



FEEDBACK BUILDS SIGNATURE'S CUSTOMER LOYALTY

By Jason Compton, Contributing Writer

Every business values feedback from its customers, making surveys and focus groups important marketing tools. It's rare, however, that a company puts the same priority on acting on the information gathered as it does on gathering it.

[Signature Flight Support](#), a ground crew services company for private and corporate aircraft, regularly makes changes based on cues from customers. "We are a high-end service provider that charges a premium price, so the customer's experience is very important to us," says Steve Lee, vice president of operations at Signature. Flight and maintenance crews at its 60 worldwide locations have the most face-to-face time with customers, so it is there that the company focused its customer experience measurement project. Working with customer experience firm LRA Worldwide, the company now invites customers to participate in a Web-based survey as they close out their visit. Each sales receipt has an invitation with URL and unique ID, and Signature provides public Web terminals in each location for travelers to fill out a survey immediately after checking out, if they wish. Lee says that about 5 percent of customers receive the sales receipt at the point of sale, and 25 percent of those actually complete the survey.

Acting on results

As a result, Signature's leaders have made acting on individual feedback a top priority. LRA sends email alerts to employees when a response indicates an unsatisfactory experience or a strong criticism in the freeform question fields. "We all carry Blackberrys, so no matter where we are in the world, it's going to pop up in a matter of minutes if there was a problem at a particular location," Lee says.

Such immediate visibility lets the company reach out to the dissatisfied customer quickly -- sometimes even before the day's business is done. "We have had cases where a customer is still in the lobby when [the alert] gets circulated, so our general manager can tap them on the shoulder and discuss the problem." Location managers are charged with resolving the customer issue and reporting the result of their intervention to Signature senior staff. Signature has also adopted a management bonus program, which ties a portion of compensation to problems resolved based on these instant surveys.

Getting customers involved

Surveys can only reveal so much about a customer's mindset, so in 2003 Signature implemented a customer advisory panel. Made up of 12 representatives from each of the company's constituencies, from pilots to flight bookers, the group meets every six months for informal presentations and discussions. "We spend time with them just learning what's new in the industry, as well as finding out what their hot-button issues are," Lee says.

The panel was instrumental in Signature's recent overhaul of its company image and market presentation. Customers felt that Signature fell short explaining how its service differentiated from competitors. "One of the early comments we got was that we didn't do a good job telling our story," Lee says. "So we have revamped our ads and brochures to highlight those things."

Advocate for results

A new customer experience initiative just underway at Signature is the creation of what Lee calls a "designated service guru" at each location. A member of the rank-and-file staff will be the liaison between the field location and the company's central service-strategy staff, sharing corporate strategies with coworkers while reporting real-world results in regular conference calls. "We're hoping from this that we'll get better feedback and the real story of what's going on in each location," Lee says.

Signature's payoff has come from a strong and improved connection with its customers. "Through a combination of our attention to the surveys and our service, 85 percent of our locations have over a 90 percent loyalty index," Lee says. By putting customers ahead of price wars, Signature hopes to maintain that leadership position.