THE MARKETING POD

The Marketing Pod's Guide to...

Enhancing customer experience

It's time to make a difference

Marketing is all about understanding your customers' needs and communicating in a way that connects with those needs.

In today's hyper-competitive commercial world, an excellent customer experience is essential for the survival of your business.

How do you make sure that customer insight and experience are central to your market proposition?

Could your customers be happier?

Begin by understanding

In this guide, we take a closer look at how you can begin to understand customer sentiment and the effective steps which you can take to improve it, including how you can be sure that your customer communications are really hitting the mark. In improving your customer experience, your business will create credible marketing proof points that really resonate with your audience.

If you are starting out on the important mission of improving customer experience, we would recommend that you begin by gaining a full understanding of:

- Current customer sentiment
- Reasons for any negative sentiment that exists
- The things that are really important and less important to them

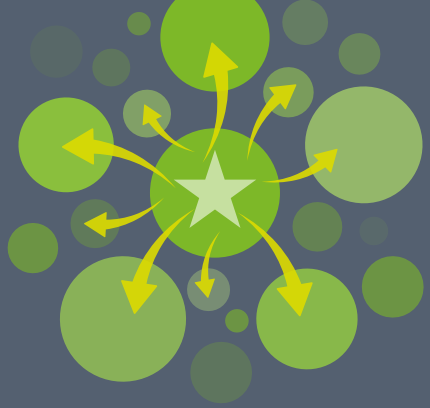
Next, identify any internal barriers to improvement – these could include:

- Technical
- System related
- Process related
- Internal culture
- Management framework

Only once you have insight into these things will it become possible to plan steps for improvement.



Accepting the Challenge



The marketplace that businesses are operating in is more competitive and more connected than ever before. Reputation amongst customers and end users is critical to remaining commercially successful and will also have an effect on business and stakeholder perception.

Many businesses will be looking for new ways to differentiate themselves from the competition. For some, a step change activity might be needed to turn the tide of a declining customer base or get ahead of the curve.

What you learn from your customer feedback should not only affect your systems and processes, but can also inform the way you communicate with – and market to – your target audience.

Identifying the issues

It is a common problem amongst businesses that customer dissatisfaction is rooted in disconnected internal processes. This is particularly true for long established businesses where processes have not been overhauled for some time.



Some examples of issues which businesses may face:

- Inconsistency in customer relations: a focus on key accounts with less effort made for smaller accounts.
- Sales and service teams that operate in silos, hampering productivity and leading to ineffective customer relationship management.
- A focus on perceived departmental performance rather than actual customer satisfaction, meaning company-wide cultural changes may be needed.
- KPI and targeting that does not prioritise the customer.
- Inability to get a clear view of customer needs and experience due to defensiveness of individuals or teams and fear of receiving blame.

Overcoming the hurdles

Raising customer satisfaction is one of the best ways to safeguard your business against a commercially uncertain future. Once you have a clear idea of where your problems occur, it's time to start making positive changes. Here are our best-practice tips for addressing customer satisfaction issues head on:

1. Engaging decision makers

Endorsement from the top is vital wherever company-wide change is needed. Many businesses may find that they have commercially-driven people at the top who are not necessarily from a customer-facing background. It's important to carefully build the business case for change.

