The Top 5 Characteristics of a Successful VoC Program
Understanding the Voice of the Customer
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Reaching Your Customers on a New Level

An effective Voice of the Customer (VoC) program is essential to any organization that wants to survive in today’s customer experience-driven world. When properly designed and implemented, a VoC program provides insight about your customers’ expectations, preferences and desires. This allows you to keep you in touch with reality and drive better decision making at multiple levels in the organization.

A VoC program provides insight about your customers’ expectations, preferences and desires

While a VoC program has potential to provide a considerable amount of valuable data, maximizing the effectiveness of your efforts and the quality of the information gathered is not always easy. Achieving buy-in and engagement internally, and then reaching your target audience and giving them a simple and efficient method of offering their feedback, are vital components to the success of your VoC program.

How can your organization create a killer VoC program and maximize the end results?

While there is no single formula for creating an effective VoC program, there are several characteristics you should strive to instill into your VoC efforts, including:

- Strategic Focus
- Buy-in and Engagement
- Customer-Centric Program Design
- Commitment to Action
- Effective Partnerships
- Effective Analysis and Clear Reporting
Typically, VoC programs seek to understand what customers are experiencing day to day by setting up “listening posts” at various touchpoints, and thereby to get an overall picture of customer opinions and needs. The overarching goal is to monitor the “state of the customer.” But this will look different in each organization, so it’s important to work with internal stakeholders to pinpoint the priorities for your program. For example, which customer segments do you want to monitor? Which touchpoints are most important to start with? How much emphasis do you want to place on measurement – quantifying your customers’ experience – vs. a more qualitative approach focused on capturing themes? (Good programs do some of both.) Answering these questions will help you set a strategic focus.

**Data collection methods employed without a strategic starting point and specific feedback in mind may yield less than optimal results.**

It is essential that key stakeholders, from the CEO down, believe in the importance of listening to customers systematically and working toward improvements in their experience. Not only organization leaders, but director-level employees, middle management and on-the-ground staff in key departments need to understand the value of the program in general and be willing to engage in the process.

For organization leaders, buy-in involves a commitment to supporting the program and sustaining it until it is developed, recognizing that these programs build over time, and their ROI is best recognized once a strong foundation has been laid. Senior leaders must also recognize that they will most likely see recurring themes, which may make the program seem unnecessary but really just underscores the importance of understanding and tracking those key customer issues. Finally, buy-in involves a commitment to taking action as a result of key insights about customer experience.

For other employees, it’s important to explain the program and its intended benefits for customers (and ultimately, employees as well), and to gather employee feedback on the process. You will also want to go back to key employees in the analysis phase for rich interpretation of some of the customer comments you receive, so the cultivating of these relationships is of paramount importance.

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Customer-Centric Program Design

Another vital characteristic of a successful VoC program is its design. This will involve a “listening” strategy, made up of effective data collection methods. These methods may include surveys, certain types of data mining, accessing existing customer interactions, interviewing customer-facing staff, social media monitoring, and more.

To maximize the effectiveness of your data collection, it is important to:

**Know your audience:**
Before creating any data collection strategies, it is vital that you understand your audience. Take into account your customers’ preferred communication channels, and think about ways that you can access their feedback less intrusively than by asking them. Gain an understanding of the frequency with which they interact with the company through various channels.

**Measure key elements:**
VoC programs commonly include assessments of both customers’ overall experience (sometimes called the “relationship” aspect), and their experience with various interactions along their journey (the “transacational” aspect). Decide also if you want to use an external benchmark such as the Net Promoter System (NPS) or Forrester’s Customer Experience Index (CXi).

**Write effective questions:**
Work with professional researchers to craft a survey that will yield the information you need, avoid leading questions, and provide the best possible experience. Ask as few questions as possible, and for every question, ask yourself, “What will we do as a result of the answer to this question?” If you can’t identify an action, drop the question. Ask questions that give customers an honest opportunity to offer their thoughts and opinions.

**Design for the customer:**
Be sure to examine your data collection methods from the customer point of view. Pay attention to the time required to complete a survey, the difficulty doing so and the overall experience. Plan out communications and surveys so that no single customer will receive more than one survey each quarter. Go a step further by setting up “alerts” from surveys that allow you to respond quickly to customer needs. There’s nothing like an immediate response!

**Automate if it makes sense:**
When a customer service case is closed, your CRM can automatically launch a survey to the customer. If you have a high volume of text comments, a text analytics program may be helpful in identifying themes. On the other hand, be sure you plan for human intervention where it makes sense, for example in reading low volume, high-impact text comments. Avoid overengineering your program.

If you design your program carefully, your efforts are much more likely to be effective. In turn, your overall VoC initiative will hold much greater promise.
Effective Data Analysis and Clear Reporting

To maximize the effectiveness of your VoC program, and the impact it will have on your organization, plan for data analysis that goes beyond the traditional. Identifying trends and common responses and sharing those with your organization are important to do, but stopping there would be a great disservice to your organization.

