

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY
DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION
MODEL FOR LOCAL BUSINESS

By
Tori L. Feit

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CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

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Chapter One

Introduction

The purpose of this applied research was to assess the level of customer service satisfaction for a local beer distribution company. The company had concerns about their customers' level of satisfaction with their services. Customer satisfaction surveys had been performed previously at the distribution center but there was apprehension regarding the validity of previous methods. It was also acknowledged that an appropriate satisfaction assessment had not been recently administered.

A customer is defined as an establishment that receives merchandise from the distribution company. A customer of the distribution center can be a bar, convenience store, supermarket, or another establishment that sells the brands of beer that this company distributes. The customer also receives services. A service, as defined by the proposed research could be aid in stocking, promotions for the establishment, the delivery itself, other assistance or goods provided by sales representatives and/or delivery personnel to the customer. Another form of service is the assistance the customer receives while at the distribution company. This can be in form of support by the staff, timeliness of response to needs and questions and many other forms that will be addressed.

The management of the distribution company is concerned with their customer service that occurs at the customers' place of business and also in the warehouse. Products that the customers receive are also an area that was assessed because of a high value that is placed on satisfaction in the product. Satisfaction of the product is evaluated by content, display and delivery of the product.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The customer is an integral part of a company's workings. The legendary Indian prime minister, Mahatma Gandhi expressed the importance of the customer by stating: "Customer is the most important visitor to our premises. He is not dependent on us. We are dependent on him. He is not an interruption on our work. He is the purpose of it. He is not an outsider on our business. He is part of it. We are not doing him a favor by serving him. He is doing us a favor by giving us an opportunity to do so." as quoted by Holdway (2001). To understand this quote and to adhere to its wisdom can increase success by obtaining, retaining and satisfying customers.

There are different definitions of quality service. Gerson (1998) defines "world class customer service" as including the following: courtesy, competency, responsiveness, professionalism, attractiveness, reliability, completeness of product, and good communication. This definition encompasses these facets of creating a positive experience for the customer. Appraising the current level of these characteristics and broadening the scope of them can achieve customer satisfaction.

There are many techniques that are used to identify, assess and create a positive experience for the customer. Graham (1994) explicates five ideas for a "knowledge is service" approach. The first is "information sustains relationships"; by collecting information you can better understand wants and needs of the customer. Secondly, "doing it right"; this is explained by pleasing the customer, by helping them achieve their goals as well as achieving the organization's goals in the process. This point may be better explained by placing high value on a continuing contribution to customers' success (Graham, 1994). The next topic addressed is "overcoming the challenge"; keep customers and prospects wanting to do business because they

know they are valued. “Leadership comes from innovative ideas” is the fourth theme. Create a positive setting for both the customers and employees to express their feelings. Finally, the last premise addresses the concrete issue of “creating the right products and services”.

Obtaining, retaining and satisfying customers of high concern for a business. Yoegel (1997) explains that ensuring that good customers are satisfied will enhance long-term consumer loyalty. Keeping current customers satisfied reduces the costs and efforts of attracting new clients. Harris (1998) states that the cost of obtaining new customers is about five times more than that of retaining existing customers. By concentrating on current customers, information can and should be obtained to better understand their view of the service provided. An effort to retain customers should be based on the fact that customers are loyal to value and quality (Ettore, 2001). There is needs for concentrating on aspects that customers feel are valuable; those that accomplish this are successful in business. Success is built on customers that are happy and that return with their business.

Kurtenbach (2000) explains her understanding of organizations that are successful in customer service. Her view comes from working with successful organizations, and she has found that those who are successful in customer service rank the customer’s experience at the top of their priorities. Customer service is not only part of a strategic plan or vision; it is the plan or vision. Gathering information directly from the customer is a valid way of obtaining quality information. Asking what their expectations are and if these are being met is a profitable way of better understanding the satisfaction level and knowing exactly what to address to provide better service.

Another point stressed by Kurtenbach is commitment to training and development. As stated before, happy employees provide a better service than unhappy ones. Extensive understanding

and assessment of job satisfaction can in turn build a better foundation for quality customer service. Involving the right people is important. This entails listening to concerns and incorporating their suggestions. The final point assessed by Kurtenbach was the step of removing internal structural barriers to quality service. An organization must be able to remove those barriers that prohibit examination of customer satisfaction. It is not enough just to get the information about the service but there must be room to do something about it.

