



## Market Knowledge

### **Use Customer Surveys to Obtain Valuable Feedback**

Sit at the counter in my favorite diner and hear the wait staff ask "Is everything alright?" They know repeat businesses and ultimately their income is directly tied to each customer's level of satisfaction.

This can be a great time of year for you to check in with your clients to see how well you did in meeting their needs last season. Successful contractors carefully study their customers' needs and wants by systematically asking them through surveys, customer panels, interviews and more.

One of the simplest and most effective ways to get a picture of customers' needs and satisfaction is with a written survey that you mail to each existing customer. The survey can be sent alone or together with your monthly billing statements.

Your survey can gather in-depth information about your clients' opinions. Consider sections or questions on what they like about your company and services, what they think you need to improve, what additional products or services they would consider purchasing from you, and whether they would be likely to refer you to a friend.

In preparing your survey, you want to make sure that it will lead to actionable information that will help you in improving your business. It's always wise to write down the specific reasons why you are doing the survey (also called the survey objectives) so that you know what data you are seeking and why. This way when the data comes back you will be prepared to have your team take action.

Design your survey form to be neat, short and simple. You can use a combination of rating scale questions (very satisfied, satisfied, etc.) and open-ended questions to gather your feedback. Plan for no more than 15 questions on the survey to promote good response. Make sure to include a statement at the top of the survey indicating why you are collecting the information (e.g. "We value your opinion and would like to know how we could improve our service to you in 2009.")

While some clients are kind enough to fill out surveys as a matter of course, others will respond if an incentive is offered. Typical incentives may be a discount on future services, a prize drawing to win a nice reward like a gift certificate, or a pledge to make a charitable donation for each survey received. Consider mailing all survey respondents a thank you note with a coupon for an additional discount off future purchases to further your positive relationship.

Make sure to include a section on your survey where the customer can update his/her contact information. This can be a great opportunity to capture e-mail addresses for your e-newsletters and bulletins.



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If you receive negative feedback from some clients, be proactive in improving your customer service. Let the client know that you and your company are committed to improving the situation. Set a specific timetable for remedying the problem and check back with the client to make sure the situation improves.

If you want to be truly a customer-driven company, you must take the time to systematically learn exactly what your customers need. A simple customer survey can be a great first step.

*About the Author:*

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