2. Establishing a meaningful customer feedback programme

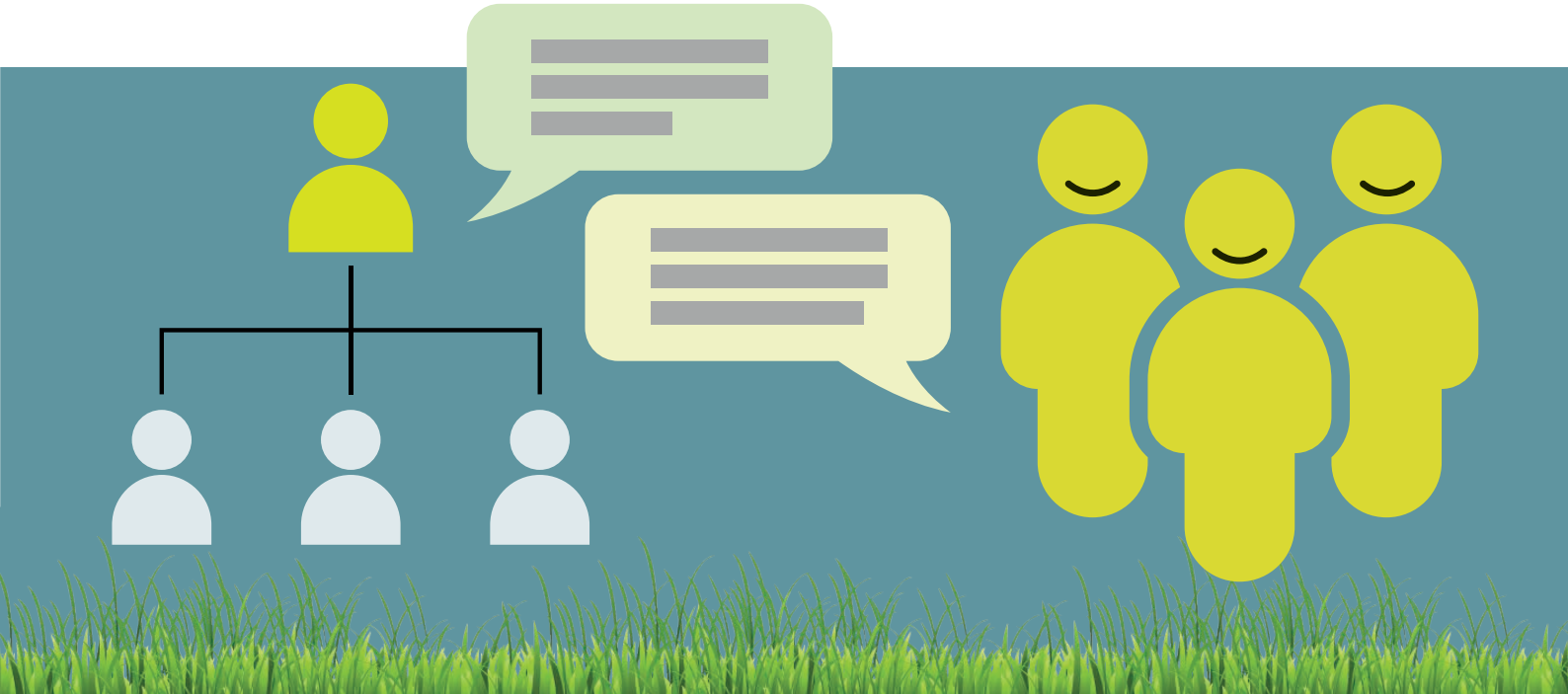
A carefully structured and independently conducted customer feedback programme will enable your business to better identify desired customer outcomes as well as frustration points. This can then inform future process changes and shape the way you communicate with customers.

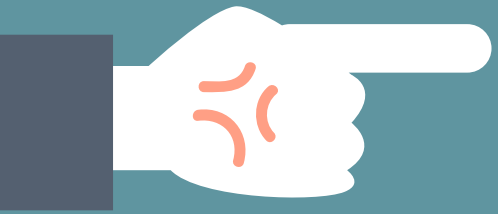
Top Tip - When you're taking your ideas to the board, think facts and figures rather than anecdotal evidence – and present your information in a way that is clear and concise, using visuals if appropriate.

3. Leading from the front

It's vital for management teams to put departmental pride aside to fully get behind a customer-centric approach. This will instil confidence throughout departments and filter down to create a 'can do' attitude amongst all team members.

Top Tip - When presenting customer feedback, use audio or visual clips of customers describing their experience to support key points. They are so much more impactful than a powerpoint presentation!





4. Removing the blame

Some of the customer feedback might be difficult to hear, but resist the urge to point fingers!

Top Tip - When listening to what your customers have to say, try to do so objectively and without emotion. Focus on the valuable insight that the customer has given you, helping your business to tangibly improve.



Top Tip - A detailed action plan that can be referenced by everyone involved will help you to sort 'quick win' actions, which can be taken immediately, from longer term and more complex changes to business structure and processes. Assign actions to owners and acknowledge or reward their completion.

