



6 Ways to Link Quality Improvement to Customer Service

by John Goodman

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Based on ASQ's Global State of Quality Research: Discoveries 2013, Customer Service Managers can enhance the pay-off of corporate quality initiatives by providing Voice of the Customer, revenue and word of mouth impact estimates and proactive customer education services.

The survey, which questioned more than 2,000 companies in 22 countries, measured the state of Quality in manufacturing and services; looking at approaches to management, outcomes and measures, training and even fostering a culture of quality.

The study suggests that quality executives are very concerned about product and service quality and the close alignment of quality and customer relationships — a concept it terms as "Qustomer™." But it's clear that organizations have not yet embraced the implications of the end-to-end customer experience.

Survey respondents provided definitions of quality which included "acting as promised, adding value, meeting and exceeding expectations through world-class products, services and support." Not once are the marketing and finance departments or revenue growth and word of mouth enhancement mentioned within the definitions.

Marketing, finance and service should be the major champions of investment in quality and continuous improvement. Input on building a revenue oriented business case from customer service executives is needed is to support the setting of quality priorities based on customer feedback and then to guide improvement of the end-to-end customer experience.

The quality function is both a major market for data from the service department and a source of rich analytical horsepower. It is a market for your services because most quality functions need assistance in demonstrating a compelling linkage of Quality to customer loyalty, revenue enhancement and word of mouth to marketing and finance.

This research should be your excuse to go visit your corporate quality department and suggest that you work together to enhance the overall customer experience. You should join with them to:

- Demonstrate to the finance department the linkage of improved quality to enhanced revenue and margins as well as positive word of mouth.
- Show the marketing department that word of mouth and word of "mouse" (on the web) are the most powerful and cost-effective marketing tools and that service helps foster WOM.
- Use CRM technology to anticipate customers' information needs and proactively help customers avoid problems thereby reducing service and warranty expenses.

- Focus quality improvement on marketing and sales quality in the same way that product and operational quality are addressed — my own research shows that sales and marketing complaints create four times the damage to loyalty on a per problem basis as traditional product quality problems but are articulated by customers only one fourth as much due to fear of alienating sales reps. The problems that do the most damage are the ones that the company least hears.
- Make the website an effective educational and service channel. Is it not ironic that the most critical channel of communication with customers, the website, is administered by the information technology department, which usually is not known for customer focus?
- Partner with Quality to make the case for creation of a Customer Experience Council, which coordinates the end-to-end customer experience. The existence of such a function will prevent many of the problems that service spends time cleaning up after the fact.

The following are appropriate roles for a Customer Experience Council :

- Oversee mapping and analysis of all customer-touching processes
- Gather unified voice of the customer data regarding process performance
- Facilitate identification of key points of pain and opportunities for value
- Create the economic imperative for action
- Decide which function should take the lead in addressing the problems
- Measure progress in attacking issues, thereby creating accountability
- Act as an advocate for customers to top management, quantifying the cost of inaction

The two functions that the CEC should not responsible for are:

- Being responsible for the satisfaction and loyalty indices
- Fixing quality and service

The Quality function in most companies has the ear of executives and significant resources. They are frustrated by causes of dissatisfaction beyond the boundaries of the plant and operations but they often lack the customer data to suggest and justify changes based on the revenue damage of the status quo. Customer service is perfectly positioned and equipped to provide data in exchange for their support, and as a team, get the resources and support to manage and enhance the customer experience.



About the Author

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