

Do you really want customer feedback? Ask the right way.

Lately, I have been inundated with customer feedback requests from what seems like every company with which I have even had a glancing blow. And all of these feedback requests have serious flaws.

Self-serving: The airline I flew wanted to know about my recent flight, but not about the other part of the same trip, which included one segment that was delayed five hours.

Bordering on harassment: My gym wants feedback (about what, I don't know or care) and they have sent me at least five or more requests reminding me they want my feedback. Apparently they don't take no for an answer.

Not interested in my opinion at all: The conference I attended last week says it wants my opinion, but sent a survey that focused more on my demographic profile than on my opinion.

Asking every possible question on earth: I got a questionnaire that I abandoned when I realized that after five minutes I was only twenty percent done, thanks to the helpful completion meter at the bottom of the survey.

Really, just give us a glowing review: Some companies send you a link to online customer response sites like Yelp, basically asking for you to provide a testimonial, and may even try to promote this action by offering a discount next time you come in.

Customer feedback can be very valuable. *If* done the right way, feedback requests can tell you what customers/clients/supporters are thinking, and can alert you to any issues. However, there's a big "if" there, and as evidenced by my own examples above, many organizations are not

handling these requests well.

Many times, I have provided specific feedback, only to never hear from the company again or see the problem addressed. I think the problem is that customer feedback requests straddle the line between communications/marketing and operations.

Communicators/marketers see asking for feedback as a way of communicating further with customers. Operations folks see feedback as a potential for improvement (theoretically). But if these two factions are not in consultation, you end up with customer feedback requests that don't actually address any issues the customer may be having or may even hurt the brand as customers are bothered by repeated requests or intrusive questions.

Before you ask for customer feedback, here are four things to keep in mind.

1. **Determine exactly why you want feedback.** Are you trying to assess your product/service? Are you trying to pinpoint problem areas? Do you want to get testimonials?
2. **Determine what you will do with the feedback.** Will you address any issues?
3. **Determine the best way to get the feedback.** Is it email? Or a phone call?
4. **Remember your customers are not obligated to give you feedback.** Customers are in fact doing you a favor by providing feedback. Respect their time. Don't harass them.

How do you handle customer feedback? Do you even ask for it? If you do, how do you go about it? Please let me know.