Beyond Surveys: Building a Modern VoC Program

A Practical Guide to Using Voice of the Customer to Improve Customer Experience

Beyond Surveys: Building a Modern VoC Program

A Practical Guide to Using Voice of the Customer to Improve Customer Experience
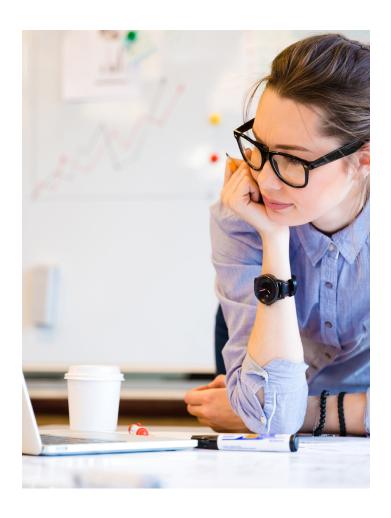
—–-

Introduction

For decades, surveys have been the primary mechanism used to gauge customer satisfaction. And while metrics derived from surveys, such as customer satisfaction (CSAT) scores and net promoter scores (NPS) are useful, they can be imperfect indicators of how your customers actually feel about your company, its service and support, and more.

Why? Because surveys put the onus on customers to answer questions, which doesn't always happen as quickly, frequently or accurately as we'd like. Some single-question surveys are a low lift, but others are extraordinarily detailed and, frankly, burdensome.

What's more, there are often discrepancies in the actual customer experience (CX) compared to the 'remembered experience.' In other words, how agents and customers interact on a call or chat can vary greatly from the way customers respond to surveys.

To provide a more accurate measurement of customer satisfaction than traditional surveys, more sophisticated voice of the customer (VoC) programs, technologies and strategies have been created to collect customer feedback, address it, and make improvements. Modern VoC programs often rely on a combination of solicited feedback (such as surveys) and unsolicited feedback (such as voice and text-based customer interactions, social media comments, reviews and more).

Let's explore more about why surveys alone fall short and how you can use unsolicited customer feedback from throughout the customer journey to **establish a more comprehensive VoC program** that can drive real improvement in customer satisfaction, brand loyalty and retention.

Where surveys fall short

Surveys are a good starting point to gain insight into CX, but according to the American Customer Satisfaction Index, the average survey response rate is only between **5 and 15%.** People who tend to answer survey questions usually are at opposite ends of extremes: extremely satisfied or extremely disappointed. That means most customers in the middle are often left out.

Even at the largest and most experienced companies, there's a high margin for error with surveys. According to the WSJ, here are some of the **most common mistakes** companies make with surveys:

They don't ask enough questions: A single-question survey can only reveal so much detail, and often leaves out the "why" or motivation behind the answer.

They ask too many questions: On the other hand, a survey that's too long can lead to high abandonment rates. Keeping surveys under 10 questions can avoid these issues.

They ask questions that are open to interpretation: Ask direct questions, instead of those that can have different meanings or answers depending on who is answering the survey.

They don't compensate respondents: Offering reasonable compensation (e.g., gift cards, sweepstakes entries) can improve the quality of survey responses.

They ask too often: As the cost of issuing surveys has decreased, many brands have taken advantage of survey mechanisms too often, leading to survey fatigue.

The most successful companies are those that use surveys in combination with unsolicited feedback to gain true insight into the VoC. This enables you to make changes to internal processes and better meet customers' needs based on their feedback, improving metrics like CSAT and NPS scores.

5 tips for collecting more valuable solicited feedback

When developing surveys as a part of a VoC program, you should include customer-centric questions carefully designed to elicit measurable responses (both qualitative and quantitative), using a variety of question formats and approaches. Here are a few **best practices** for you to keep in mind for survey design.

1. **Decide on a goal.** Think about the answers you want to get out of a survey, or the end goal, before you design the questions. Reverse-engineer the questions from there.

