How voice of customer data is being used - part 1

In this article, I am going to jump back to the topic of voice of customer (VOC) feedback. I was recently asked to provide an example of how VOC feedback is being used by Business and Finance service units to identify areas of opportunity and make improvements. One department that is very active when it comes to listening to customers is Parking and Transit Services. They have put a great deal of effort into assessing customer needs, the university’s needs, and balancing all of this with operational requirements.

Collecting feedback through surveys
Parking and Transit Services (PTS) have been actively engaged in collecting information from customers using surveys since early 2008. When a customer interacts with PTS either in-person or through the web, they are emailed a survey invitation and asked to provide feedback. Customers may also access the survey from links located on the department’s web pages.

This short survey asks questions about what service the customer contacted the department for, whether their issue was completely addressed, interactions with department staff and the quality of the service they received. Customers are given the opportunity to provide comments about the service and any other information they want the department to be aware of. At the end of the survey, they are asked if they would like someone to contact them and if so, provide their name and contact information. Requests for contact are pulled from the survey data every weekday morning and forwarded to the PTS communications staff so they can contact the customers and resolve issues quickly. At the first of every month, the PTS leadership team receives a status report, augmented by trend analyses that look at performance over the past 12+ months.

The ongoing customer feedback survey is supplemented by a longer, more detailed survey that goes out to all PTS customers every two years. The department also collects information through other channels, but for now I want to concentrate on how they are using the survey feedback.

Using the Feedback
The survey data has played a role in decisions about what services PTS provides, how the services are provided, and how the department interacts with the ASU community. The following are examples of decisions the feedback has supported:

- Upgrades to parking systems and equipment.
- A greater variety of parking decal options (Eco-Pass, semester specific, etc.).
- Improvement in transit options, access methods and safety.
- Revised and improved communication with customers.
- Greater flexibility in payment options.
- Improvements and repairs to equipment and facilities.
- Identification of employees who are providing excellent service and how they take care of their customers. The department is also able to identify and address issues of poor customer service when they arise.
- Identify areas of opportunity for improving the training and skills of the PTS staff.

**Identifying critical to quality factors (CTQ’s)**

A couple of months ago, I was contacted by Parking and Transit Services leadership with a question: “How do we prioritize our projects to ensure that we are putting our time and resources into the right efforts?” There are a number of factors that need to be considered when prioritizing projects (i.e. what will be gained by completing the project, when the project needs to be completed, associated costs vs. expected benefits, etc.); but in a service environment, how projects will address customer needs becomes a major element in decision-making. For this reason, we examined what PTS customers identified as critical to quality (CTQ) factors and how each project would address these factors.

I started by reading through thousands of open-ended comments that customers have provided in the surveys over the past six years, and began categorizing and counting them by topic using a tool called a check sheet. If you have ever made marks on a sheet of paper to count the number of times something has happened, then you have essentially used a check sheet. An example is shown at right. You can see that as you fill out the check sheet, the data starts to create a frequency graph; but remember to keep the spacing between the marks consistent or your graph will not turn out well. As I sorted through the PTS data, clear groupings started to appear. In the end, there were 168 topics that were grouped into 10 categories: services, customer service, parking permits, web/customer accounts, citations, interactions with customers, contractors/vendors, parking facilities, communications, and transit options. Note that I did say there were thousands of comments that needed to be sorted. I didn’t say this type of work is always quick or fun, but sometimes you just have to put in time and effort to get the information you need. I guarantee the results are worth the effort.
Having 168 factors is far too many to consider for every project, so the list was refined, sorted and similar factors were combined. In the end, 30 over-arching critical to quality statements were written. I would be remiss if I did not mention one thing that came out of all of this data, but was not included in the factors used for project prioritization: the majority of comments were compliments on the services provided and professionalism of the staff, interspersed with a few suggestions. That said, the focus was on finding customer needs to be addressed by upcoming projects, so the compliments were removed from the dataset. Here is the final critical to quality factor list:

1. Do not be rude or unfriendly.
2. Make sure staff is well versed in all aspects of operations (policies, locations, hours of operation, etc.) so they can provide information to customers when asked.
3. Do not make customers run back and forth between offices, or have to go home and return later.
4. Focus on the customer, ask questions and listen to what they have to say during interactions with you. Do not ignore customers when they communicate with you.
5. Do not make customers wait for service.
6. Do not quote policy to customers.
7. Make processes clear and easy for customers to understand and navigate.
8. Give customers the option to talk with a live person when they call, make a purchase, or submit an appeal.
9. Give customers a variety of options.
10. Make paying easy and convenient for customers.
11. If a mistake is made, take ownership of it and fix it completely.
12. Communicate clearly, frequently, and make it very obvious so customers can’t miss it.
13. Have facilities open and available for use when customers need them.
14. Get vehicles into and out of lots quickly and efficiently during busy times.
15. Give customers spacious parking stalls.
16. Provide customers with facilities that are secure, clean and in good repair.
17. Make it easier for customers to find, park and get access to the Parking and Transit Services offices.
18. All citations are viewed negatively, even if it is just a warning or interaction. If a warning is given, make sure the customers can clearly see that it is a warning.

19. Do not make mistakes when giving out tickets, and clearly explain why the customer is receiving it. If a mistake is made, correct it quickly and completely.

20. If you communicate with, or send something to customers, make sure it arrives.

21. Give customers lots of room to make an online appeals case and provide Parking and Transit Services with photos and documents. Confirm that the appeal was received.

22. Provide vendors/contractors with parking that allows them easy access to the tools and materials they need to do their job.

23. Make the website more user friendly, easier to search, easier to read, and with fewer clicks to get the information customers need.

24. Make sure the website works with all browsers and systems that customers might use.

25. Make sure all of the functions and links on the website work.

26. Make it easy for customers to update their information in the parking system.

27. Provide year-round services. Do not have any gaps in the services provided.

28. Make sure inter-campus shuttles run frequently and on time.

29. Lower the cost of services and fines.

30. Provide more and closer access options to classes, offices and events.

From a service standpoint, there are no surprises on this list. I have worked with a number of service organizations in my career, and these customer requirements are nearly universal to any organization that provides services. I suspect that you will find that these CTQ’s apply to your organization too.

I want to be very clear about something here. Just because something makes the CTQ list does not mean that it can be provided exactly the way a customer would like. You may have to compromise a bit or find alternatives that meet the customers’ needs. For example, look at the desire for more and closer parking access to classes and offices. Parking and Transit Services are constrained by the location and size of the existing parking facilities. They cannot arbitrarily decide to knock down a building in the middle of the Tempe campus and put in a parking lot. They have had to develop ways to make their existing facilities meet that customer requirement. In this case, services like the FLASH and McAllister shuttles quickly move people from more distant lots to various
points around campus, making it easier for the ASU community to get from the existing parking facilities to their destinations.

In part two of this article, I will describe how the CTQ’s were weighted, and a modified cause and effect matrix was used to create a priority list. As always, I welcome your questions or comments. You can email me at clayton.taylor@asu.edu.

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