immediate surveys are more likely to receive relevant feedback from their customers.

Tip: Surveys should not be a one-time pursuit for customer opinions. In order to collect an adequate amount of data, surveys should be repeated frequently so that trends and issues can be identified as quickly as possible.

Evaluation

Performing an analysis after collecting customer feedback is critical to the survey process. The purpose of the analysis is to identify both upward and downward trends. The quantitative information collected in the survey will provide specific feedback on the organization's strengths and weaknesses from the customers' viewpoint.

Every customer response should be evaluated consistently and equally. Organizations often discard negative customer feedback because the customer seems overly upset or unfriendly, or simply because it is negative. However, disregarding these customers will leave you with inaccurate results. Customers who seem the most negative may be the most honest customers you have.

If possible, develop a way to link the customer survey results to quality monitoring programs in place. Linking customer and agent feedback allows contact centers to marry subjective customer feedback with objective agent evaluations. By attaching the survey to a quality monitoring program, supervisors can evaluate call center performance from multiple points of view and tailor service to the wants and needs of their customers. A 2006 survey posted in Dallas Morning News revealed that contact center agents in the insurance industry gave accurate, complete answers to callers only a third of the time. If surveys were conducted after the calls, insurance agencies would be able to identify specific instances in which agents provided inaccurate or incomplete information and take steps to correct the problem.

Tip: Survey responses enable organizations to evaluate the effectiveness of not only the contact center and organization, but also the effectiveness of the survey itself. Are people responding? Does the survey reveal anything new? The survey should reveal previously unknown customer information, trends, and behaviors.

Apply the Results

Most quality monitoring programs are agent-centric, meaning they focus on whether or not the agent followed the correct process and procedure. In order for organizations to truly improve service, organizations must shift to a customer-centric position. In order to strengthen customer response, organizations must develop a connection between customer surveys and organizational practices. Customer feedback can be utilized to evaluate agent performance, operational procedures, products, and services, and to develop coaching methods and training materials for agents and marketing and sales collateral, promotions, and other strategic business initiatives.

Surveys are often collected at the contact center, but other departments within the enterprise fail to consult them when making business decisions. According to a survey by Strativity Group, 71 percent of executives said there is very little survey follow-up internally to change behavior in the organization. Customer feedback does not produce internal change because most companies do not conduct surveys with the intention of using the collected information in decision-making processes. It is difficult for organizations to accept feedback that calls for change because it suggests that there is something wrong with their people, processes, or the products or services they provide their customers. As a result, many businesses view customer surveys as a means of validation for their current practices. However, "validation" surveys only allow organization members to remain oblivious to problematic areas throughout the enterprise.

In order to leverage the information collected in customer surveys, organizations should establish feedback systems for all pertinent parties so that the appropriate actions can take place across the organization—outside the call center. By empowering organization members with information direct from the customer, surveys can elicit customer-centric attitudes and practices. Customers should also receive communication that their surveys are listened to and used in decision-making processes throughout the organization.

Tip: Deliver feedback to managers and agents in the form of easy-to-read reports or training materials. Provide customers with regular communication such as emails or mailers with organizational updates.

Abandoned Surveys

Autonomy etalk customers have been using automated post-call survey technology since 1999. Over the years they have found that, on average, completed survey rates range from 1 to 3% of the total calls that are invited to participate in a post-call-survey. Additionally, talk times over 5 minutes leads to extremely high rates (almost 100%) of abandoned surveys. Surveys that are too long run the risk of not being completed and customers will be turned off from taking future surveys.

Tip: To prevent customers from deserting their surveys, consider aiming the closing statement toward encouraging customers to continue to the survey. One client increased survey completion rates by 300% by modifying their agent close, which now finishes with "…and remember, if you agreed to take a survey, please hold and it will be with you immediately."

Recap

Below are tips that Autonomy etalk's customers have shared in various user groups when setting up an automated post-call survey.

1. Do not survey the same customer more than once a quarter.
2. Keep the survey between 3 and 5 questions.
3. Keep the survey between 30 to 60 seconds in length.
4. Use the same scoring method for all questions.
5. When you ask the survey question, start off the prompt by playing the scoring rules (I.E. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest, what did you think…?)
6. When using a "Scale of" scoring method, use a scale of 1 to 5. That drives differences in the scoring and allows the customer to differentiate between Good and Excellent. Most people associate 1 as low and 5 as high.
7. Be specific. Generic questions return generic responses.
8. Use an open-ended question at the end of the survey. This allows you to discover things about your business or service delivery that you did not know to ask.
9. If you permit voice messages to be left, make sure that you designate someone to listen to them and provide appropriate feedback.
10. Play back recorded calls and their appropriate surveys. Playing back recordings could help uncover problems with abandoned surveys and low satisfaction rates.
11. Provide feedback to customers, agents, and managers after the surveys have been evaluated.

Learn More About Optimizing Customer Feedback

Autonomy etalk can help you execute a valuable post-call survey. Our Qfiniti Survey product is an automated post-call survey solution that supports traditional survey methodologies such as skip patterns. This allows specific customer responses to branch to more appropriate questions, providing more in-depth analysis opportunities. Customers can also record voice comments during a survey session to discuss their specific likes or dislikes, providing detail that may have been impossible to capture during a standard survey. Visit **www.autonomy.com** to learn more.

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