Another way to create positive customer service is proposed by Gerson (1998). Gerson's plan includes many facets that should be evaluated to create a positive experience for the customer. These concepts include: setting performance standards for customer service, creating a setting for commitment to service that starts at the top of the organization chain, training employees in service quality, measuring the level of service (this is important for improving customer service), creating an environment for the customers to define what "service is to create a benchmark, setting service standards and abide by them, rewarding those employees that perform well, encouraging an excellent internal communication process, and lastly thanking the customer for their business. Gerson advocates that evaluating these steps and abiding by them will create a positive customer service environment.

There are several factors that contribute to customer retention. These can include competitive prices, high quality products and service. These are factors that can be controlled, and by "controlling the controllables" customer satisfaction can be achieved (Ettore, 2001). It has been stated that positive customer service keeps most people returning more often than lower prices (Brownell, 1999). By concentrating on the service and dealing with the pricing issue as efficiently as possible customers will return. Research had shown that over 90 percent of unhappy customers, who have a choice, would not repurchase goods or services from that

supplier again. Within that unhappy 90 percent, over 95 percent will never tell the company about their experience, but will tell others, at least nine others (Holdway, 2001). Understanding current levels of customer satisfaction and the level of service needed to realize satisfaction for each client can produce loyal customers and profit for the company.

It is said that every time an individual in an organization has contact with a customer a risk arises. This encounter can provoke a variety of responses and these can include: dissatisfaction, by not fulfilling the needs or expectations; satisfaction, by meeting the needs and expectations; or delight, by exceeding the expectations in some way (Menzela & Craig, 1999). This meeting between the customer and the employee is the breaking or making point of the service and the company. Satisfaction and delight are the objectives of a successful company, and dissatisfaction should be avoided whenever possible. Research indicates that customers are currently demanding a higher quality of service and their perception of existing service frequently fall short of their expectations (Otten, 1988; Rosenstein, 1988). As the customers identify this gap between expectations and desired levels of service a feeling of dissatisfaction develops (Oliver, 1980).

Employees are an integral part in the customer satisfaction process. They are the foundation upon which success is built. To better understand the impact of employee attitude on consumer satisfaction, Holdway (2001) found that 8 percent of customers are lured away by better deals, 14 percent because they are unhappy with the product or service, but fully 68 percent are turned away by a negative attitude shown by an employee of the company. Morris (1996) asserts that employees create customer satisfaction through providing value to the customer. Investment in employees is not in vain. Employees are the beginning of a long path to efficiency and profitability. Holdway (2001, p. 7) states “In order to attain that goal I believe the

starting point is our employees.... delighted employees are better positioned to achieve the objective than those who are just satisfied with their work and responsibilities.”. There seems to be a high correlation between customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction. A contribution to, and recognition of employee happiness must be done to promote this exchange (Blanchard & Nelson 1996).

Gatewood and Riordan (1997) also found a strong relationship between customer satisfaction and employee happiness. They discovered positive relationships between employee’s attitudes and various measures of customer satisfaction. Critical employee attitudes evaluated in their study including job satisfaction, job involvement and personal responsibility. Other factors included: organizational commitment, indicating employee willingness to engage in positive activities to reach organizational goals, and empowering of employees to accomplish the activities that lead to customer satisfaction. Adsit and London (1996) also found a strong, positive relationship between customer satisfaction ratings and employee descriptions of their work environment. Blanchard and Nelson (1996) make a generalization of employees and their contribution to an organization. The idea of employee motivation and customer satisfaction being the “holy grail” of business is what every company wants, customers raving about the high level of service from the employees. The employees of an organization are an integral part of customer satisfaction but there are other factors that need to be evaluated to better understand the process of producing customer satisfaction.

Businesses today must understand the world around them in addition to understanding the world within that business. This entails an understanding of the industry. As explained by Blocher (1997), Michael Porter evaluates this situation by stating that businesses have begun to

think strategically and identify their strengths and weaknesses; an organization must determine the ways they can effectively meet the customers' expectations.

