

GATHERING CUSTOMER INSIGHTS

11 Methods to Understand Your Customers
and Guide Your Decisions



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GATHERING CUSTOMER INSIGHTS

When some people think of gathering customer insights they think only about conducting surveys. We believe that approach is too narrow and puts too much burden on the customer.

We suggest going way beyond surveys.

New tools and emerging techniques provide more options for business leaders to capture the voice of the customer and improve customer experiences. We recommend a comprehensive approach using a wide variety of inputs. And naturally, we recommend the careful use surveys when they are the right method.

Ultimately, companies should strive to gather customer insights in a way that results in better insights, more action, and more impact.

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CUSTOMER INTERVIEWS

If “why” is what you’re looking for, customer interviews are the answer. Open-ended, qualitative and customizable, customer interviews can be conducted on the phone or in person; with one person or a small group. Capable of capturing essential detail, interviews allow for probing and follow up – both key to answering the “why” that’s often elusive in structured surveys. Because they’re more personal than quantitative solutions, they’re also ideal for getting strategic feedback from senior executives.

WHY IT ADDS VALUE:

- Answers the “why” that can be difficult to ascertain in surveys
- Offers opportunity to get in-depth feedback
- Provides a more personal alternative to traditional surveys; builds connections with key customers
- Yields an understanding of the role that emotion plays in customer experience

IT’S A GOOD SOLUTION TO:

- Guide the development and design of a customer listening program
- Gain insights to refresh a customer listening program, especially if survey feedback has become stagnant
- Gather feedback from executives
- “Deep dive” into trouble spots and specific touchpoints in the customer experience

IT WORKS WELL WITH:

- Journey Mapping
- Customer Events

CONSIDER THIS:

In addition to providing valuable details, customer interviews are great relationship-building tools. Customers generally enjoy being engaged and appreciate having an opportunity to share their opinions and offer feedback on issues surrounding how they do business with you.

Walker’s team of experts has decades of experience designing, recruiting and conducting interviews with customers at all levels in organizations. Let us help you garner the richest insights your customers have to offer.

CUSTOMER ADVISORY BOARDS

When it comes to gathering valuable, strategic information from top-tier customers there are few methods more effective than the customer advisory board. Generally reserved for your principal accounts, customer advisory boards are made up of C-suite executives representing up to 25 companies who have at least one thing in common – they do business, and likely a lot of it, with you. Customer advisory boards generally meet annually in a half- or full-day meeting moderated by a third-party. As the host company, your C-suite executives attend in an observation role. The meeting, planned well in advance, has specific objectives and discussion topics.

WHY IT ADDS VALUE:

- Provides a synergistic forum that encourages robust discussion, engagement and information sharing among like-minded senior executives
- Strengthens relationships with a select group of prominent customers in a high-touch environment
- Creates a level of transparency between C-suite executives that fosters greater understanding of both sides

IT'S A GOOD SOLUTION TO:

- Gain knowledge or a better understanding of how your product offerings drive growth and create value for key customers
- Learn what's top of mind with C-suite decision makers to help inform your strategy
- Capture new or different intelligence about competitors
- Acquire valuable insight and perspectives from a highly influential audience

IT WORKS WELL WITH:

- Customer Interviews
- Customer panels – for product specific insights

CONSIDER THIS:

Customer advisory boards are a win-win. In high-touch fashion, you're able to strengthen relationships with key customers, while guiding discussion about topics that matter to your growth and bottom line. Customer advisory board members, in turn, appreciate the opportunity to share their opinions of the business relationship with your C-suite executives for both firms' mutual benefit.

As an objective third-party and trusted advisor Walker will collaborate with you to gain wisdom from your most insightful customers and turn that wisdom into results for your company.

CUSTOMER EVENT FEEDBACK

There's value in learning what your customers think and feel while they are focused on what you do and the value you provide. That's the idea behind collecting customer insights at trade shows, user group meetings, sales meetings, and other customer events that your company may sponsor. Such events are opportunities where customers are engaged and willing to share their thoughts. And, because they are often your most interested stakeholders, their input is especially valuable. Interviews conducted in a "listening lounge," short surveys with results displayed in a show booth, interactive display boards, and feedback collected via a conference app are all examples of creative and engaging ways to gather rich insights at customer events.

