

What Have You Done for Me Lately?

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Creating an Internal Marketing Culture

Most support organizations are continually answering the customer's question, "What have you done for me lately?" It seems that the internal customers never quite understand the value of support from a business perspective. They view support as being technology-focused, not business-focused.

Whether it's on the phone, in meetings, or in reports, the support professional should make a constant effort to clearly articulate the value of services provided and improvements made in business terms the customer understands and values.

Wouldn't it be nice to hear your customers thank you for making their jobs easier? Would you like them to credit you for helping the company make money? Would you like to eliminate the words "helpless desk" from their vocabulary? By making internal marketing part of your culture, all of these are possible. However, it is not as simple as creating nice looking brochures, intranet sites, and newsletters. Although these can be aspects of marketing internally, they are not requirements nor are they necessary for improving customer perception.

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customer's vocabulary?*

What is Internal Marketing?

Internal Marketing is *taking advantage of opportunities to positively influence customer perception.* In other words, recognize that you are marketing with everything you do – during every call you take, with every person you talk to, and in every meeting you attend. The goal is to take advantage of these opportunities to make a positive impression of your value in business terms. If you don't make a conscious effort to spread a positive message, or if your message is not in line with what your customer values, you may in fact be creating negative perceptions.

Because of the "fire fighting" environment of the Service Desk, a support organization may not take the time to market its successes. Furthermore, it may not take the time to find out what its customers really think. Sure, you may send out surveys asking if you handled their calls well, and some organizations ask for customers' opinions on an annual basis, *but do you ask them the questions that are directly aligned with their expectations?*

If the answers are not giving you the information necessary to promote how you make employees' jobs easier and more productive, or show that you facilitate in generating revenue for the company, then it's time to re-examine your surveys and methods for gauging customer satisfaction.

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Before you can successfully market your accomplishments, you need to know what they are - from both a business and customer perspective. Here are four steps you need to take before you market your value.

1. Understand customer expectations
2. Learn current perceptions
3. Identify the gap between expectations and perceptions
4. Assess the value of your current services

Once you've taken these steps, you are ready to market your value within your organization.

Understanding Expectations

A common mistake made by most support organizations is that they base their survey questions on what they *think* is important to the customer, or on the Service Desk metrics most easily measured.

A common mistake made by most support organizations is that they base their survey questions on what they think is important to the customer.

I worked with a support team who was averaging an overall customer satisfaction score of 4.8 on a scale of 1-5, 5 being the highest. These scores were based on the handling and closing of customer issues called into the support team. Although the score was high and it seemed that they were providing a high level of service, the Support Directors were frequently being pulled out of meetings to handle issues that had been escalated to the CIO. When this became a regular occurrence, it was obvious that the surveys weren't reflective of the true quality of service. Therefore, the management took a step back and had a third party call internal customers and ask a simple question, "What do you expect when you call the Customer Support Center?" The answers were consistent. Customers expected:

- The appropriate sense of urgency
- An understanding of the problem from a business perspective
- An update when the call won't be resolved when originally promised
- Communication of the status of an issue

The existing survey questions did not focus on business understanding or an appropriate sense of urgency. The survey did not reflect how well the Service Desk kept the customer informed. Therefore, the team was unable to identify and make improvements in areas that were most important to the customer.

Consequently, they were failing at meeting basic expectations and were perpetuating the negative perceptions centered on the business acumen and value of the Service Desk.

Before marketing accomplishments, you need to know what your customer expects and whether these expectations are realistic from a business and technical support perspective. Communicating accomplishments that are unimportant to your customer has no impact on improving perception. Surveys that don't focus on high value areas don't provide information that will help you to target areas that will improve perception.

Perception is Reality

Is it true that perception is reality? Those who don't agree will agree that perception *seems* like reality. If the customer thinks it, repeats it, and feels it, then it is reality within the organization.

If customers' expectations are met, they view the support organization as good or great and believe it adds value. If customers are not satisfied, everyone knows, including the CEO.

How do you know if customer perceptions are based on fact? First, you need to know what their perceptions really are. Don't guess or make assumptions. This requires collecting information beyond transaction surveys (surveys focusing on resolved calls). Instead, create an environment where you can continually be in touch with customer opinion.

You can use a combination of formal and informal methods for learning customer perception. Some methods are:

- Facilitating customer opinion meetings
- Holding one-on-one interviews
- Taking advantage of hallway conversations
- Administering opinion surveys
- Creating focus groups.

Document your findings and look for trends in perceptions. Then determine whether the perceptions are accurate or not. Those that are not accurate are typically easy to correct. They often require communication, clarification, or education on existing services and processes. The others may require training or changes to processes.

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Identify the Gaps between Expectations and Perceptions

Once you understand customer expectations and learn the current perceptions, you are ready to identify the gaps between the two. These gaps are what negatively impact perception. For example, if your customer expects to receive new software within 24 hours of requesting it and this expectation is never met, the customer may view your team as slow or as not adding value to the process. If new software requests take 3 business days to process, the customer needs to know this. In this case, closing the gap is as simple as educating the customer on the process and communicating the timeframe for receiving new software. Now when the customer calls to request software and his expectations match the process and timeframe, he is satisfied with the experience and has a positive perception of the support organization.

Once you identify these gaps and close them, you can improve perception. Publishing service levels and processes and reiterating these timeframes when interacting with the customer, helps to set realistic expectations. It is also important to reset expectations if the original timeframe cannot be kept.

The Value Connection

Understanding the **value connection** – *the value your customer places on your services and the degree to which your customer’s expectations are met* – is the next step in determining what you should market.

Once you know what their expectations are, and have changed or improved those that were unrealistic, you need to prioritize those requiring further action. Target the expectations that mean the most to the customers and have the highest business impact.

Aside from asking your customers to prioritize their expectations, you can also create weighted surveys by adding a column that allows the customer to place a priority on each item he assesses. Here is an example:.

	Level of Satisfaction	Level of Importance
Did your support representative handle the call with an appropriate level of urgency?		

Not only can you assess whether you are asking survey questions in areas that are important to your customers, you are also gaining valuable information for making improvements, increasing your value, and marketing your successes.

Internal Marketing is not a project; it requires creating a culture of continual feedback and conveying value in all that you do. It is taking advantage of opportunities to positively influence customer perception. Marketing the services your customers value most is sure to improve their perception of your team.

Once you’ve taken these four steps to truly understand what your customers expect, what their current perceptions are, and what they place the most importance on from a business perspective, you will know what to market.

Once you know what to market, you can build an internal marketing focus into your culture. To build a culture that focuses on consciously promoting individual and team accomplishments, you need to involve everyone in your department. Not only does every employee need to understand the current customer perception and the desired perception, but each employee also needs to be “kept in the loop” on departmental issues, accomplishments, and efforts. Being well informed on what is important to management and the customer, helps each team member to say and do things that promote value. Begin by setting goals for raising awareness of your services and promoting your value in your customer’s eyes. Make communication a focus within your group.

Value Connection
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