

OPINION

► EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK

Feedback from the front lines

Angela Sinickas, ABC,
President,
Sinickas Communications, Inc.



Everyone has experienced some type of frustration in dealing with companies, organizations and government agencies. What do we do in response? We tell the front-line service employees - from call center representatives, to flight attendants, to check-out cashiers. If they've been well trained in dealing with frustrated customers, they at least know how to calm us down.

Unfortunately, few companies have created systems for raw customer feedback to make its way up the chain of command to someone who can actually change the way things operate and improve the bottom line.

As an example, I used to choose between two local grocery stores depending on which products I needed that day that were available at either one store or the other, but not both.

At Albertson's, the cashiers often ask if I found everything I was looking for. If I say they don't carry the brand I want, or that they just aren't keeping a product stocked quickly enough to keep up with demand, they ask me to take a moment to fill out a customer request card.

I know those cards make their way to the store manager because I find my desired products on the shelves a few weeks later, every time. Now that all my preferred products are available at Albertson's, the only time I shop at the other store is if I need groceries at the same time I'm picking up my dry cleaning in the shop next door to it.

So here's a message to all those companies that spend millions of dollars in customer surveys and focus groups: carve out a portion of that budget to enable your employees to let you know on a continuous basis what customers are saying to them - through hotlines, e-mails or paper cards. You'll find out what your competitors are doing. You'll hear about the bugs in your web-based buying software that force customers to call a live agent instead of completing their transactions less expensively online. You'll learn dozens of simple, practical ideas that will bind your customers to your company and keep them away from your competition.

► www.sinicom.com

NEWSINBRIEF

BOSSSES BLAME INEFFICIENCY ON COMMS

Senior industry executives cited internal communication problems as the primary cause of inefficiency in a recent survey. The 2006 *Proudfoot Productivity Report* is based on interviews with 800 company bosses across 19 countries. When asked to rank ten reasons why companies performed poorly, just under 50 percent of survey respondents put the blame on internal communication problems between departments, while 44 percent cited poor management and a further 33 percent said it was down to poor employee motivation or morale. But data taken from 1,900 business reviews conducted by the consultancy in 30 countries between 2002 and 2005 doesn't always bear out the views of the survey respondents. The most notable variant is the problem of poor communication, which the data shows is less of a commonplace cause of wasted working time at just six percent in 2005. Inadequate supervision of work was seen to have a far higher impact on time wasted scoring 38 percent, although the report stated "it should be acknowledged that there is a correlation between this and poor communication."

► www.proudfootconsulting.com

NETWORKED GENERATION SET TO DOMINATE

Online channels and interactive media are likely to dominate internal communication in the future, as today's 16- to 24-year olds prefer them to traditional mass media channels such as newspapers and broadcast terrestrial television. A recent study from the UK telecoms regulator, Ofcom, shows the "networked generation" are the greatest users of interactive media and are not content to be passive audiences as older generations have been. They spend more time on the internet - on average nearly three hours per week - and embrace new technologies much more quickly; half of the group owns a games console and/or an mp3 player. Seventy percent (compared to 41 percent of the general population) have used some kind of social networking site, such as MySpace, and one in five have their own website or blog. A reduced consumption of other media, such as newspapers, magazines and radio among young adults is also thought to be due to the internet.

► www.ofcom.org.uk/research

BOSSSES AND STAFF LACK COMMS SKILLS

One in three UK employees would change their boss if they could, according to a survey by UK standards company Investors in People. The survey of 1,700 adults found that poor communication skills and stealing credit for work were the main grievances employees have against their managers. But in another survey of 1,400 UK employers by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and accountants KPMG, employers rated comms skills as the most desirable qualities among school leavers, but said few had them. And according to another research report by the UK employers' organization, the Confederation of British Industry, one in three businesses are trying to rectify this by sending staff for refresher lessons in basic literacy and numeracy skills.

► www.iipuk.co.uk

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