WHY IT ADDS VALUE:

- Provides an opportunity to acquire feedback from customers who are invested in your company
- Encourages input when customers are open and willing to share
- Shows customers that you care – promotes your CX initiatives

IT'S A GOOD SOLUTION TO:

- Gather insights while customers are thinking about your company
- Collect input in a way that reinforces your company brand
- Provide creative ways for customers to share their thoughts
- Learn more about customer wants and needs

IT WORKS WELL WITH:

- Customer interviews
- Voice of the customer through the employee (VOCE)

CONSIDER THIS:

Customer events are ideal venues for in-the-moment feedback. Attendees are naturally drawn to interactive experiences at conferences and events, so look for creative, outside-the-box ways to gather real-time customer feedback that will not only engage your audience, but provide useful information for CX efforts.

Walker has participated in countless customer events to help promote CX initiatives, educate customer audiences, and collect customer insights. Our team is ready to design the right solution for you to learn more from your top customers while increasing visibility for your customer experience initiatives.

SOCIAL MEDIA

When people hear “social media,” they tend to think of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. But in the world of B-to-B customer intelligence, “social” is generally broader, encompassing online communities, support communities, blogs – anywhere and everywhere online chatter exists about companies. Synthesizing comments from social media, especially when driven by a business objective to narrow the focus, offers a helpful customer listening tool to heighten understanding of your customers and their experiences. While more fluid and challenging to manage than quantitative data, social media is a ready and available resource for promoting customer intelligence.

WHY IT ADDS VALUE:

- Provides a broad range of unsolicited feedback ideal for gathering insight
- Offers high-level interpretation of customer thoughts and feelings outside the confines of a formal survey
- Helps prioritize actions to improve the experiences you deliver

IT'S A GOOD SOLUTION TO:

- Monitor certain topics or themes revealed in customer feedback
- Gauge sentiment – How are customers talking about you?
 - Are there impressions positive or negative?
 - How do they feel?
- Track whether new initiatives or improvements are effective
- Gain “in the moment” feedback
- Combat declining survey responses without hassling customers
- Quantify large volumes of unstructured data

IT WORKS WELL WITH:

- In the moment feedback
- Customer surveys

CONSIDER THIS:

As a platform for customer feedback, social media is most valuable when combined with other intelligence resources – customer survey data, customer demographics, financial data and company metrics. Synthesizing social media commentary with these filters increases its relevance and capabilities to meaningfully impact decision-making.

Walker can help make the most of your social media conversations. We'll gather the right information, compare and contrast it with other sources customer intelligence, and conduct advanced analysis to determine the right course of action.

JOURNEY MAPPING

Most companies have at least a general idea of their customer's journey. Where many fall short, however, is in identifying real moments of truth – those touchpoints most critical to the customer. Journey mapping can help. Highly interactive and collaborative, journey mapping is a multi-faceted exercise that documents various touchpoints, strengths and weaknesses to arrive at those key, singular moments that can make or break the customer relationship.

Journey mapping is typically conducted by gathering together a cross-functional group from within your company to systematically walk through the journey customers follow to interact with you. Understanding the path your customers take uncovers key customer experiences to leverage and areas to improve. Customer interviews or mapping sessions are conducted to determine perceptual alignment – whether your company's perception is, in fact, your customer's reality. Specific to the B-to-B industry, qualitative feedback is also obtained from third party channel partners, distributors and resellers.

WHY IT ADDS VALUE:

- Defines the customer's point of view, methodically honing in on what really matters
- Determines alignment between internal and external perceptions
- Promotes common understanding so internal teams work together more effectively
- Provides specific, qualified customer intelligence to guide future action

IT'S A GOOD SOLUTION TO:

- Set the foundation for a customer listening strategy or customer experience program
- Identify consequential gaps in the customer experience
- Evaluate and fine tune new processes or recent initiatives
- Assess market differentiation and brand strength
- Support training and development

IT WORKS WELL WITH:

- Customer interviews
- Customer events

SOMETHING ELSE TO THINK ABOUT:

While journey mapping is a detailed, exploratory exercise, it's also versatile and customizable. It can examine the entire customer journey or target just one or two interactions, such as order and delivery. It's also used effectively to facilitate forward, "blue sky" thinking in support of R&D or innovation to heighten understanding of what customers may expect in the future.

Walker's journey mapping approach can help you create the right listening program, affirm action plans, reveal obstacles, and get the right people engaged to help you make customer experience your biggest competitive advantage.

