

Reversing a Negative NPS Trend

I was concerned about our gradually declining Net Promoter Score, or NPS. I was leading a team coordinating a massive equipment migration for a large broadband provider and we were only a few months into the program. A speaker at a Field Service conference I was attending boasted of an NPS score of 85%. My client was flabbergasted, "We are not even in the same league with them".

The Net Promoter score or NPS has become the standard metric to quantify customer loyalty. It is a simple analysis of one question posed: *On a zero-to-ten scale, how likely is it that you would recommend us to a friend or colleague?*

Customers replying with a 6 or less are considered detractors, dissatisfied with a service. Customers providing a response of 7 or 8 are considered passives, satisfied with a service but not enthusiastic. Customers responding with a 9 or 10 see value in a service, are considered loyal to the brand and will continue to do business with the organization. The NPS is the ratio of promoters less the ratio of detractors.

Improving the NPS begins with the senior leadership strategically aligning the organization to advance it. Improvement efforts require an investment of the organizational talent at all levels. The NPS must be integrated into the values and culture of the organization, touching every department to achieve long-term profitability and sustainable growth by listening, engaging and acting upon what your customers are telling you.

Measurement

Process improvement begins with having a profound understanding of the measurement system. Before jumping into analyzing data and improving the outcome, a thorough understanding of the system should be attained.

Focused and event-driven surveys provide better feedback because they are linked directly to recent customer appointments. We emphasized that surveys should be event-driven, a best practice for providing timely feedback. All customer contact: trouble calls, installations, upgrades or downgrades were eligible for a survey. Customers received an email immediately following the service visit.

In his book Customer Surveying, Customer Service Press, ©2002, Dr. Frederick Van Bennekom cautioned surveyors of administrative process bias induced by telephone surveys. He discovered some respondents may not provide honest answers due to a lack of anonymity.

Measure

- Event-driven surveys provide the most beneficial feedback because they are directly linked to recent customer engagements.
- Select a measurement plan and stick to it; measurement techniques may bias results.
- Limit the surveys a customer may receive within a period.
- To boost the response rate, keep your questions limited.
- Follow up on low scoring responses with punctual telephone calls and open ended questions.
- NPS is not a competition between organizations, it is quantitative measurement of your customer's perception of your brand.

I reminded our client that NPS isn't a competition, it's a quantitative representation of the customer perception of the brand, a way to understand how you're performing through the lens of your customers. Although we could rationalize the gap between our score and that of the conference speaker, we still had to reverse the trend. Our customers were growing dissatisfied with us.

Analysis

We received hundreds of responses from customers coming into contact with a field service technician performing the equipment migration during the past month. We wanted to summarize the customer feedback, identify the vital key drivers and discover the contrast between the promoters and the detractors.

We utilized word cloud visualization to gain a quick insight into the feedback. Word cloud visualization assigns greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the source. We tweaked the software to paint the words most often used by detractors *red*, passives *gray* and the promoters *green*. The font size of each word was proportional to the frequency of the word's occurrences. The algorithm enabled us to form several theories as to what is most important to our customers.

Next we interviewed the supervisors from each site that were responsible for speaking with detractors to learn of their conversations and to collaboratively refine our initial assumptions. We reviewed examples of surveys during the meetings to gain their precise insight and tweak the theories.

Following the interviews, we read many of the comments provided by the detractors and passives. To prioritize our actions, we recorded the customer's dissatisfaction topic with hash marks on a check sheet listing each hypothesis.

We stratified the data into sets to test the hypotheses, segmenting customers into follow-up strategy buckets based on the feedback to focus our efforts where it was needed most. The data sets were arranged by service provided, account complexity, customer profile, customer location, technician skill set, internal resources vs. outsourced contractor, and other likely key variables. Statistical hypothesis testing was conducted contrasting the groups to determine if there was a relationship between the variables and the detractors.

Analyze

- Interview customer facing technicians.
- Peruse the data to form hypotheses collaboratively.
- Stratify data by customer type, services provided, resources dispatched, and other relevant buckets to refine your hypotheses.
- Statistically test the hypotheses; pursue the most likely theories and reject the others.

Improve

- Focus your efforts where the data indicates it is needed.
- Document and maintain action plans.
- Develop metrics and set realistic goals.
- Recognize top performers.
- Coach technicians; improve their soft skills.
- Adapt to a supportive leadership style.
- Close the feedback loop by having supervisors share customer pain points.
- Empower supervisors to make it right with the customer.

Improvement

Hypotheses which demonstrated a high probability of correct assumptions were addressed with a team of subject matter experts. Corrective and preventive action plans were tested and implemented throughout the organization.

Scores and goals of technicians, supervisor teams, managers and vendors supporting our equipment migration were developed. Weekly team discussions were conducted reviewing individual metrics. We recognized the top performers and engaged the others by speaking about their encounters with dissatisfied customers. We pulled low scoring surveys up on the monitor during team meetings and asked each affected technician to explain the specific circumstances. The team was then split up into groups of two or three to discuss what could have been done differently to improve customer satisfaction. As the tactics were discussed among the group, team members gained soft skills and confidence. As the meetings progressed, supportive leadership styles from the supervisors and managers emerged. The emotional ties made it easier to gain cooperation and support for the technicians with their leader's support.

Maintain

- Understand that NPS must touch every part of your organization to produce sustainable growth.
- Invest the time to have NPS discussions reviewing the metrics with your team.
- Build customer listening into your business strategy.
- Build customer feedback into the decision making processes.
- Ask your employees what they need to deliver exceptional customer care.
- Net Promoter is a journey not a short term initiative.

We closed the feedback loop by having the supervisor share the highlights of each customer call with the technician. Detractors were called within 24 hours by the supervisors to understand and correct the problem.

Conclusion

In three months the negative trend was reversed; in six months it doubled!

We showed that NPS is not a competition between organizations, it's a reflection of the actual customer sentiment towards the brand. We were transparent reviewing it and collaborative solving it. Being empowered by a senior leadership team that embraced the Net Promoter System as a strategic priority gave the team a tremendous boost.

Following up with customers immediately after the survey demonstrated empathy and a commitment to getting it right. The leadership took criticism to heart and worked relentlessly to make it right with the customers.

Improving your Net Promoter Score is thinking about the factors that impact your customer's perception and making informed decisions. It keeps you focused on prioritizing the customer-facing issues.

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