A previously stated, an encounter between the employee and the customer may provoke a variety of responses including: dissatisfaction, by not fulfilling the needs or expectations, satisfaction, by meeting the needs and expectations or delight, by exceeding the expectations in some way (Menzela & Craig, 1999). This outlook on satisfying customers can be explained by the drive to exceed the expectations that the customer has about the service that they will receive. To exceed the expectations that the customer has is to go above and beyond the basics of customer service. Gatewood and Riordan (1997) equate satisfaction with meeting the customers' needs and expectations by delivering goods and services to the satisfaction of the customer. Exceeding those expectations and making it a "delightful" experience rather than just a satisfying one can broaden the level of satisfaction. Agilent Technologies (formerly Hewlett-Packard) likes to describe their customers' state as "delighted". Their goal is not to just merely satisfy but to delight their customers (Holdway, 2001).

Menzela and Craig (1999) declared that there are four steps or ideas to assess in planning successful service. These include exploring values, empowering people, providing information, and achieving consistency across the experience. Exploring values means understanding the customers' values and what they feel is valuable in a positive experience. These may include prestige, convenience, and quality. By understanding these values you understand what the "customer is buying from you" this does not only include tangible items or service. The second focus of the evaluation is empowering the employees. By making the experience for the employees a wonderful one you empower them to perform at their best ability because they want to and they like what they are doing. To enable the employees to perform at

their best ability an organization must communicate, capture the imagination, and gain commitment of their employees. The third step in developing a better understanding of the customer is providing information. This step entails measuring and monitoring performance. Performance goals can be set and evaluated to better understand if the customers are getting what they expect. By obtaining information from the customers on their views of service the company can understand what needs to be done to better serve the customer. The fourth and final step includes achieving consistency across the whole experience. Achieving consistency across the chain of customer service better solidifies the customer-organization relationship, because the customer service chain is only as strong as its “weakest link” (Menzela & Craig, 1999). Customers build impressions of organizations, either positive or negative that greatly influence their views of their experience and return on investment.

Another way to evaluate customer satisfaction is outlined by Bond and Fink (2001). Their technique includes a more specific approach. The first is addressing customer complaints. This is a “data source” that is readily available. If the customer is going to complain, the information should be addressed and used to build a better experience for the customer. They explain that complaints that are addressed can lead to “high-leverage changes”; or as they put it “small change equals big benefit”. Customer complaints indicate how to create better service as defined by the customers. The second issue relates to sales and service personnel. Like customer complaints, the employees’ ideas for ways to better serve should be embraced into the process. The third and final issue is the actual encounter with customers. Customer visit information is also readily available and easily documented. Listening, understanding and fixing any problems that are identified through these sources of information can greatly enhance customer satisfaction. They summarize by stating “immediately letting the customer or representative

know that you are listening and that you value the input, rapidly fixing the problem and assuring better future performance, and collecting the data into a database so trends can be quickly identified and acted upon” lead to increased satisfaction.

An efficient way of understanding the needs and wants of the customer is to gather the information directly from the customers themselves. Larry O’Hara, senior Vice President director of Marketing at Grand Premier Financial Incorporated defines customer service as “meeting or exceeding the needs the customer has expressed in some form of communication” (Gerson, 1998). Brownell (1999) explains the difference between success and failure as asking the customer for feedback, getting to know the customer and providing more than promised. Information that is used to understand customer satisfaction can be obtained in many different ways. Obtaining it from the customer and employee is an idea that is shared by many. The survey is a useful tool for gathering information that is needed to better understand wants and needs of the customer. Deviney and Engelke (2000) administered surveys to employees to understand their perceptions of customer service. They found that 61% of the employees felt they knew most or all of their customer’s expectations. Only four percent believed that their customer service needed no improvement.

The information above supports the need for surveying the customers. By surveying the customers, an organization can determine the precise ideas the customer has about the organization’s service. The following study identifies the perceptions of the distribution company’s customers by surveying them. An additional survey to the employees is anticipated. The idea to survey the employees is supported by the strong correlations between customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction.

Chapter Three

Method

Participants

Study participants included all of the customers of the distribution center that were open for business from September 2001 to December 2001. The customers of this distribution company include convenience stores, liquor stores, restaurants, taverns, and grocery stores. Individuals that completed the survey were those that had the most contact with the distribution center. The service area of the distribution center encompassed six rural counties in western Wisconsin. A total of 645 surveys were sent out and 148 were returned, yielding a 22.9% return rate.