ONLINE CUSTOMER PANELS

There can be real value in having a group of customers ready and willing to provide quick feedback on timely issues. That's the idea behind a customer panel – select customers you recruit to respond to surveys on an established frequency. With demographic and user information on your panel of customers, you can customize surveys, honing in on particular audiences to ask specific, targeted questions to help guide your strategies or roadmaps.

WHY IT ADDS VALUE:

- Produces a high response rate because customers opt in
- Gathers feedback quickly and with minimal effort compared to more complex surveys
- Provides reliable, targeted customer information on specific issues
- Offers an ongoing, vetted source of customer feedback

IT'S A GOOD SOLUTION TO:

- Get feedback on products and services, including ease of use
- Receive targeted input from product users
- Gain insight on new product launches or future development plans
- Gauge effectiveness of long-term plans and strategies

IT WORKS WELL WITH:

- Online Communities
- Customer Advisory Boards

CONSIDER THIS:

Once the panel is assembled, establish objectives and set parameters in a charter and develop at least a one-year plan to promote continual engagement. Recognize panel members at customer events with special badges or gifts.

Walker experts are skilled at designing just the right approach to get the most out of an online customer panel. We'll collaborate with you to build a valuable source of intelligence and we'll design the best approach to tap into it for relevant input on a vast array of topics.

IN THE MOMENT FEEDBACK

There's value in learning what your customers think and feel at a particular moment in time. In the moment feedback offers insight while something is happening, and there are a variety of ways to gather this real-time intelligence. Feedback tools can be embedded in websites or in products themselves. On websites, these can be "pop-up" windows requesting feedback on a specific real-time experience, such as when a customer reviews product specifications or places an order. Transactional surveys are another example of in the moment feedback. It's possible to provide mechanisms for gathering in the moment feedback without being intrusive. Consider ways customers can opt in, including leaving feedback via QR codes on orders/invoicing documents, product shipments and "leave feedback?" options on websites.

WHY IT ADDS VALUE:

- Offers real-time customer intelligence when experience is top of mind; not dependent on customers' longer-term recall
- Provides an alternative to surveys to provide more meaningful intelligence

IT'S A GOOD SOLUTION TO:

- Extract valuable customer intelligence from experiences that are already happening
- Troubleshoot a specific process or part of the customer experience
- Learn more about customer expectations • Monitor progress on specific improvement initiatives

IT WORKS WELL WITH:

- VOCE (Voice of Customer through Employees)
- Company Metrics

CONSIDER THIS:

Customer events are ideal venues for in the moment feedback. Attendees are naturally drawn to interactive experiences at conferences and events, so look for creative, outside-the-box ways to gather real-time customer feedback that will not only engage your audience, but provide useful information for CX efforts.

Walker can collaborate with you to review customer touchpoints and evaluate the best ways to gather insights throughout a customer's journey. We'll help you evaluate the right resources to apply to gain timely customer intelligence leading to quicker intervention on problems and better anticipation of customer needs.

SURVEYS

Customers have grown increasingly tired of the onslaught of companies asking their opinion. So are surveys dead? Not necessarily. When used in the right way and with the right objective, surveys can be a reliable and worthwhile method of gathering customer intelligence. It is critical, however, that we as customer experience professionals understand the right time and place for using surveys to gather customer intelligence for our organizations.

WHY IT ADDS VALUE:

- Surveys allow for a large population of the customer voice to be represented
- Surveys can gather customer insights relatively quickly
- Surveys have historically served as a catalyst for getting attention on customer experience within organizations
- Surveys allow for flexibility and scalability – can be narrowly focused “pulse” survey to check progress, an account-level survey to facilitate customer communication and plan strategy, or a survey sent to an entire group of customers to gather feedback

IT'S A GOOD SOLUTION TO:

- To gain broad customer perceptions, either on a high-level or for specific events
- To gauge progress on improvements or initiatives
- To validate or disprove hypotheses

WHEN NOT TO USE SURVEYS:

- When feedback is needed from only a small population of customers
- When you don't have a specific hypothesis or question you are trying to answer
- If you can gain the same insight by utilizing existing metrics or information
- If there is no plan to act on the information

CONSIDER THIS:

While it's easy to subscribe to a “survey first mentality,” preliminary customer intelligence may already exist through other channels inside your company. Once you have a better idea of the information you need, a survey can be designed to hone in on specific questions or issues. Before launching a survey, consider the items above to make sure it is a good use of the customer's time.

