



Building Stronger Business Relationships

By Chris Reimann (KS&R Vice President and Principal)

When you increase the speed of customer satisfaction research – and get better data at the same time – it adds up to stronger business relationships.

What if you hear a customer is unhappy – 6 months after the fact? Or you get detailed customer feedback on one of your services – that you've already discontinued? Today, business moves fast, and customer satisfaction research needs to keep up. By the time customers are using one product, it's already being improved, and more innovations are coming down the pipeline.

That level of momentum demands faster research – much faster than the traditional, customer satisfaction survey. Often, by the time you get customer satisfaction survey results, they're irrelevant. It's too late to correct a customer's issues, let alone get feedback on a new product or service.

But is faster always better? In the case of customer satisfaction, you can't go faster and sacrifice quality. Research needs to be fast and provide specific information you can act on, whether it's feedback that alerts you to customers who need immediate help, or strategic information that leads to long-term, overarching business decisions. And ultimately, getting better information more quickly leads to stronger business relationships. Here's how.

Conventional Research Can Slow You Down

A typical customer satisfaction survey process occurs like this:

1. When it's time for the annual customer satisfaction survey, the internal marketing team gathers and exports customer data from the CRM system into data files and transmits it to their market research firm.
2. The market research firm surveys customers, and within a few months returns reports and analyses to the company's internal marketing team. The marketing team disseminates the reports for action.
3. Meanwhile, critical opportunities are missed. Customers who may have had problems months ago have not had their issues solved. In addition, any recently introduced products or solutions have not been included in the survey, so the company will have to wait until next year for additional feedback.

Unfortunately, this type of research isn't just slow. It's also not flexible enough to get you the information you need, nor specific enough to allow your employees to solve potential issues. It could be damaging your customer relationships because your company can't respond as quickly.

Actionable Data, Faster

Real-time information that you can respond to rapidly is key to strengthening customer relationships. Here's how the customer satisfaction research cycle can not only be shortened, but be fine-tuned to produce continuous, actionable data.

1. **Integrate market research with your CRM system.** Instead of periodically exporting batches of data, KS&R has enhanced operational integration with its clients' CRM systems to receive direct, automated, weekly feeds. Researchers use that direct connection to quickly execute ongoing customer satisfaction research with fewer headaches.
2. **Present actionable data to the relevant team.** Ongoing research produces tangible, constant feedback – feedback that goes directly to the people who need it fastest, rather than to the corporate market research team to disseminate. For example, KS&R regularly develops custom index scores for sales professionals that rate customer experience based on factors such as how likely a customer is to work with the company in the future or recommend the company to a colleague. Sales professionals receive these scores directly every week via an easy-to-use online portal. The score includes diagnostic feedback (what specifics contributed to this week's score?) and gives the sales professional information they need to improve.
3. **Change the questions.** When market research is continuous, surveys can be tweaked to align better with changing corporate goals. If a product has been modified in response to feedback, customers can immediately be surveyed on the new attributes. If a business needs new competitive information – now – those questions can easily be added.
4. **Close the loop.** Imagine: when your market research firm discovers a specific customer issue, that information goes straight to the sales professional or customer service employee who can solve it. It seems

like a simple act, but in conventional customer satisfaction research this rarely happens, or it happens too late. Now, however, the fuller integration into the CRM system leads to the collection of more granular, specific data. The result is actionable, direct reports. Customer issues don't remain open and unsolved; instead, the right corporate team immediately takes action to resolve customer problems

When Slow is Better

Fast and continuous feedback is excellent for customer satisfaction research. However, faster isn't necessarily better for other types of research. For example, pricing studies or segmentation studies involve surveying hundreds or thousands of people. Reviewing data from the first batch of responses may be interesting, but the number of respondents often isn't yet sizeable enough to draw conclusions or make decisions. For those types of research studies, a longer timeline is key to gathering reliable data and analyzing it correctly.

Gaining Competitive Advantage by Being Faster, Better

When it comes to customer satisfaction and relationship building, fast, flexible research gives companies a major advantage. You can:

- Detect and solve customer issues quickly
- Provide diagnostic feedback to the right teams so they can take action on issues
- Measure employee performance on an ongoing basis

- Align your survey questions and results with business goals – continuously

This enhanced responsiveness leads to a **more powerful customer relationship**. You can better create products and services that align with your customers' needs and goals. More importantly, with more insight into your customers, you become an integral part of your customers' business.

If your company had better information, faster, how would it change the way you do business? Contact KS&R to find out more.

About the Author

As a member of KS&R's Board of Directors, Chris brings 20 years of B2B and B2C marketing experience in guiding clients on customer loyalty, new product development, product usability, and VOC needs assessment. Having a background in both qualitative and quantitative research methods, he is skilled in applying proven creative approaches designed to answer clients' key business imperatives. He holds a BA from St. Bonaventure University and an MBA from the Whitman School of Management at Syracuse University.



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