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**5 Strategies for Getting Market Feedback (While Effectively Marketing Yourself)**

**By Tatiana Velitchkov**

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Running a successful business doesn't simply involve selling or providing a great product or service.

It also means knowing exactly how your clients feel about your current offerings, so you can change the way you do things and better serve their needs.

The beauty of the Internet is that it makes this necessary feedback mechanism more speedy & convenient for both the business owner and the surfer -- especially when conducted over a dynamic business website.

So why are many companies still in the dark about what their customers REALLY want, and end up saying goodbye before they can even ask why?

If you're the kind of business owner who wants his current clients to stay, then consider these 5 strategies for getting their valuable insights & feedback... while endearing yourself to them as someone who actually listens and cares:

**1) Polls / Surveys**

Most people want their opinions to count. That's why most surfers are inclined to cast their votes whenever a website politely asks them to.

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You can use this to your advantage by using polls & surveys to know your potential clients' preferences, particularly when it comes to your products & services.

When conducting any kind of poll online, just remember 3 things:

### 1. Make it QUICK.

Keep in mind that your surfer has other things to do

(like fill out your order form), so limit most polls to just one question each.

### 2. Make it CONVENIENT.

Create drop down menus or radio buttons for your surfer to click on, so they won't have to waste time typing in the whole answer.

### 3. Make it WORTHWHILE.

If you want the most number of feedback in the shortest possible time, offer a prize for specific "lucky voters," within the range of respondents that you expect for your survey.

If you have 1,000 prospective voters, for example, you can award voter number 500 with your premium service package at half the price, and grant voter number 1,000 the entire package for free!

Just make sure you have all the contest rules clearly stated before you ask for their votes... or they might vote against you & your business forever.

## 2) Message Boards

Message boards hold their own appeal for surfers truly interested in the topics your website usually covers.

When moderated properly & promoted regularly, they can become "virtual hangouts" where people:

– share their knowledge & opinions

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- offer advice / ask for help
- or simply meet other people with the same interests.

Although some clients with tight surfing schedules find that "having to go online and visit a specific URL" is rather taxing, you can make the idea more attractive by:

- stimulating dynamic discussions in your board by raising current & compelling issues
- regularly telling your casual surfers about the hottest ongoing debates & topics in the forum
- and directly asking people to offer their own insights, while providing an easy-to-click link or URL.

### 3) Mailing List

The mailing list is very similar to the message board, in that it encourages discussions among your clients & would-be clients. The only difference is that everything here is done through email, and members aren't required to go online to interact.

Just like the message board, however, there are 3 secrets to effectively using mailing lists to gain useful feedback:

1. Keep all discussions **FOCUSED** on the same general topic — preferably the field/industry you're doing business in.

Often, your own members' posts will be enough to keep you updated about the major issues that affect your business, saving you time and money on reading and research.

2. Allow members to mention your **COMPETITION'S** products & services; let them even make personal comparisons.

These posts will give you valuable insights for improving **YOUR OWN** products & services... and how you can convince even your competition's clients to change their minds and trust **YOU**.

3. Finally, remain **VISIBLE** in your own message board or

discussion list.

Give helpful comments, offer positive feedback, and praise every real effort made by members to share what they know. This is your chance to establish a real, ongoing relationship with the people who frequent your website... and turn most of them into friends, or clients or (if you're lucky) both.

### 4) Chat Event

If you're just starting your own business, however, you probably won't have the time to manage a message board or mailing list just yet.

What you CAN do is promote & hold a regular chat event on your site each month, inviting both regular and potential clients alike.

To make each chat event worthwhile, remember to:

- Focus on a specific topic, preferably something your surfers will be very interested in.
- Set a definite schedule and time limit. Be aware of the time differences among your surfers, and try to set a schedule that is convenient for everyone.
- Promote the event well in advance. Tell as many people about it as you can (just make sure your servers can handle them). And finally –
- Give everyone clear & concise directions on how they can participate.

Minimize their chances for getting errors or getting lost during the event, so they can focus on what they want to say -- which is exactly the kind of feedback you need.

### 5) Feedback Forms

Of course, the feedback collection process won't be complete without the familiar online form.

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Although these forms are common, not all of them work as well most business owners need them to.

