

**QUOTE:** THE COMMUNITY CONCEPT SHOULD BE EXTENDED FAR BEYOND THE HOLIDAY ITSELF, INTO FORUMS ON YOUR WEBSITE. **SALLIE BURNETT**

Your happy owner members are worth their weight in gold. As the costs for marketing to each new client continue to rise, it pays to keep your customers smiling. **DAVE THACKERAY** talks to the experts about ways to monitor customer satisfaction levels – and the rewards it can bring.

IN PURSUIT OF  
**HAPPINESS**



**FORGET** fancy direct mail packs, expensive inspection visits and prize draws. The most successful catalyst for sales efficiency in the holiday ownership industry is customer satisfaction.

Customer delight is the number one driver of loyalty, referrals and recommendations – and it should be the beating heart of your business.

But are you doing enough to harness the potency of your product to inspire existing members to upgrade and evangelise about it?

To surpass your owners' needs and expectations you need to know what they want. You should know how they feel, and what their hobbies, passions and influences are. Such intelligence, combined with the hard facts and transactional data you possess, is a priceless asset to your sales and marketing strategy.

**PLAN** To gather lifestyle information you need a solid structure in place to evaluate and collect owner feedback at every opportunity. And you need the versatility, employee empathy and soft systems in place to not only listen, but actively respond and address customer concerns.

Juliet Mumford, director of market research company Intelligent Insight, specialists in customer satisfaction analysis, outlined the process she follows to identify the business need and then create an outcome to drive business success and customer delight.

• **Why are you doing this?** Figure out what it is you want to know. Make a list of key objectives and when you know what results you're looking for, you may discover the methodology needs reconsidering. A questionnaire might help you measure the benefit of developing new facilities at a resort, but is of little use if you want to establish a set of personas upon which you can base a segmented marketing strategy.

• **Set up focus groups.** These should address the requirements and concerns of the different customers at your resort. Couples think differently to family units in the way they holiday.

Pictured from top: Julie Mumford, Jeffrey Henning, Sallie Burnett and Diane Clarkson.

• **Build the questionnaire.** We're not necessarily looking for a wide range of questions – we need to work selectively to gather the exact information the business requires.

• **Gather data – and analyse.** With experience and an understanding of the marketplace you can really drill down into questionnaire responses to discover trends and traits that you may have been unaware of.

• **Present the information.** And do so in a meaningful, simple and, most importantly, actionable way. Everyone across the business should be able to gain a real insight into the mind of the consumer.

**DO** Consistency is crucial if you are to get to the heart of customer satisfaction. Consistency in the way you reach out for information, and in how you share out the results and action plans.

Jeffrey Henning is chief strategy officer and co-founder of Vovici, a leading enterprise feedback management company. He said: “We see a great deal of inconsistency in the way companies often carry out different types of surveys from which the data simply cannot be correlated effectively.

“With the technology available today, the results from every customer contact should be fed into a system able to share this data in ways that can benefit all your staff, whatever their role and department.”

Henning recommends a seven-step action plan to get on top of your customer satisfaction strategy:

• **Implement a customer experience management programme.** This is simply an understanding of the emotional engagement at each stage of the owner experience lifecycle.

• **Use a common platform to obtain ‘voice of the customer’ data.** Stop using incompatible feedback-generating methods and start unifying efforts so every piece of information received can be used to build a complete picture of the customer and benefit all staff.

• **Integrate customer relationship management (CRM)** into every part of your business so you can interact with customers in a smart, personal and efficient fashion.

• **Share feedback internally.** Too often feedback simply ends up on the shelf, but its value should never be underestimated.

• **Show your employees how their actions are being perceived** and their subsequent impact on customer loyalty.

• **Create a customer community** or an open forum for customers to talk about the organisation. Spearhead this and you can directly respond to concerns and build positive PR.

• **Share feedback with customers** as they want to know what you're going to do with it – and the timeframes involved in execution.

Like Henning, Sallie Burnett, president of Customer Insight Group, a Colorado-based strategic marketing company, is a fervent supporter of focusing on owner communities – a perfect fit for the timeshare model – to develop customer happiness and brand advocacy.

Burnett explained: “You should be doing all you can to foster this kind of community feel, both on and off resort. The community concept should be extended far beyond the holiday itself, into forums on your website.”

By developing an online community you foster a sense of belonging long after bags have been unpacked, added Burnett. The ancillary benefit is that owners will share a formidable array of local information and insights into your resort that may have slipped your attention, or would give you inspiration for the future.

Naturally, not everything posted online will be complimentary.

“Some people may use the forums as a place to moan about their experiences,” said Burnett. “Turn it into a positive – many companies will capitalise on this insight to make improvements or respond in a way that demonstrates exemplary customer service.”

Opportunities for gathering customer satisfaction data are more widespread and cost-effective online. With the prohibitive cost of postal surveys and restrictions surrounding cold calling, the natural successor which is gaining improved response rates is the internet.

Diane Clarkson, analyst at independent international research company Forrester Consulting, said: “Effective methods of gathering intelligence on customer satisfaction include surveying customers directly and reviewing information that travellers are telling each other on websites such as TripAdvisor. Twitter is also a growing source of market intelligence.

“Customer intelligence is only useful if it is acted upon – one of the most important parts of monitoring is to ensure that processes are in place to inform appropriate internal departments and circle back to ensure useful insight was enacted upon.”

**REVIEW** Henning said: “Customers no longer accept you want to communicate with them on a one-way basis – they need to know how you're implementing their input. And it's good news – this is a very powerful way of building customer loyalty.”

Having a new layer of customer information means you can integrate what you already know with what you want to know. Owner contact is enhanced with a contextual experience based on your understanding of their needs and history, and more personalised interaction.

The subsequent amassing of information can generate a formidable resource for your sales team as they embark on a discovery with their latest prospect.

“Feedback will identify the gaps between customer expectation and the customer experience,” explained Henning.

And once customer expectation has been exceeded, you're on the road to customer delight: the holy grail of any business. (V)