

## AdvanceMe's Tip of the Week: March 5, 2008

### Survey Says: Using Polls to See Where You Stand

A small business owner has many opportunities to learn how their customers feel about their business. Using some very simple strategies, a small business owner like you can get a better feel for what your customers like or dislike about what is happening every day in your place of business.

- **Comment Cards.** Comment cards are a simple strategy to get some first-hand feedback on how to improve each customer experience. Get them professionally printed if you can, and consider making them into a postcard format for added convenience. If cost is an issue, you can implement many self-designed solutions to get the ball rolling. Keep a stack of cards next to the cash registers or in other high-traffic places in your business. Have pens and collection receptacles handy. Keep the questions simple, direct, and clear. Multiple choice questions are good, as is asking them to rate you on a scale of 1-10, but ask some open-ended questions and provide blank space to encourage more free-ranging responses. You could add an incentive by having a weekly drawing of the completed comment cards, offering the winner a store credit or other perk. If possible, point out that the intent is to improve customer experience or service...your customers will undoubtedly appreciate the extra attention.
- **Online Surveys.** If you have a website or even just collect email addresses of important customers, an online survey is a good way to get some insight into how your customers think. There are many reliable third-party vendors that offer affordable surveys and track the data and details, exporting reports on demand. There are typically templates to use on these sites as well as sample questions, so you don't have to know a lot about the Internet to make this solution work for you. If you are trying to grow your customer database, it might make sense to look into a longer contract, but many vendors will accommodate a one-time project as well. Bringing the survey online usually makes it easier on both the customer and you, as the reviewer. Again, offering a small gift (like a store credit, an MP3 player, or something similar) will encourage a larger response rate.
- **Use the Information.** Most important to remember, is that you are polling your customers to try to improve the business. So you need to take action on the information you receive. Customers will sincerely appreciate knowing that their experience matters to you. Highlight any suggestions that are implemented, and you will encourage increased participation in future polls and surveys.

A poll or a survey is not a holy edict that requires immediate attention. One bad comment should not send you into a tailspin. However, a simple poll or survey can tell you a lot about your business. It is a smart and simple way to keep a finger on the pulse of what works, what doesn't, and what you might do to improve.

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