5. Creating champions

Establishing customer champion groups - with representation from across a range of departments - will help you to break down and review feedback. This group should use the feedback to agree specific actions - and commit to completing them.

Taking action

If your business has made a commitment to enhancing customer experience, there are some essential techniques which will help you to get started (and keep up the momentum):



Let your customers know you're committed to improvement

Communicating your plans to customers demonstrates your dedication to their needs – and has the additional benefit of ensuring internal commitment!

Plan ahead

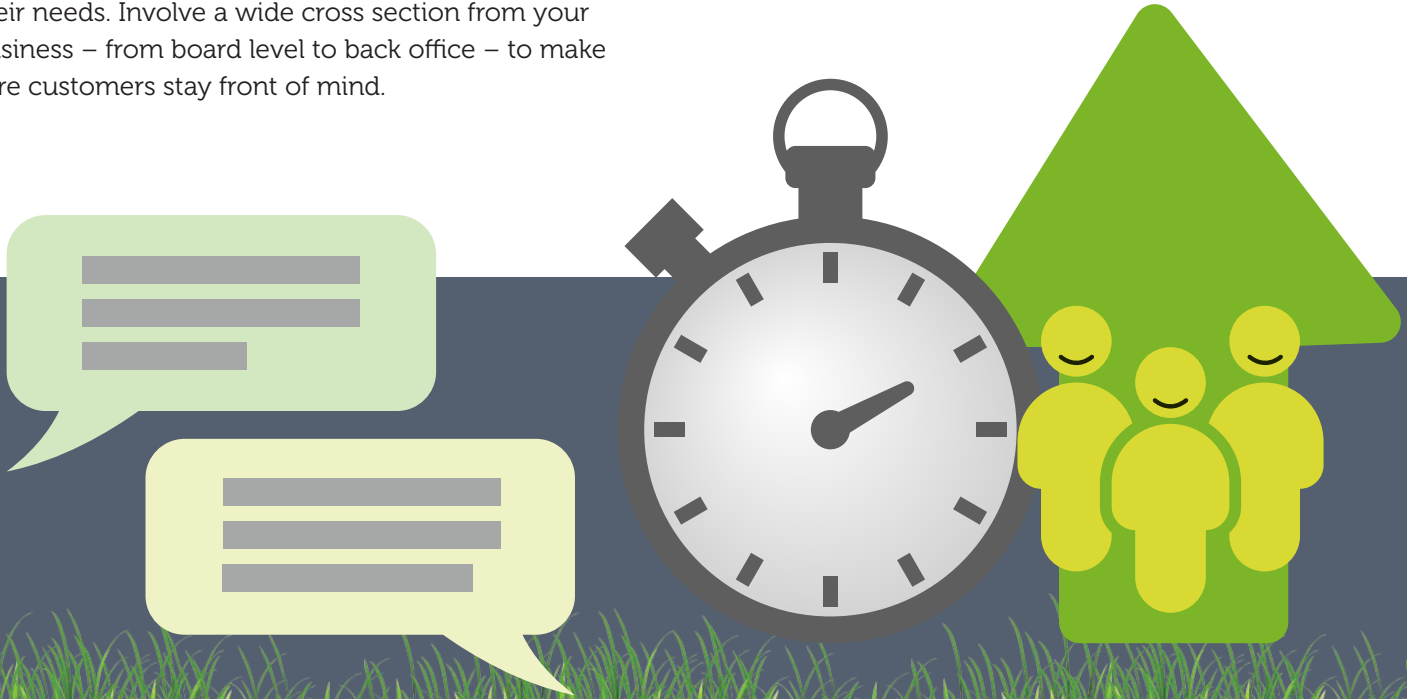
A comprehensive, ongoing customer research programme will allow your business to gain continuous feedback on proposed initiatives, new products or technologies, communication methods and almost anything else that affects your customers!

Immerse yourself

Customer immersion sessions help you to truly stand in your customers' shoes. Get to grips with the role your business plays in their world, what their pain points are and how you can better meet their needs. Involve a wide cross section from your business – from board level to back office – to make sure customers stay front of mind.

