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**Optimizing Marketing Programs through Customer Feedback**

**By Meg Walker**

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As Marketing professionals, we are all aware of the need to measure program results. We can measure website hits, bingo card responses, 800-number calls and increased product purchases. Unless we ask our customers, however, we will never know WHY particular programs are successful and others are not.

When was the last time you asked 500 of your best customers why they are loyal to your products, services, website or promotions? How much did it cost? How long did it take?

The most effective Marketing strategies include some level of market research. Whether you choose the services of a large professional organization or you conduct an in-house telephone survey, you know that research can be complex, time-consuming and expensive. What do you do when you need answers quickly? Consider implementing a web-based survey. Here are several areas where you need on-going feedback and can implement tactical surveys to rapidly gather information that you need now.

Who is visiting your website?

Demographic information about your website visitors is crucial. To whom does your site appeal? Why does your website appeal to them? How long do they stay on the site? Although you can extrapolate some information from log files analysis, these questions cannot be answered except by asking the visitors themselves. By implementing an online survey in a pop-up window, you can get important demographic and site-use information. Either by appealing to visitors' need to express opinions or by offering an incentive, you can rapidly gather data to help you improve your online presence. Interestingly, customers who feel that they contribute to your programs are more likely to remain loyal.

Are your services meeting customer needs?

I recently launched a survey to assess the effectiveness of a literature and sample fulfillment service that cost \$250,000 per year. By designing a brief nine-question survey and e-mailing an invitation to recent sales prospects, I was able to gather information about service satisfaction as well as brand

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loyalty, sample usage and general demographics. I launched the survey on Thursday at noon and by Monday afternoon had received an unprecedented 34% response. By Tuesday morning, when I met with the Business Unit Manager for that product, I was able to recommend (and provide substantiation) for maintaining both the samples program and particular brand identities. And my cost? Less than two hours of work and under \$500.

Are your advertising campaigns driving traffic?

Many advertisers now list their web address as part of their advertisements. This is a two-edged sword. Since most prospects have access to the Internet, they will not return bingo cards, so ad response rates may appear significantly lower than just a few years ago. Unless you implement special response URLs, gateway pages or on-line mirrors of your advertising campaign, you cannot reliably capture

which site visitors are driven to your website by traditional advertising means. These solutions require significant time investments and can be expensive add-ons to your already-costly advertising campaign.

With budgets that often reach into millions of dollars, Marketing professionals need a reliable method to prove program effectiveness so that they can focus their spending to increase return on investment. By implementing an online survey linked to your advertised product's web page, you can find out what draws your visitors to the site. Additionally, you can also discover what prospects' needs are, what appealed to them about your advertising campaign and what other media sources they rely on. Far beyond the unique URL solution or expensive industry-wide research, surveys give you tangible, objective data about why particular programs are effective with your unique audience.

How Do I Start?

The first step in launching a successful web-based market research survey is to decide who you want to study and why. Of the many uses for surveys, I've given three scenarios where this tool provides important, actionable data. Putting together a clear statement of purpose first will become invaluable as you write and order your questions. Your statement should include who you are surveying, why you are surveying, what data you hope to accumulate and what business decisions the data will help you to make.

Next, how do you want to present the data? Are there concepts or ideas that you want to compare? Do you want to compare data from two different demographic groups? If you plan to present the data, choose formats and software that make graphing the data easier (or graph the data automatically).

Write your questions. Keep the questionnaire short and on topic or you will lose your audience. Longer, more complex surveys do not necessarily give you enough incremental data to justify potential frustration of tabulating responses - or decreased response rates. Avoid adding questions that don't have particular bearing on your business decisions. For instance, if your product or content is not gender-specific, you don't need to ask the respondents' gender.

Decide how you want your respondents to answer. Choose single-choice, multiple-choice,

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agree–disagree or sliding–scale reply formats. Do you need more information? Add a block for a verbose response to an open–ended question. Thinking through response mechanisms clearly will facilitate tabulating your data. Remember, you can always launch a follow–up survey, if necessary.

Publicize your survey. Decide whether you want to have the survey appear as a pop–up window or if you want to send out e–mail notifications. If you send e–mail invitations, you can also send follow up reminders to encourage responses. If you send out e–mail invitations, make certain to use the BCC (blind copy) field in your e–mail for all of the addresses. You can reinforce confidentiality by keeping all of your audience from knowing who else has received the invitation.

Receive and analyze your results. Unless you have chosen a user–friendly program, this may be the most complex and frustrating aspect of your research program. As mentioned earlier, graphing the results will be very useful in analyzing and presenting them.

### Conclusion

With current, accurate data at your fingertips, you can make winning decisions about the programs that you implement. Using tactical surveys regularly allows you to adjust your messages and strategies quickly to meet a changing market. You can know who your customers are, what their needs are and whether your company is meeting them - and you can show objective data to your colleagues to support the important decisions you need to make every day.

## **Good Communication Promotes Positive Feedback On Ebay**

### **By Stephen Pope**

Good communication is the key to encouraging your auction buyers to leave you positive feedback. Such communication also helps avoid most negative feedback on eBay.

#### 1. Good Communication Prevents Misunderstandings

Good communication helps to avoid misunderstandings. For example, if surface shipping takes six to eight weeks but the customer doesn't know this, he may expect almost immediate delivery. When such quick delivery doesn't materialize, he may feel that he has been cheated or that your service is slow and poor.

Thus, try to spell out delivery time frames and other details as much as possible. Is your refund policy clear? Is your product clearly and accurately described in your auction ad? Does your product's quality meet or exceed the expectations created by your auction ad?

#### 2. Prompt E–mail Response

If, for whatever reason, your e–mail response is slow, the customer may assume that you aren't

delivering on your promises. Prompt e-mail communication can help reassure the customer and gives evidence of good customer service.

### 3. Encourage Queries

Basically, state in your auctions: "If you have any questions about this auction, please e-mail me." If a person is expecting instant delivery of an e-book but instead you send him the information via the postal service, he might be disappointed. Nip all such problems in the bud by encouraging your prospective buyers to ask questions.

### 4. Ask for Positive Feedback

How can you encourage buyers to leave positive feedback for you? Simply state that you'll leave positive feedback for them after you've received theirs.

Since they are leaving the feedback first, they will hesitate to leave you negative feedback, knowing that you may respond in kind. If you leave positive feedback for the buyer first, they may never return the favour.

### 5. Reversing Negative Feedback

With good communication, you can often avoid receiving negative feedback. Try to do everything that is reasonable to make your customer happy.

However, what if you do receive negative feedback on one of your auctions? What can you do about it?

Under certain, very limited circumstances (such as an extortion attempt), eBay might reverse negative feedback unjustly given to you. In most cases, however, eBay will not reverse negative feedback.

You can use eBay's "Mutual Feedback Withdrawal" procedure. This is where both the buyer and seller agree to withdraw negative feedback from each other. Thus, the negative feedback will be removed from both of your total scores (thus improving both feedback ratings).

The negative comments themselves won't be removed by eBay. However, your comments left in response to a negative feedback will also stay to tell your side of the story.

Yes, good communication can lead to more positive feedback from your auctions. Such communication can also help you to avoid and even reverse negative feedback. So, by all means, promote positive feedback on eBay through good communication.

J. Stephen Pope, President of Pope Consulting Inc., has been helping clients to earn maximum business profits for over twenty-five years. To learn more about Internet auctions and other profitable Work at Home Small Business Ideas, visit



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