Instrument

The instrument used was a 24-item survey describing the respondents' feelings of satisfaction with the distribution center as shown in Appendix A. The researcher, Research Advisor and management of the company constructed the survey. Management consisted of the two owners and the sales manager. Each participant was asked to include the name of his or her sales representative and delivery person. The survey was distributed and used to identify the respondents' view of their satisfaction with the distribution company and other similar distribution centers. Twenty-two of the 24 items used a five-point Likert scale technique with "1" being strongly disagree and "5" being strongly agree. Three of the 22 Likert scale items were used to obtain overall satisfaction of the service they receive from the distribution center, other distribution centers that produce similar products and finally all other distribution companies. The respondents were asked to rate both the distribution company in concern and other similar distribution companies in the first 19 Likert items. The survey contained two open-ended

questions used to identify positive qualities of the distribution center and/or any improvements that could be made.

Procedure

A customer list was compiled to include all organizations that received and sold products from the distribution center and that were currently operating, excluded from the study included golf courses or other season establishments not open at the time of the study. Surveys were then sent to the customer, along with a consent form that explained any risks and actions taken to reduce those risks. The survey also included a list of sales representatives and delivery personnel to help the respondents indicate their specific service provider. Participants were asked to return the completed survey in a self-addressed stamped envelope provided with the survey. The surveys were then returned to the distribution center where they were collected by the researcher. Analyses of the surveys were then conducted. The distribution center sales manager requested to receive the surveys after analyses were completed.

Chapter Four

Results

The survey consisted of nineteen general satisfaction questions where the respondents were asked to rate both the company and other similar distributors (Table 1). A paired-samples t-test was used to determine any significant differences in the means between the company and other similar distributors. One item had a significant difference in ratings by the respondents. For the item “the product expiration dates are monitored regularly” the company had a mean of 4.24 and other similar distributors had a mean of 3.63 ($t = 4.803, 111 \text{ df}, p > .05$). Additionally, a single-sample t-test was used to analyze any significant differences between the means of ratings of company and the neutral value. All nineteen items produced significant results; all items were rated higher than the neutral value of three.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for General Questions for the Company and Other Similar Distributors

Question	Company	Other Similar Distributors
Needs handled quickly	M = 4.43 SD = .72	M = 4.31 SD = .71
Needs handled politely	M = 4.52 SD = .66	M = 4.38 SD = .70
Consistency among personnel	M = 4.11 SD = 1.05	M = 4.16 SD = .96
Out-of-stocks are not an issue	M = 3.34 SD = 1.41	M = 3.24 SD = 1.33
*Product expiration dates monitored	M = 4.24 SD = .99	M = 3.63 SD = 1.10
Management is available	M = 4.09 SD = 1.13	M = 4.05 SD = .97
Ownership is available	M = 3.71 SD = 1.21	M = 3.51 SD = 1.23
Sales rep reviews business performance	M = 3.75 SD = 1.23	M = 3.58 SD = 1.13
Supplier builds quality displays	M = 3.58 SD = 1.25	M = 3.60 SD = 1.23
Deliveries are consistent	M = 4.51 SD = .71	M = 4.39 SD = .72
Delivery personnel assist	M = 4.31 SD = .94	M = 4.14 SD = 1.00
Sales reps are timely	M = 4.20 SD = 1.02	M = 4.05 SD = .98
Team Leaders are accessible	M = 3.74 SD = 1.16	M = 3.67 SD = 1.15
Sales reps are approachable	M = 4.33 SD = .97	M = 4.15 SD = .97
Sales reps have knowledge	M = 4.09 SD = 1.07	M = 4.05 SD = .97
Management have knowledge	M = 3.72 SD = 1.25	M = 3.66 SD = 1.18
Supplier exhibits professional conduct	M = 4.42 SD = .81	M = 4.30 SD = .83
The service is on a personal basis	M = 4.23 SD = .95	M = 4.16 SD = .93
Positive relationship with my supplier	M = 4.27 SD = .99	M = 4.14 SD = .91

Note: * $p < .05$

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The individual delivery personnel and sales representatives were also identified in the survey. There were a total of ten delivery personnel and eight sales representatives identified.

Tables 2 and 3 presents the mean scores across all satisfaction measures for each of the delivery personnel and sales representatives.