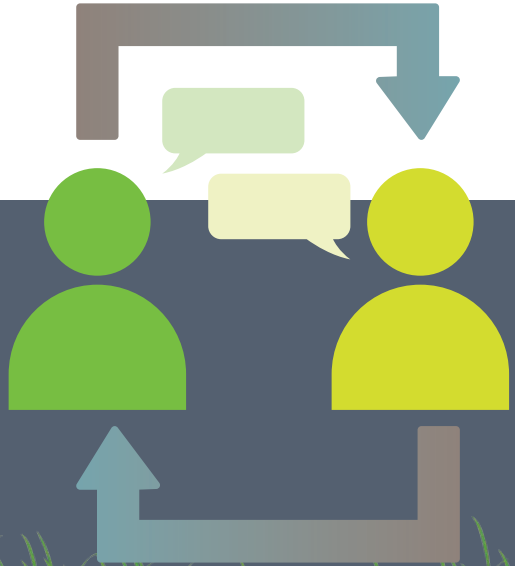
Keep comms regular

Communicating regularly keeps you fresh in your customer's mind. Plan content carefully and be sure to give them something targeted, relevant and useful.



Keep feedback regular

Always provide your customers with the chance to respond; enable feedback through regularly scheduled surveys and also put mechanisms in place so that they can let you know if they are unhappy (or happy!) about something whenever they need to in between.



Make internal communication important too

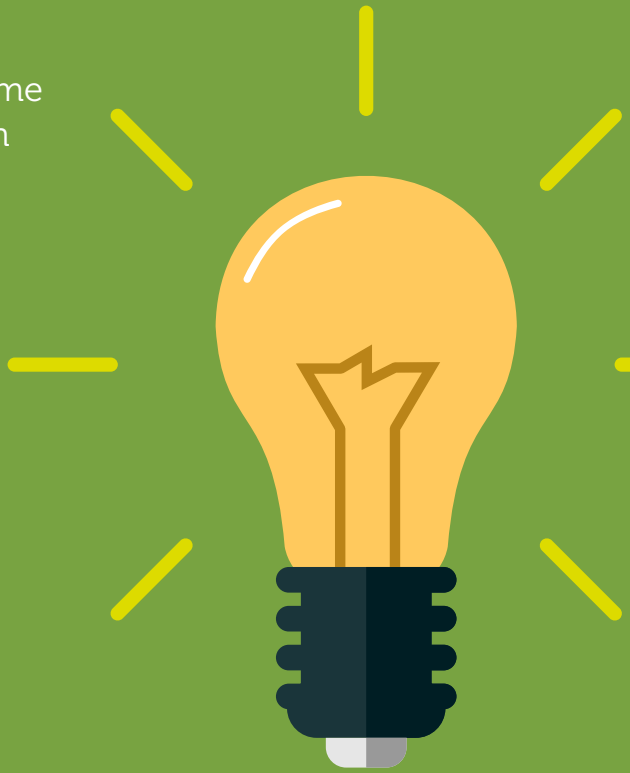
Always make sure your internal teams are up to date with progress. Ensure they know what your customers are receiving and keep them informed on action plans, so they know how to respond. By doing so, you will create a more consistent experience for customers and also improve team morale. Educate teams on how quickly they should expect feedback to improve and let them know when they are doing well.

Top Tip - It's important to keep feeding your customer input back into business processes and make use of your champions at every step.

Things we have learned...

The mission to change customer perception and sentiment isn't always an easy one. Here are our some of the lessons we have learned over the years which might help to keep you focused on the task ahead.

- Fundamentally changing ways of working (and people's mindsets) isn't easy!
- Business targets frequently don't help in embracing a customer-centric approach.
- Customer evidence is a powerful driver for change – and should be hard to ignore.
- Leading from the front is essential to provide confidence for the people within your organisation.



Need expert help?

The Marketing Pod can help your business to plan and action change, whatever stage you're at on your customer experience journey.

We undertake customer and market research projects for a range of clients, helping them drive their business forward.

To find out more about this, as well as our full range of marketing services, visit www.themarketingpod.co.uk, or email hello@themarketingpod.co.uk

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