Walker provides a wide range of services related to surveys beginning with expert advice on the best overall approach. We'll also apply decades of experience to design the right questions, sequence, and length to maximize responses. Finally we provide all the technology to gather survey feedback, conduct advanced analysis, and deliver clear reports in a wide variety of formats.

VOCE VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER THROUGH THE EMPLOYEE

While it's natural to look ahead to the next survey, in reality you hear from your customers every day. In fact, for account teams and associates in support and service, listening to what customers think, hearing how they feel, and learning what they expect are part of the job. Yet, many B-to-B companies overlook the potential in harnessing valuable VOCE – Voice of the Customer Through the Employee, making it an underutilized resource for capturing feedback. Customer-facing employees can provide a wealth of customer intelligence. They have firsthand knowledge, and they're easily accessible (think simple web surveys). They're also willing participants with a vested interest in your company's success.

WHY IT ADDS VALUE:

- Offers a reliable, rich source of customer intelligence that's easily accessible
- Gathers valuable feedback without contributing to customer “survey fatigue”
- Presents opportunities to gain customer intelligence or innovation ideas
- Helps establish buy-in from associates across the organization

IT'S A GOOD SOLUTION TO:

- Identify gaps in perception between employees and customers
- Evaluate individual customer relationships mid-contract or during quarterly business reviews
- Identify common themes to explore more closely
- Supplement other data sources for validation purposes
- Identify new product lines or target markets
- Identify internal barriers to meeting customer needs

IT WORKS WELL WITH:

- Journey Mapping
- In the Moment

CONSIDER THIS:

It's possible that your company is already collecting VOCE informally through customer relationship management tools and other internal resources. Take a look at ways you may be able to leverage VOCE sources that already exist.

Walker can develop an effective approach to garner information from your customer-facing employees. What's more, we'll combine it with other forms of customer intelligence to draw conclusions and develop the right action plans for your CX team.

TEXT ANALYTICS

While managing large volumes of text sources can be challenging, text analytics is an increasingly reliable resource for making sense of this insight-rich data. In essence, text analytics is a mostly automated, software-driven approach that helps to transform unstructured data – survey comments, blogs, and social media posts, for example – into structured data; this more manageable structured data can then be used to supplement other sources of intelligence, ultimately improving the customer experience. When effectively designed and facilitated, text analytics is a way to gain understanding and value from disorderly text sources.

WHY IT ADDS VALUE:

- Offers a high-level view of customer feedback
- Cultivates meaning and understanding from text sources
- Maximizes efficiency through the use of software to arrive at conclusions faster
- Reduces the amount of manual coding or review needed to understand large qualitative data sources
- Integrates nicely with other quantitative information and data sources, such as customer demographics, to provide more meaningful intelligence

IT'S A GOOD SOLUTION TO:

- Help validate a hypothesis by harnessing and digesting direct feedback from customers
- More clearly define the “big picture” by serving as a solid supplement to other data sources and customer insight
- Explore issues of concern to establish a viable starting point for CX action planning

IT WORKS WELL WITH:

- Social media
- Large volumes of customer comments/conversations

CONSIDER THIS:

You can do almost anything with text analytics, which can be a blessing and a curse. To avoid generating information that provides no real value, enlist the support of an expert in text analytics who understands the tool's strengths and weaknesses and knows your fundamental business objectives.

Walker's experts take the time to understand your business objectives and meticulously build the right library of terms that represent your customers. Then, we regularly review customer data, organize insights, provide expert analysis, and fine-tune the system to ensure the most relevant information is put to use.

COMPANY METRICS

Company metrics are the truth-telling serum of customer intelligence. They consistently tell it like it is. Metrics to consider when optimizing CX are those that impact the customer or relate to customer experiences. Delivery and inventory availability are common examples. These types of metrics supplement and enhance the value of customer survey data. In fact, when aligned with customer perspectives, you will determine which touchpoints need to be prioritized and monitored over time. Metrics are also useful for pinpointing specific areas in which change or improvement are likely to have greatest impact.