Table 2

Means for Delivery Personnel for Satisfaction Questions applicable to Delivery Personnel

Delivery Personnel	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	Overall
Question:											
Needs handled quickly	4.25	4.36	4.63	4.78	5.00	4.20	4.33	4.43	3.50	4.75	4.43
Needs handled politely	4.13	4.45	4.88	4.89	5.00	4.20	4.50	4.43	4.50	4.75	4.52
Consistency among personnel	3.73	3.91	4.11	4.67	4.00	3.80	3.62	4.00	3.50	4.00	4.11
Out-of-stocks are not an issue	3.09	2.91	3.50	3.80	4.25	3.00	2.88	3.38	4.00	3.83	3.34
Product expiration dates monitored	4.45	4.00	4.38	4.70	4.75	3.70	3.50	4.11	4.50	4.83	4.24
Supplier builds quality displays	3.86	3.63	3.67	4.71	3.67	2.50	4.29	3.71	3.00	3.67	3.58
Deliveries are consistent	4.45	4.36	4.78	4.70	4.75	4.11	4.25	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.51
Delivery personnel assist	4.63	4.00	4.75	4.75	4.50	4.00	4.14	4.22	3.50	4.17	4.31
Supplier exhibits professional conduct	4.18	4.45	4.67	5.00	4.33	3.80	4.38	4.11	4.50	4.83	4.42
The service is on a personal basis	4.00	4.18	4.22	5.00	4.00	3.67	4.00	4.13	3.50	4.50	4.23
Positive relationship with my supplier	4.00	4.36	4.78	4.90	3.75	3.90	3.88	4.11	3.00	4.50	4.27
Individual Means	4.07	4.06	4.40	4.72	4.36	3.72	3.99	4.06	3.77	4.44	

Table 3

Means for Sales Representatives for Satisfaction Questions applicable to Sales Representatives

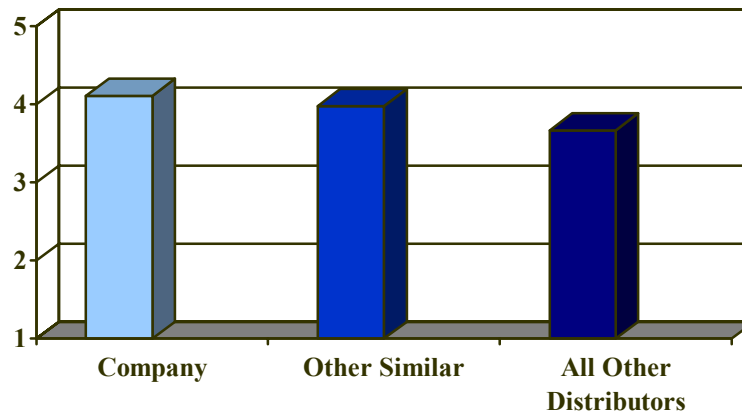
Sales Representative	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	Overall
Question									
Needs handled quickly	4.56	4.27	4.33	4.17	4.57	4.33	4.20	4.33	4.43
Needs handled politely	4.72	4.27	4.60	4.00	4.64	4.22	4.40	4.33	4.52
Consistency among personnel	4.30	4.00	3.65	4.14	4.59	3.70	4.29	3.89	4.11
Out-of-stocks are not an issue	3.37	3.14	3.18	3.86	3.50	3.50	3.60	3.17	3.34
Product expiration dates monitored	4.21	4.64	4.00	4.00	4.56	4.20	4.20	4.42	4.24
Sales rep reviews business performance	4.00	3.92	3.50	3.00	4.06	4.20	3.62	3.95	3.75
Supplier builds quality displays	3.80	3.80	3.00	2.60	3.85	4.11	3.20	4.00	3.58
Sales reps are timely	4.53	4.08	4.00	4.29	4.61	3.80	4.13	4.37	4.20
Sales reps are approachable	4.67	3.64	4.00	4.14	4.72	4.40	4.27	4.53	4.33
Sales reps have knowledge	4.47	3.71	3.69	4.00	4.50	3.89	3.79	4.42	4.09
Supplier exhibits professional conduct	4.67	4.43	4.50	4.29	4.67	4.20	4.23	4.21	4.42
The service is on a personal basis	4.39	4.00	3.93	4.00	4.65	4.20	4.07	4.29	4.23
Positive relationship with my supplier	4.63	4.00	3.88	4.29	4.56	4.30	3.79	4.33	4.27
Individual Means	4.33	3.99	3.87	3.91	4.42	4.08	3.98	4.17	

Paired-samples t-tests were also used to determine any significant mean differences in the overall satisfaction variables. These items assessed the overall satisfaction of the company, “other similar” and “all other distributors”. There was a significant difference ($t = 3.498$, 109 df, $p > .05$) between the company and “all other distributors”. The company had a mean of 4.10 and “all other distributors” had a mean of 3.67. There was also a significant difference ($t = 4.013$, 108 df, $p > .05$) between “other similar” and “all other distributors” with “other similar” having

a mean of 3.98 and “all other distributors” having a mean of 3.68. There was no significant difference between the means of the company and other similar distributors. Figure 1 illustrates the mean scores of satisfaction for the three service provider references.

