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# Surveys help not-for-profit groups

Organizations find the very act of doing a study can improve client relations

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Special to The Globe and Mail

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Not-for-profit organizations are making greater use of customer service surveys to help them reach their markets.

And many of them are finding that such surveys are the easiest way to launch total quality management initiatives. When done well, they can yield more than just statistics – they can create a co-operative link between the organization and its clients.

The very act of doing the survey can improve customer satisfaction.

To the Student Federation of the University of Ottawa (annual budget \$5.5-million), a survey delivered employee support and savings. The federation's survey of students regarding a campus retail outlet was "a real eye-opener," says Mike Aucoin, vice-president of finance. The student federation placed computers loaded with an on-screen questionnaire in high-traffic areas around campus. Students entered their answers directly into the data bank. Having customer satisfaction data and comments made it easier for Mr. Aucoin to gain support for needed changes.

The approach helped in other areas, too. "By getting our employees into it and focusing on what the students really wanted, we were able to halve the budget for our orientation week this year [saving \$130,000]," he said. "And student satisfaction more than doubled."

Canada's Export Development Corp., a Crown corporation with more than \$9.5-billion in annual business volume, tracks its success rate through a customer satisfaction index. The corporation's accountants like the CSI because it gives them a number to crunch at the end of the year.

"We only track things that we can do better – turnaround time, reliability, service, quality, etc." says Agatha Ronald, the project manager who designs and runs the system. "We want to help Canadian companies compete better in the global market," she says. EDC has found satisfaction measurements "very useful." Last year, business volume per employee at EDC increased 39 per cent to \$18.6-million.

Political parties and organizations such as the United Nations Association of Canada, Amnesty International and Friends of Canadian Broadcasting use mail surveys for gathering information and more. By asking their supporters for their views and showing them that their opinion is wanted, they are more likely to send a donation back

## QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS

Tips for doing a customer survey:

- Determine what the objectives of the survey are. What do you want to find out and who will you survey?
- Design the survey so that it is easy to fill out and won't take more than 10 minutes to complete.
- Start with simple questions to ease the respondent into the questionnaire.
- Where appropriate, stick to yes/no questions.
- Design your more important questions so that respondents can easily check off boxes using a five-point scale for rating: poor/satisfactory/good/very good/excellent.
- Break it down into no more than seven logical sections.
- Allow space for comments and prompt people to comment with a leading question.
- Remember to ask basic questions that determine who the respondent is and how often he or she purchases from your organization.
- Make it easy for people to return the questionnaire by including a self-addressed envelope or a fax number.
- Include a covering letter that explains the objective of the survey, ensures confidentiality (if appropriate) and encourages customers to respond. To increase the response rate, offer a prize, such as being entered into a draw for a free membership.
- Don't get caught up in the statistics; it's more important to know if it's 20 or 80 per cent who are satisfied than whether the survey is accurate to plus or minus 5 per cent.
- Pretest the questionnaire with a small group of representative respondents.

with the survey.

Surveys can also be a way of educating clients about what you can do for them. The Carleton County-Law Association is starting its total quality management initiative with a new survey that has been designed to educate Ottawa-area lawyers about CCLA services, and at the same time find out how lawyers feel about the association.

"We found you can do a lot with a 10-minute survey if you design it properly," says Karen MacLaurin, executive director of the CCLA.

The article EM9352 reprinted above is used in Figure 8.8d of the STAT 220 Course Materials, in Figure 11.16 of the STAT 221 Course Materials and in Figure 3.5d of the Course Materials for STAT 332 (1995 curriculum).