2. **Lead with a question asking for an overall rating.** Asking for one key insight first will ensure that you get the most critical answer you're looking for. Then you can expand and ask for other pertinent details.

3. **Simplify processes, including the path to purchase.** Use both relationship and transactional surveys.

4. **Avoid leading questions.** Leading questions are those that have a clear "right" or "wrong" answer. Multi-part questions can often come across as leading. Splitting these questions into two can avoid that trap.

5. **Don't be afraid to ask "why?"** Using "why" as a follow up question to an insight (e.g., Question 1: What word would you use to describe our business? Question 2: Why?) can lead to more thorough, free-form customer opinions you may not get otherwise.

What is VoC?

VoC **terminology first surfaced** nearly 20 years ago in an **MIT paper** about quality management techniques for product development. Since then, the concept has taken off as the sheer number of channels to collect customer feedback has increased.

In recent years, VoC programs have evolved due to survey fatigue to encompass a wider variety of customer feedback mechanisms.

Components of a modern VoC program could include:

Surveys

NPS, CSAT, customer effort scores (CES) and other custom-built surveys are still a prominent solicited feedback mechanism.

Focus groups or market research

Both online and in-person focus groups and market research can provide valuable insight for product development, marketing, customer support and more.
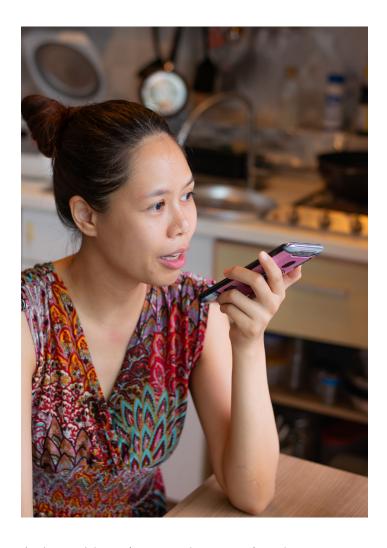
Social media monitoring

Monitoring brand mentions on social media can uncover both positive and negative customer insights and provide opportunities for direct response.

Online reviews

Reviews can be collected as solicited (e.g. as a part of a sweepstakes or giveaway) or unsolicited feedback, and unlock important details for product or service improvements.

Unsolicited customer feedback

This is primarily collected via the contact center or other channels of customer interaction (like customer success or sales) and can be analyzed for insights that lead to direct business performance improvements.

As the omnichannel customer journey evolves, there are more opportunities than ever for you to capture and listen to the VoC. One of the most powerful channels is unsolicited feedback.

CallMiner

Listening throughout the omnichannel customer journey

Customers may already be telling you what you want to know throughout their omnichannel customer journey, as they interact with your brand through both physical and digital touchpoints. But first, what do we mean by omnichannel, and how is it different from multichannel customer engagement strategies?

Omnichannel takes the CX much further than multichannel by enabling cross-channel customer engagement. Unlike multichannel, omnichannel refers to some level of integration, data sharing or analytics that work to mitigate the technology "gaps" between each channel of communication.

Common benefits to an **omnichannel CX strategy** include reduced effort to repeat information on the customer side, and increased intelligence for optimizing agent performance. By providing a means to share intelligence across all communications, omnichannel ensures that information travels with a customer as they switch from digital channels such as online chat to phone support.

Many customer-focused businesses have already embraced the omnichannel approach. **A PWC report** indicates the number of companies investing in omnichannel customer experiences rose from 20% to more than 80% since 2020. Many companies that have made the investment have already seen it pay off. Brands running **omnichannel campaigns** saw more than 3.5x increases in CX rates. And, as it turns out, 90% of customers have come to expect the level of cross-channel consistency omnichannel delivers.

Once you establish your omnichannel strategy and start collecting data from all communication channels, it's important to make sure that data is accessible to everyone within your organization, particularly CX business leaders. This **'democratization'** makes it possible to leverage data to gain a holistic view of the VoC and make more informed decisions, changes and optimizations as a result, but you don't have to listen to hours of call recordings, or read pages of transcripts and customer feedback to get there.