WHY IT ADDS VALUE:

- Offers objective, continuously collected information that can be used to actively measure customer experience interactions
- Can be used as a predictive tool when aligned with customer sentiment
- Allows for more specificity and focus in determining targets for improvement
- Extrapolates results to locate at-risk customers who don't respond to surveys

IT'S A GOOD SOLUTION TO:

- Prioritize customer pain points and areas of focus to direct action planning
- Facilitate predictive/proactive modeling to assess future behavior
- Leverage findings to touch customers similarly affected by an issue or concern
- Quantify the impact of recent changes to justify investments in action plans

CONSIDER THIS:

Company metrics are behavioral metrics – they track what actually happened. Unlike customer satisfaction and loyalty metrics that can be subjectively appraised and disputed, there's no denying the truth of company metrics. The combination of company and survey metrics helps to prioritize the vast amount of data now collected about your customer interactions. That's why they'll usually stand up in the board room and can serve as a rallying cry for teams across the organization.

Walker's team of analysts will work with you to identify, access, analyze, and leverage all the right sources to make the most of your customer metrics.

ABOUT WALKER

Walker is a customer experience consulting firm. We specialize in helping today's business-to-business companies build and maintain a competitive advantage by delivering an exceptional customer experience. Our team of senior consultants averages more than 20 years of experience and they deliver a wide range of services to meet and exceed our clients' objectives.

And it works – Walker clients outperform the market by more than six to one!

WALKER'S SOLUTIONS AND SERVICES

No two companies are alike, so we collaborate with each client to understand their business, focus on their objectives and deliver the right combination of services to accelerate their success. No consulting firm can match Walker's focus on customer experience and the broad range of solutions and services we deliver, which includes:

- Customer experience assessment programs, which result in execution-ready strategic roadmaps.
- Journey mapping services to document the customer touchpoints and focus on "moments of truth."
- Design of customer "ideal experiences," targeting problem areas and identifying opportunities for breakthroughs.
- Collection of customer insights, leveraging a wide range of methods to understand the perspective of the customer.
- Advanced analytics services to interpret customer intelligence and improve decision-making.
- A full range of technology services to manage customer data and integrate with clients' existing systems.
- Action planning and change management services to prompt transformation across the organization.
- Education and training services to engage employees and foster a customer-focused culture.

Learn more about Walker at www.walkerinfo.com.

WALKER RESOURCES

WALKER B-TO-B CX SUMMIT

The industry's only conference focused on the latest and best customer experience strategies for B-to-B companies. We feature powerful keynote presentations, engaging workshops, and valuable networking all aimed at sharing best practices to improve the way companies drive business success. Learn more at www.walkercxsummit.com.

WALKER WEBCASTS

We produce a popular series of monthly 30-minute webcasts on a variety of customer experience topics. Each webcast is hosted by Walker's thought leaders. Learn more at www.walkerinfo.com/knowledge-center/webcasts.asp.

KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS

Walker's thought leaders deliver excellent keynote presentations on a wide range of customer experience topics. Consider bringing a Walker executive to your next big event.

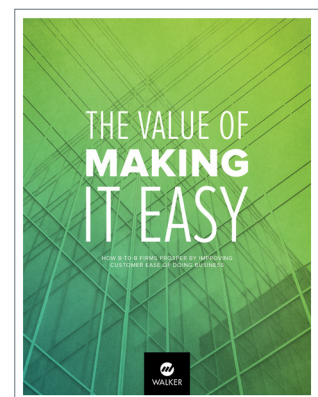
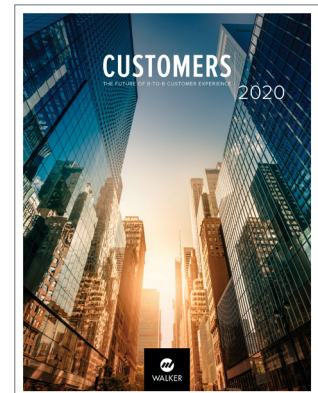
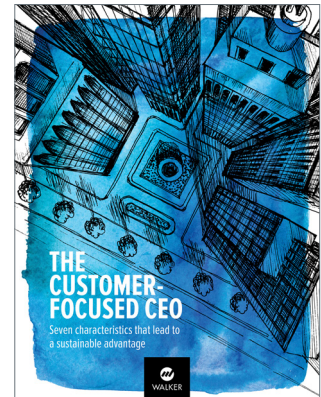
CUSTOM WORKSHOPS

Walker conducts dozens of workshops for leading companies. Whether you're considering a session of two hours or two days, consider hiring the experts at Walker to help plan and execute your next customer experience workshop.

WALKER KNOWLEDGE CENTER

Walker's Knowledge Center is an outstanding resource for customer experience leaders. You have access to informative webcasts, thought-provoking white papers, powerful case studies, eBooks, and more. Learn more at www.walkerinfo.com/knowledge-center.

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