



Agent Customer Feedback and Staying out of Court

By Dr. Jodie Monger – President, Customer Relationship Metrics

“Has the jury reached a verdict?” Most people are familiar with the implications of this question, whether by personal experience or through television dramas. In your role as a contact center leader, there are many things on the list that you think could result in you going to court. However, you probably do not include your customer feedback program on that list. Well, if there are flaws in your measurement strategy, you’d better add it quickly.

Many contact centers have rightfully realized that the customers’ evaluation of service delivery is a critical factor in the continuous improvement process. Best-practice Voice of the Customer (VOC) programs that receive the highest return on investment (ROI) collect both quantitative (scoring) and qualitative (verbal comments) information *as well as* link the evaluation directly to the agent that served the customer. Unfortunately, many contact centers implement a VOC program riddled with error and bias. Beyond asking ineffective questions to be scored by the caller or not using a valid sample size, verbal comments are often times not captured in the feedback program. Without verbal comments, a critical component is missing.

The greatest weakness of a Voice of the Customer program, that is designed to hold agents accountable for their job performance, is the failure to have a back-end quality control (QC) process that leverages the customer comments. Without a QC process in place, the potential for error is amplified meaning the credibility of the measurement tool is decreased and your liability is increased. Many caller feedback solutions that capture the Voice of the Customer only capture the data and present the numeric summary results. If you are using such a strategy to capture evaluations from the caller and then holding agents accountable for the results, consider the difficulty of defending such data.

Surveying is a science. For the VOC program results to be scientifically sound and credible to the agent level, the QC process must take place and each survey must be consistently held up against a list of criteria. In the QC process, all of the customer verbal comments must be reviewed to ensure the scoring portion and agent accountability is defensible. All scientifically-sound research programs contain a data cleansing process. You must not forgo this step.

An effective QC process on agent-level feedback holds surveys up to the “is this fair?” test. These examples are taken from the thousands of comments Customer Relationship Metrics collects each day for our many clients.

“The Specialist that helped me with my problem was wonderful, however, the generalist, Bonnie Harris, that helped me in the very beginning was not. She got very aggravated with me when I had to be transferred to a specialist.”

Without the verbal explanation of the score and without a QC process, this survey would be assigned to the Specialist (as the last one to handle the interaction). Reviewing the comment *and* the survey scores in the QC process, it is apparent that the negative scores were actually meant as an evaluation of the generalist, Bonnie Harris. Based on the customer’s explanation, this survey and score must be removed from the Specialist and attached to the rightful owner - Bonnie Harris. Anything less than this type of “is it fair” test creates “noise”, and hence liability, associated with the program and its results.

Terminating an employee based on performance, providing or withholding incentive pay, or giving a raise or promotion from unclean (non-QC’d) data is a court date waiting to happen. Team members need to be

focused on the service ratings of THEIR customers and not presented with an opening to spend time discounting the survey results or building a case that the feedback is not fair.

Another example:

“The rep who assisted me was not very helpful. She had a very bad attitude and she disconnected me, which meant that I had to call back and have someone to connect me to this survey line. Someone needs to correct her on her bad attitude.”

This survey would be assigned incorrectly to the representative who followed the procedure to connect the customer to the survey. Without the QC process, the wrong employee would be held responsible for the scores. Quality control is paramount to the believability of the results and to providing legally sound information to the management team.

One final example:

“I don’t know why you are asking me to make a suggestion for the rep. She was wonderful. I pressed ONE to be the best”

Despite very clear survey instructions, this customer did not realize that ONE was the lowest score and would certainly be confused when asked to explain how the representative could improve. A clear explanation of what the customer intended to rate allows the data to be corrected.

How often does Metrics see (and correct) such errors? Less than 5% of the time sounds low, doesn’t it? The average call center collects 600 surveys per month so this tolerated error affects the payout or performance review for 30 agents every month. Think about how many times something has to happen in your center that creates a problem for the management team. How long would it take you to fix that many problems? How many of your agents would take advantage of this liability issue and lead to more questions of your management techniques and performance metrics?

The back-end quality control process for your agent-level feedback program could save you a trip to the courthouse, as well as provide increased customer and employee satisfaction. Although we concentrated on agents being held accountable for another’s poor performance, it is also possible for agents to get another’s praise. In any case, surveys that do not pass the “is it fair” test affect every employee in your company – and rightfully so. Success or failure of your agent-level Voice of the Customer program is contingent on quality and should never create dissatisfaction for customers or employees. Let the judge and jury of your service be the customer, not the court of law.

So when selecting a Voice of the Customer solution, be aware there are many low-cost options that do not have the QC process available. But as you can see, cheaper can be very expensive.

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