Conversation analytics technology allows you to improve omnichannel customer experience by capturing and analyzing every conversation with your customers, regardless of channel (phone, email, chat, social media, or surveys).

These platforms help derive contextual meaning on top of what is said, helping you understand why customers reach out during their omnichannel journeys – not solely based on what they said, but by how they said it using acoustic measures that derive both emotion and sentiment. Here are a few examples of insights your teams can uncover with the right technology.

Sentiment and emotion

Sentiment analysis continues to be an important standard within customer service. With the addition of emotional analysis, a more nuanced and complex picture of the customer is available to help you refine your approaches. Sentiment is a powerful indicator but is often reflected in a one-dimensional answer to a question (Positive, Negative, or Neutral). Emotional insights can more quickly identify motivational indicators, such as loyalty, distress, or churn-likely behaviors.

Contact drivers

Contact drivers help you understand why customers choose to reach out, based on the customer's perception of a certain issue or situation. In addition to contact drivers, you can drill down into customer emotions, frequency of contact, the root causes behind the interaction, and more, to understand the context of a customer interaction.

Call dynamics

From silence time to average handle time (AHT) to agent quality scores, conversation analytics can reveal important dynamics of each customer interaction. For example, on collections calls about financial matters, longer silence times can indicate that an agent is empathetically listening to a customer's needs. On other calls, long silence times can be an indicator of a challenge or issue with customers that requires additional agent training.

As detailed by the examples above, conversation analytics can help you paint a clearer picture of customer behaviors, even when they hop between channels. This technology can work both post-interaction or in real time to coach employees to improve the CX.

Case Study: Improving CSAT through customer feedback

Within a holistic VoC program, customer feedback can help inform other critical CX metrics like CSAT and NPS. This was true for **Slimware Utilities**, a leading media and internet company revolutionizing the way users and businesses clean, update and optimize personal computers.

To support its customers, Slimware Utilities operates five contact centers globally, with more than 125 agents and only a handful of analysts. Slimware Utilities turned to conversation analytics through CallMiner to maintain compliance and address a wide variance in call performance in its contact centers, including some ongoing issues with customer churn.

> **"**We looked at customers who had churned out, using CallMiner to examine the customer journey timeline to identify where issues occurred,**"**

Said Carl Stuerke, director of operations at Slimware Utilities

> **"**We were able to double-click on these interactions to determine how to fix common issues. As a result, we have a 16% reduction in churn by having agents do a better job on the phone.**"**

By adapting agent training to the areas of improvement identified with CallMiner, Slimware Utilities witnessed dramatic improvements beyond customer retention. The company began sharing performance metrics – like handle time and average sale – with its agents to demonstrate the impact of the call center's efforts. Over a one-year period with CallMiner, the call centers saw their NPS increase by 300%. Additionally, the CSAT score rose 350bps over the same period.

To learn more about Slimware Utilities' results, read the full case study here.

Building a modern VoC: 5 Tips for leveraging customer insights

How do you get started building a VoC program that incorporates both unsolicited and solicited feedback? Let's look at five practical next steps.

1. **Evaluate where you are today using a maturity model framework.** A maturity model is a powerful tool to help you objectively assess your functional capabilities compared to best practice recommendations. It helps target the tactical and strategic resources upon which you need to focus or invest to reach the next level of success and return on investment. It also highlights the factors across your organization that have a significant impact on success. By identifying these accelerators, your program owners and executive sponsors can be aware of the organizational alignment needed to build and grow your analytics initiatives.

   You should conduct a maturity assessment at the outset of a program to identify strengths and opportunity areas, and then revisit it on a regular basis to evaluate progress. Participants should include program managers, executive sponsors, and even outside business stakeholders to best take advantage of the benefits available from a full view of the program. A sample conversation analytics maturity model is **available here.**

2. **Create a customer journey map. Customer journey maps** offer a unique perspective on what it's like to be your customer. By visualizing every step of the path from first contact with your company to engaging online, making a purchase, and interacting with customer service, customer journey maps provide insight that can help you improve every interaction and create exceptional customer experiences.

