

# Any monkey can survey; start building relationships

**R**ecently I stayed at a Marriott hotel on a business trip. Three days later, as expected, I received a request to participate in a “short” online survey. My inbox gets several of these a week. They’re annoying and usually end up deleted at a glance. But this time my Marriott experience had been particularly troubling, and the survey invitation specifically stated that my feedback would be acted upon. So I decided to participate.

After a few minutes I realized that “short survey” was an understatement. It would not be a small investment of time. Rather, I had to walk through the entire stay and pinpoint what actually worked and what went wrong. About 20 questions in, I so badly wanted to drop out, but I kept going as the progress bar indicated I was almost done. Finally, after nearly 10 minutes (which felt like 20) of intense memory recall, I finished, having rated the Marriott very low on topics including “responsiveness of staff” and “cleanliness of room” and even providing direct comments about the poorly functioning amenities. I even answered all the profiling questions about age, occupation and reason for staying.

As I write this article, it has been more than three weeks since my stay. Do you think I’ve heard anything back from Marriott? This is an illustrative example of over-surveying and under-acting, which is why I can confidently say that most companies’ survey approaches are annoying!

Don’t annoy your customers by seeking feedback about their experience if you are not prepared or motivated to act on it. A fundamental mistake that companies make is being irresponsible in surveying customers. Bombarding customers with an endless list of questions using oversimplified—yet affordable—tools like SurveyMonkey or Zoomerang has become a popular and simple but less-than-strategic way to try to engage with customers. However, when it comes to truly engaging with customers and taking real action on their feedback, initiative leaders tend to move on to other priorities or simply admit they are not sure what to do with the massive amounts of data collected.



**ON PERFORMANCE**  
Gregg Lederman

Your customers don’t want to be surveyed. But most customers do want a relationship with your company and want you to take their feedback seriously—especially since they know they are doing you the favor by providing feedback.

There is a significant difference between a “monkey” survey and a fully operational customer experience management program. For starters, any monkey (that is why they call it SurveyMonkey, right?) can lay out questions of various types and invite thousands of customers to participate. Here are the key differences between monkey surveys and fully operational customer experience management programs:

**Objective:** Have a single, clearly stated and well-communicated objective, such as “measure the overall customer relationship” or “track drivers of customer satisfaction.” A strong focus will align your company’s decision-makers and provide the necessary support to act on customer feedback and keep the program going. On the other hand, a monkey survey can have multiple objectives, but the results are less accurate, less actionable, more biased and simply limited in their use.

**Design:** Use a short, very accurate and focused set of questions that follows the clearly defined objective. Like the Marriott survey, monkey surveys can include dozens of questions over lots of pages, collecting information on scattered topics. And it’s OK, because nobody cares about the results.

**Sampling strategy:** Ideally, solid customer relationship programs are implemented twice a year at most. This allows your company to actually study, incorporate and act on customer feedback. Monkey surveys don’t have a sampling strategy.

They are drafted every day, and nobody seems to care enough about the consequences. Customers are simply data points.

**Action plan:** Customer relationship management begins when data has been collected. The most important component is what you do with customer feedback—how you incorporate ideas for improvement, address issues of poor satisfaction and act both strategically and tactically to bring about change. Your customers expect you to follow up with them. They expect to see change happening. Conversely, a monkey survey is considered almost complete when feedback has been collected. Analysts tabulate or visualize it, present it and then go home.

**Let’s face it:** Getting feedback from customers is a selfish act. And it’s perfectly OK! Just accept the fact that you want feedback because you want your customers to like you more, buy more from you and recommend you to friends and relatives. You want to learn and improve so you can outbehave and outperform your competition. Another wonderfully selfish reason to reach out to customers and follow up the right way: You can regularly share the feedback (good and bad) with employees and dramatically improve engagement. Quite often employees are too far removed from the reality of the customer experience and how they positively affect a customer’s life.

Companies that do the best job of building customer relationships use four questions in designing survey instruments. Each question is distinct and captures a different aspect of customer loyalty.

■ **Likelihood of recommending to others:** This measures the customer’s propensity to overtly praise and endorse a company to friends or colleagues. Studies have found this question to be the best direct gauge of loyalty currently known.

■ **Satisfaction with overall performance:** This measures the degree to which customer expectations were met, based on a particular experience.

■ **Likelihood of choosing again:** This measures the degree to which a customer would choose to do business with you again, based on experience with your com-

pany over a specific period of time.

■ Likelihood of continuing to buy: This measures company performance based on initial expectations and actual experience over time. It can also indicate if customers are “trapped” because of high switching costs or for other reasons.

Customer experience management is the most effective way to start and enrich direct relationships with your customers.

Every time you have the opportunity to interact about the customers’ experience, you stimulate potential referrals and upselling opportunities. But there is much more to it than simply getting the survey out. That’s the easy part. Asking the right questions and following up in an effective manner are what it takes to turn customer feedback into company profits.

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