To set up the kind of form that's easy to send & easy to reply to, observe the following DOs & DON'Ts:

- DON'T just invite them to send all queries & requests to the same email address.
- DO create a drop-down menu for the "Recipient" field listing the different departments in your company, so each email will be instantly routed to the right person or mailbox.
- DON'T just use a generic form mailer for your "contact us" page.
- DO use a drop-down menu for the "Subject" field, listing the most common reasons people have for wanting to email you.

Aside from helping your client/surfer focus his reason for contacting you, it also helps you categorize each request quickly so you can deal with each batch of email more promptly.

The truth is, feedback is important not only in business, but also in our dreams, and our everyday lives.

Some feedback will be good, and some of it will be bad. Some will encourage us, some might crush us, and some might even have the chance to totally disillusion us.

But the important thing to look forward to is that feedback will always CHANGE us... and WE decide if we're going to be better because of it.

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### **Phases of Instructional Design/Technical Writing**

**By Lisa Spurlin**

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The development of a project is typically done in four different phases. In the project analysis phase, a market research is conducted to determine the courses that need to be developed and the information that they should cover. In the design phase, the development team collects relevant content from different sources, organizes the course content, and decides on the strategies to be used to cover the content. The actual course development occurs in the project development phase. Finally, in the project evaluation phase, the effectiveness of the project output is evaluated by collecting feedback from students and other organizations.

- \* Project Analysis
- \* Design
- \* Development
- \* Evaluation

### Project Analysis

The project analysis phase is the first phase in the development life cycle (DLC) of an ID project. The first task in this phase is to perform a market research to determine the requirements of potential students. This research is usually conducted by the marketing staff of a company. Based on the findings of this research, the market requirements analysts provide the course development unit of the company with specifications regarding the courses that need to be developed. These specifications, which are in the form of an MRD (Market Research Document), include the title of each course, a set of broadly defined objectives for each course, and the target audience for each course.

### Design

Once a course is selected for development, it is handed over to the project development team to mark the beginning of the design phase. In the design phase, instructional designers use the specifications in the MRD to collect relevant content from different sources and organize the course content in a proper structure. The development team members also refine the objectives suggested in the MRD according to the course development standards defined by the company. Additionally, the development team decides the instructional strategies to be used while covering specific content in the course.

Since incorporating design changes at the final stages of the course involves a lot of rework, identifying and rectifying design problems, earlier in the DLC, is critical for the successful and timely execution of a project. To ensure this, the development team should be provided sufficient time in the project design phase. Additionally, the project design should be reviewed regularly during the course development.

### Development

Project design phase is followed by the development phase, in which instructional designers, along with other members of the project team, develop the content of the course. Instructional designers use

the information gathered and strategies decided in the design phase to write the course content. Support teams, such as graphic artists and SMEs, help the instructional designers during the course development, as and when their help is required.

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### Evaluation

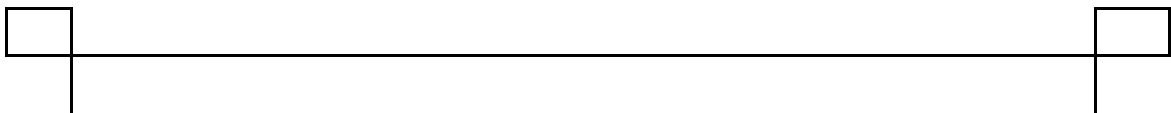
In the evaluation phase, the effectiveness of the project output is evaluated. Several mechanisms are used to collect the feedback of students who have used the instructional material developed during the project. Some of these mechanisms are exit tests, feedbacks collected by the company's marketing staff, and online feedback (in case of CBTs and WBTs). In addition to student feedback, product reviews conducted by various third party organizations help a company evaluate the output of its ID project. The feedback received in the evaluation phase can be used to identify the flaws in the development process and take corrective actions to rectify them.

Another set of activities that belong to the evaluation phase involves the evaluation of course content during the project design and development phases. These evaluation phase activities include ID and language reviews conducted by the reviewers, and the technical reviews conducted by the SMEs. Additionally, some companies conduct beta reviews of their ID products, in the duration between the completion of the project and its release in the market. The feedback received from these reviews helps the development team to improve the learning effectiveness of the final output.

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