



In This Issue

[Listen. Your Customer Is Speaking.](#)
[Quotes](#)

Quick Links

[EA Home Page](#)

[About Us](#)

[Solutions for Businesses](#)

[Solutions for Professionals](#)

[News](#)

[Contact Us](#)



"Quotes"

"Face-to-face customer feedback refines or validates every component of the startup's business model, not just the product itself."
~Steve Blank

"A complaint is a chance to turn a customer into a lifelong friend."
~Richard Branson

"We sent our user research team out to sit with customers for periods of time and get some insight... We also get tens of thousands of points of contact via Twitter and our customer support ticketing system every month and can synthesize those results."
~Stewart Butterfield

"You're meeting the client; you're finding out what they like and what they don't like. You've really got your customer there in front of you, so you know what works and what doesn't."
~Giles Deacon

"Customers are your best teachers."
~Mark Goulston

"It's about making sure we listen to our customer needs and get to those pain points."
~Tricia Griffith

"I have connected by phone with customers who have left negative reviews and had a chance to get to know them. Not only was I able to solve their problems, a lot

Just Checking In

Last weekend I traveled home to be with my mom. And, as is the usual practice after Sunday service, she, my aunt, and I went to breakfast at their usual haunt.

Nestled snugly into our booth, we met our server, who came by quickly to get us started on beverages. With that settled, we turned our attention to scouring the menu in search of just the right selections to fill our hungry bellies.

Not long thereafter, though, we had a second visitor -- the restaurant's manager. In fact, she'd been making her rounds from table-to-table since we'd arrived. When it was our turn, she happily greeted her Sunday regulars, connected with me, took a guess at which of my mom and aunt's favorites they would order that day, teased them about senior-citizen discounts, and generally checked in to let these two loyal customers (and their guest) know that she was there...and that she cared. And, ever on the clock, I smiled, all the while taking note of how this small touch meant the world to patrons and to the brisk business being done throughout our time there.

So, in this month's edition of **EA Insights**, let's devote a few minutes to a practice that sometimes gets lost in the hustle and bustle of getting stuff done -- that is, checking in with the folks for whom we're working. Clearly, that restaurant manager knew something important. Keep reading; let's see if I can share a bit of what makes her, and all those like her, so special!

All the best,

June

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Listen. Your Customer Is Speaking.

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When's the last time you listened to your customers?

Seriously, when's the last time you paused to hear what the people who do business with you had to say?

Sometimes in the madness of attracting customers, and doing the work, and getting paid, and doing it all again, it's hard to stop. It's difficult to be intentional about checking in to see *how* our efforts are being received, *whether* we're meeting expectations, or *if* a reset is needed. Yet, touching base with the customer -- not just to win the work initially, but throughout the provision of service and even After -- can mean the difference between keeping and losing business.

Why You Listen

Touchy feely? Extra? Something designed exclusively for newbies? No, listening to the customer is an essential function for every business, whether a start-up or an industry staple.



You listen because your customers have an opinion about the interactions they have with each and every member of your team -- good, bad, or indifferent.

You listen because your customers are going to share their opinions with someone. Social media friends, folks in the neighborhood or on the job, or even consumer advocates will know...shouldn't you?

You listen because your customers expect you to care about their opinions. They don't want to feel taken for granted; they want the sense that you value each piece of business and that you're serious enough to invest the effort in gaining continued loyalty. If roadblocks or challenges arise, they want you to hear how this impacts them and to be earnest in collaborating with them to find and to implement a solution.

How You Listen

Listening takes many forms. No one method is correct. Perhaps the best recommendation is to be flexible, choosing the option that fits each client and each situation.

- *Try a conversation.* Schedule a periodic check-in time to sit down in person, by phone, or using some remote meeting technology. Find out how things have been going, from the *client's* perspective, since you last connected. Also, while planned meetings are great, don't force the client to wait until next month to relay information you need to hear today! So, hammer home for customers that you are open to conversations in real-time (or as close to real time as possible) in order to hear what's on their minds.
- *Use a survey.* A quick "How Are We Doing?" survey after a customer touch is another way to keep the feedback flowing. Surveys can provide extremely useful qualitative and quantitative information. They can track customer reflections from period-to-period. And, they can help you to see specifically where you continue to shine, where effort is needed, or where attention to past trouble spots has begun to pay off.
- *Monitor the messages.* Word of mouth matters but, in today's world, the mouths have a far greater reach than ever before! So, another way to listen is to monitor the messages. What are folks saying about you online? Does mention of your company's name evoke a smile or a grimace? How willing are past customers to offer a testimonial or make a referral? There are messages galore out there for the hearing...if you are listening.

What You Do After You Listen

The customer speaks. Now, what's your part?

Do your best to truly hear. Believe it or not, accurately receiving the message can be a challenge whether the incoming feedback is positive or negative. When positive, there's a tendency to just bask in the glow -- happily receive the smile, gush over the big tip, grin at the 5-star rating, jump for joy at the return business -- without stopping to actually grasp what's behind what just happened. So, when you get that thumbs-up or a thumbs-down, don't just stop there; do your best to truly hear and try to understand the customer's opinion.

Take a few minutes to be honest with yourself about what you heard. Ouch, it may have stung, but was there some truth in what was just shared? Did the comment reflect misunderstanding or miscommunication in any way? If your work was considered "Excellent" from the customer's perspective, were there some internal glitches (perhaps unseen by those on the outside) that still could be tightened up for the next go-round? If you're honest, you know that there's an opportunity to learn at each juncture. Invest in extracting the valuable nuggets you were just handed...no matter how they may have been packaged.

Lastly, decide how to use the customer feedback. The shared customer insight can validate improvement efforts of the company as a whole, of a department, or of an individual team member. It can showcase a continually strong performer and perhaps open up a new growth path for him or her. It can prompt a new policy or process, highlight a training need, or signify that a change in organizational approach is warranted. The bottom line is that, if customer input goes in one ear and out the other, and nothing comes of it, it's wasted. Your customers will begin to notice the futility, and they just might stop offering feedback (to you) and/or doing business with you entirely.

So, your customers are speaking. Are you listening? What are you doing with what you hear? What benefit is coming to them and you?

If you're struggling with capturing, truly hearing, or figuring out how to use the messages your customers are sending, it's time to connect with **Executive Advantage**. Let us help you make the most of each customer feedback opportunity. These are nuggets you can't afford to miss! [Contact us today.](#)

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About Executive Advantage

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

To learn more about **Executive Advantage**, contact us [online](#) or at (301) 280-5950.

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...were so happy with the customer service that they become repeat customers."
~Chris Gronkowski

"[W]e see ourselves as customer specialists.... We talk to her and listen to her ideas and opinions."
~Richard Hayne

"It is surprising how little most small business values the customers. A positive feedback from the customer is critical to your business, and what's more important is their referral."
~Fabrizio Moreira

"When you think of customer research, chances are you think of surveys. Used alongside other strategies, they can be an important way to learn more about your customer's needs, wants and habits."
~John Rampton

"Any business, no matter what it is, lives or dies by the customer reaction it creates."
~Jon Taffer

"The first step in exceeding your customer's expectations is to know those expectations."
~Roy H. Williams

"Statistics suggest that when customers complain, business owners and managers ought to get excited about it. The complaining customer represents a huge opportunity for more business."
~Zig Ziglar