   A customer journey map begins with identifying a buyer persona and the touchpoints involved as they move from first contact with your brand to receiving communications, interacting online, making a purchase, seeking support, writing reviews, and hopefully continuing to choose your products and services. Journey mapping software presents this information in a visual way that makes it easier for you to track the journey for each persona.

A journey map tool can also help understand your customers' emotions and opinions about your brand at each stage of the journey. This data must answer several critical questions.

For example: How does the customer feel about your product, your brand, the way you communicate, and the buying process? Do their interactions with your company leave them happy, unimpressed, or frustrated? Are they recommending your products to their friends or writing negative reviews on social media?

3. **Implement a conversation analytics solution.** As described above, conversation analytics technology automatically collects and analyzes 100% of customer feedback across the customer journey. A deep dive into these analytics could potentially uncover agent patterns that negatively impact CX, such as longer-than-usual AHTs, churn, silence on calls and more. In addition, you may discover agent behaviors that deserve positive reinforcement, and serve as the foundation for an effective training program.

Beyond these insights on agent performance, you'll discover both the explicit and implicit meaning your customers are trying to convey throughout their interactions with your brand. This includes both the acoustics of what people say and the semantics of how they say it, or their intent.

4. **Act on the insights discovered in your analytics.** Using the insights discovered within a conversation analytics platform, your teams can make measurable business improvements. One important step is to work with agents on the front lines to continuously improve through enhanced coaching and training programs, based on what's actually happening during customer interactions.

In addition, you can leverage these insights across departments to improve the products and services you offer, engage with customers more effectively through data-driven marketing campaigns, shorten sales cycles, and meet regulatory compliance goals.

5. **Use surveys to fill in the blanks.** After you've gained a comprehensive view into what your customers are telling you through unsolicited feedback, you can more effectively design customer surveys. Use these surveys to gather information that customers may not be readily giving you through unsolicited feedback. For example, surveys can be used to gain insights before launching new products and services, or to understand how external factors impact customer buying decisions. They can also be used to validate findings that have been uncovered by your conversation analytics programs.

Taking customer experience beyond the survey

As we've discussed, conversation analytics provides critical insight into customers' unsolicited feedback, which is full of context and insights to improve CX. By analyzing 100% of conversations, you can take action to improve your business based on exactly what your customers are telling you about their experience.

Combining unsolicited customer insight with solicited survey feedback helps you discover the true VoC and understand how your frontline employees represent your brand. Rather than waiting days or weeks to collect and analyze survey responses, conversation analytics provides a holistic "before, during and after" picture of the CX in real time.

Taking it a step further, integrating this conversation analytics feedback with data from your CRM systems allows you to analyze interactions within the context of all the other demographic, firmographic, purchase and other data you have about your customers. This enables you to identify and solve operational problems and CX issues, as well as uncover sales and marketing opportunities that can spark even more revenue.

Learn more about VoC in [The Inner Circle Guide to the Voice of the Customer](#) from ContactBabel.

CallMiner

About CallMiner

CallMiner is the global leader in conversation analytics to drive business performance improvement. Powered by artificial intelligence and machine learning, CallMiner delivers the industry's most comprehensive platform to analyze omnichannel customer interactions at scale, allowing organizations to interpret sentiment and identify patterns to reveal deep understanding from every conversation. By connecting the dots between insights and action, CallMiner enables companies to identify areas of opportunity to drive business improvement, growth and transformational change more effectively than ever before. CallMiner is trusted by the world's leading organizations across retail, financial services, healthcare and insurance, travel and hospitality, and more.

CallMiner

Corporate Headquarters

200 West Street
Waltham, MA 02451
+1 781 547 5690

Sales

sales@callminer.com

Social

facebook.com/callminer, inc.

twitter.com/callminer

linkedin.com/company/callminer