Figure 1

Means of Overall Satisfaction Variables for the Company, Other Similar and All Other



An initial correlational analysis was run with the individual satisfaction variables and the three overall satisfaction variables. Each of the individual satisfaction variables for the company was positively correlated with the overall satisfaction variable; these were significant findings. None of the individual satisfaction variables for the company were significantly correlated with the other similar distributors overall satisfaction variable or the overall satisfaction variable for all other distributors.

Next independent factor analyses were performed on both the company’s individual satisfaction questions and the other similar distributors individual satisfaction variables. The company’s factor analysis produced five factors, which combined accounted for 78.3% of the total variance. Other similar distributors’ factor analysis produced four factors, which combined accounted for 74.6% of the total variance. Table 4 maps the company’s five factors and percent

of explained variance, while Table 5 presents other the factor mapping for the four factors produced from the ratings of similar distributors.

Table 4

The Company's Factors Created by the Factor Analysis with Percent Variance Accounted for

Factor	Percent of Variance Accounted For
Factor 1: "Sales"	23.0%
Factor 2: "Management"	18.3%
Factor 3: "Behavior"	14.1%
Factor 4: "Product"	13.2%
Factor 5: "Assistance"	9.6%

Table 5

Other Similar Distributors Factors Created by the Factor Analysis with Percent Variance

Accounted for

Factor	Percent of Variance Accounted For
Factor 1: "Personnel"	33.6%
Factor 2: "Management"	21.9%
Factor 3: "Miscellaneous" **	10.0%
Factor 4: "Product"	9.2%

*** Miscellaneous factor contains two items not related, a commonality was not found*

The factors were then used to create subscales and composite variables for each of the subscales. The composite variables were computed by summing the responses for each variable in the subscale, and then taking a count of the zero values (which was the not applicable responses). The variables were then computed by subtracting the count of zeros from the total items in the subscale; then the summed variable was divided by the value found by the previous step. These were then classified as the subscale composite variables; there were five composite variables for the company and four for other similar distributors. The final composite variables were then correlated with the three overall satisfaction variables: overall satisfaction with the company, overall satisfaction with other similar distributors and overall satisfaction with all

other suppliers. Each of the company's five composite variables were positively correlated with the company's overall satisfaction variable, but were not significantly correlated with the two other overall satisfaction variables. Table 6 presents the correlations between the company's composite variables and the overall satisfaction variables.

Table 6

Correlational Table of the Five Composite Variables of the Company and the Three Overall Satisfaction Variables

	Overall Satisfaction with the Company	Overall Satisfaction with Other Similar Distributors	Overall Satisfaction with All Other Distributors
"Sales"	.833*	.061	.099
"Management"	.766*	.111	.066
"Behavior"	.604*	.147	.111
"Product"	.619*	.097	.149
"Assistance"	.395*	.139	-.015

Note: * $p < .05$

The other similar distributor's four composite variables were all positively correlated with the overall satisfaction variable of similar distributors and the overall satisfaction variable with all other distributors; these were significant findings at the .05 level. Also, of these four composite variables two were significantly correlated with the company's overall satisfaction variable. Table 7 presents the correlations of the other similar distributors' composite variables with the three overall satisfaction variables.

Table 7

Correlational Table of the Four Composite Variables of Other Similar Distributors and the Three Overall Satisfaction Variables

	Overall Satisfaction with the Company	Overall Satisfaction with Other Similar Distributors	Overall Satisfaction with All Other Distributors
“Personnel”	.040	.789*	.486*
“Management”	.188*	.519*	.246*
“Miscellaneous”	.187*	.417*	.270*
“Product”	-.024	.458*	.322*

Note: * $p < .05$

The survey included two qualitative questions encompassing the positive qualities and needed improvements of the company in concern. A content analysis was used to put the “positive qualities” variable into seven categories and one miscellaneous category. Table 8 illustrates these categories and their frequencies and percentages of that category.

