

Illawarra Small Business Assistance

HELPFUL HINT - CLIENT SATISFACTION SURVEY

One of the best ways to improve your business relationship with your clients is to ask them what they think of your services and how you might improve in order to serve them better. Begin by developing a *Client Satisfaction Survey* based on the guidelines and questions below. Personalize it according to what your organization really needs to know at a given time – this will become a regular research tool, so don't worry about asking everything all at once.

The *Client Satisfaction Survey* should be conducted in person – preferably face-to-face. If distance prevents this personal contact, at least conduct the interview over the telephone after sending a copy of the form to the interviewee, so he/she can go through the form with you.

By conducting the interview rather than having the client just complete the form, you are giving your client special attention which will leave a positive impression. If the respondent merely completes the form, you may be imposing on his/her time for your benefit – not theirs. If this course is chosen some form of reward is recommended.

Personal contact also allows you to "read between the lines" and pick up subtleties that would not appear on the questionnaire. Use the interview time to build a relationship with the clients at a new level. Let them know you respect their opinions and value learning from them. Take the time to ask questions that go beyond the formality of the questionnaire to learn about the client's emerging needs, test ideas of new products/services you might offer, and learn about the competition – what are they offering and how your organization compares. Never miss an opportunity to have a client contact – even if the message you receive is negative, the client will know that you care. And don't forget it is also a marketing opportunity.

Survey Guidelines

A Client Satisfaction Survey should either begin or end with some identifiers, for example:

- Client name, address and telephone number;
- The date;
- Respondent's name and position.

Questions should be clear. They should solicit information that will help you better meet your clients needs and desires. They might include:

- List current products/services provided to client
- What are your specific impressions relating to each product/service we provide you?
- What is your perception of the price we charge for each product/service?
- How should we improve the quality of each product/service?
- How could we improve our delivery of each product/service?
- What is your perception of the technical support we provide? Does it meet your expectations?
- What is your perception of the frequency and quality of the non-technical contacts we have with you and other members of your organization?

- How do you perceive us with respect to our competitors?
- What other products/services would you like to receive from us?
- What are the three best aspects of your purchasing products/services from us?
- In which areas should we improve our organization, our products/services, our marketing, and our delivery?
- Any other thoughts you might like to share concerning our organization and how we are perceived by you, your organization and the marketplace?

The following are some hints for successful client satisfaction surveying:

- Be brief – the person completing your survey is doing you a favor
- Be focused – a way to be brief, think about what is important to you now. Since asking will be a regularly scheduled marketing activity, there will be other opportunities to pursue other areas of interest.
- Don't ask too often – but do ask regularly. You may want to use the survey annually or a few months after a significant change or event.
- Ask questions in an orderly sequence and wording – test the survey to see if it conveys what you want to know clearly and concisely.
- Limit identifiers – those questions that are at the beginning or end of the survey that categorize the person/organization being surveyed.
- For trend data, be consistent – For example when questioning satisfaction, consider asking it with respect to a reference such as "this year" as opposed to "last year."
- Say thank you.
- Get help – Surveys take time and cost money. Consider getting professional help in drafting the survey instrument and the method for conducting the survey, as appropriate.

Three other points to keep in mind:

1. When asking, expect criticism. This could be the most important result of the survey, so don't be defensive and be positive in your desire to improve your product/service delivery.
2. Listen carefully, you may know the answer, but since you asked, let the person being surveyed respond at his/her pace and fully—some responses may even be surprising. If you are asked a question during your interview or if you are presented with a criticism, respond.
3. Remember the clients may not always be right, but they are the clients and should be treated in a way that makes them feel that their inputs are valuable to you.

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