A VoC program involves analysis that digs into the data, asking questions and involving key people throughout your organization to help answer them. There may be fairly straightforward metrics and themes on the surface, but a good “so what?” analysis involving the right people can reveal more important and decision-driving insights. Key to these insights are the open-ended survey comments that customers take the time to provide, especially lengthy ones and those that carry a lot of emotion.

Involving employees who are on the front lines with customers not only enables richer interpretation, but builds employee buy-in to the importance of listening to customers through your VoC program.

Even the most effective data gathering and analysis is a useless endeavor without the successful distribution of meaningful, actionable information across the enterprise. Reporting the results of a VoC program in a clear and context-appropriate manner that all stakeholders can access and process is vital to the organization, and to the ROI of the program in general.

To maximize the reporting of VoC program insights:

**Tell stories:**

People respond to stories about customers and their experiences, such as a customer nearly lost and won back, a frustrating experience with a website, or a customer service victory. Use stories with rich customer quotes to introduce an important insight, and then back it up with data.

**Make insights accessible:**

Put data and findings where they are most likely to be found by your audience, for example by attaching account-level findings to an account object in your CRM system, where sales reps can see it. Also, combining the data gathered in a VoC program with the information contained within your CRM system will make it possible to cross reference data and maximize change.

**Share insights cross-functionally:**

Limiting the reporting of VoC data to leadership only, or excluding some departments, can reduce engagement in the importance of the insights, limiting your organization’s ability to make wide-reaching changes. Be sure to share or make insights available across the enterprise to encourage more collaboration.
Commitment to Action

Too often, organizations go through the effort of conducting a VoC program, only to fail to take action to address customer concerns or implement available improvements. Without utilizing the information gained during the program, the investment into gathering customer opinion is nothing short of wasted. Not only will the lack of action impact the ROI of the program, failing to listen to customers may lead to increased frustrations and alienation, especially those customers who offered passionate insight.

To maximize the effectiveness of your VoC program:

Identify strengths: While it is easy to focus on negative feedback, it is just as important to pay attention to the positive comments customers offer. Identifying “bright spots” and making plans to increase their frequency and duplicate their success is critical to the buoyancy of the program and helpful to your organization.

Pinpoint weaknesses: Your VoC program is likely to shed light on a lot of weaknesses in your organization. Your employees are probably nearly as frustrated with these as customers are, so use this opportunity to build relationships and create plans for fixing the processes or policies that are less than effective.

Create a plan: Keeping a balance between emphasizing strengths and addressing weaknesses, be sure to create a plan of attack. Seek input from varying departments throughout the organization to ensure that all aspects of improvements are beneficial to the entire enterprise, and can lead to success.

A good goal for every VoC program is to identify 2-3 specific changes based on the results of each wave or measurement. This will allow for tracking and help to maximize the ROI of the program, without overwhelming the organization.

It is important to note, however, that it takes time for change to happen – the actions you take today will likely have an immediate impact, but the overall benefit to the organization may take time to register on survey scores and customer feedback. Stay the course, and your efforts will be rewarded.

Effective Partnerships

While it is certainly possible to conduct an effective VoC program internally, the guidance of an experienced partner may help to streamline the process and improve the final results of the program.

A partnership with VoC experts, such as Avtex, is beneficial for many reasons, including:

Added insight: Avtex offers insight that can be gained only through experience conducting and analyzing VoC programs. With a detailed knowledge of best practices, the Avtex team is able to provide the guidance you need to design, maintain and get the maximum impact from a VoC program.

External maintenance: In many cases, it is helpful to have a partner manage the ongoing maintenance of your VoC program. By partnering with Avtex, you are offered the peace of mind in knowing that your program will be run efficiently, and with minimal responsibilities placed on your organization.

Experienced analysis: Knowing how to gather customer feedback is just the first step in the process; effectively analyzing the data is equally as important. Avtex offers superior expertise in analysis and results communication to support your VoC program.

Summary and Suggestions

While no two VoC programs will ever be exactly the same, the most successful programs have many characteristics in common. Instilling these characteristics into your VoC program will improve your chances of creating, implementing and utilizing the program to its fullest.

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About Avtex

Avtex is a full-service Customer Experience (CX) consulting and solution provider focused on helping organizations create better experiences for their customers. With an unparalleled breadth of knowledge and experience, and partnerships with leading technology vendors like Microsoft and Genesys, we are uniquely suited to address any CX challenge.

Our portfolio of solutions and services supports our unique approach to Customer Experience, which includes two key phases, CX Transformation and CX Orchestration.

- Our **CX Transformation** solutions and services aid in the process of defining and improving CX. From Journey Mapping to CX Design Thinking, we provide the support you need to set the foundation for CX success.

- Our **CX Orchestration** solutions and services enable the realization of your CX strategy through people, processes and technology. From technology implementation to training, we ensure you have the capabilities to execute your CX strategy.