Table 8

Categories of Positive Qualities

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Overall staff service	26	29%
Sales representatives	19	21%
Delivery personnel	18	20%
Going above and beyond	7	8%
Product and delivery	7	8%
Knowledgeable	5	6%
Office staff	5	6%
Miscellaneous	3	3%

The miscellaneous category included items such as “good summer products at deal prices” and “act very concerned about the appearance of our business”. Next, the needed improvements variable was analyzed by a content analysis to determine categories. There were five categories and one miscellaneous. Table 9 illustrates these categories, frequencies and percentages.

Table 9

Categories, and their Frequencies and Percentages, of Needed Improvements

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Staff	22	27%
Promotional aid	20	24%
Delivery and product	17	21%
Visiting place of business of the customer	8	10%
Lower prices	8	10%
Miscellaneous	7	8%

The miscellaneous category included items such as: “I would go elsewhere if I could” and “possibly show some interest in the issues that we face”.

Chapter Five

Discussion

The discussion of the current research must begin with two important caveats to help guide the reader's understanding of this manuscript. First, an accurate and extensive understanding of the nature and dynamics of customer satisfaction related to this distribution company lies beyond the scope of the research reported herein. Such knowledge would require an ongoing longitudinal data collection paired with an active quality improvement intervention by the company. This, and other cross-sectional methods will only provide a momentary glimpse at a minority of the company's clients. Second, an exhaustive analysis of the data collected by the researcher is beyond the scope of this report. As described in the rationale for the study, data regarding client satisfaction needs to be analyzed at multiple levels to achieve optimal service. Company-level data provides critical information related to overall procedures and practices, service provider-level data provides specific feedback to staff and management regarding performance and training needs, and finally, case studies of individual clients inform a customized service model. This report focuses primarily on aggregate-level analyses that relate to the gross, overall performance of the distributorship with some analysis of the individual service providers.

As a group, clients agreed that the distributorship and its agents accomplished each of the specific service expectations listed on the survey (see Appendix A). Thus, no major systemic service problems were discovered in the study. However, further analysis revealed that clients felt that the distributorship's competition (other similar suppliers) equally met their expectations. While the mean ratings of the target distributorship were consistently slightly higher than ratings of the competition, the only statistically significant superior rating was for monitoring product

expiration dates. While clients did not view the distributorship and its closest competitors as significantly different, both were rated significantly higher than other suppliers regarding overall satisfaction. This portion of the data clearly presents opportunities for service improvement. The responsibility for meeting each expectation listed in the survey can be negotiated, mapped and assigned to specific service staff. Then, descriptive analyses can be employed to prioritize strategies to improve service through training and reallocation of resources. For example, a quick glance at the “Overall” rating at the rightmost margin of Table 2 and Table 3 suggests that the company should invest more effort toward out-of-stock issues, building quality displays and reviewing client business performance.

Table 2 and Table 3 also lend insight into noticeable variability in service staff performance. For example, these tables indicate that delivery person #4 and sales representative #5 are providing exemplary service to their customers. If the customers of these individuals are not qualitatively different from those of others, these personnel could be used to explore and define an evolving program of “best practices” training for the company. Minimally, these data can provide specific feedback for constructive performance reviews of service personnel.

The factor analyses mapped five relatively independent “clusters” of expectations clients held regarding the distributorship, and that these clusters were distinct from their expectations of the competition. This information can also be used to inform a more simplified approach to training personnel. Rather than structuring training toward a specific expectation, training could be designed to target the overarching concept that includes that specific expectation and several others as well. Moreover, the correlation matrix linking global client satisfaction with these clusters of expectations indicates the relative importance of each factor toward the overall satisfaction of clients.

The open-ended qualitative responses included at the end of the survey added much to understanding and extending the data derived in this research. Both the positive and negative comments highlight the importance of quality personnel in customer satisfaction. Indeed, characteristics of service behavior dominated comments to both questions. Information from the question about positives can be added to the construction of “best practices,” whereas the negative comments can be sorted and addressed as opportunities for growth. As with the quantitative ratings, these comments can also be used as specific feedback in performance reviews.

Finally, as described at the beginning of this section, the optimal use of these data would be to initiate an ongoing quality assessment/intervention. As clients see that their views are being taken to heart by management, they will become more communicative and cooperative. Improved communication can allow problems to be resolved in a timelier and less costly manner. Furthermore, the improvement in service should greatly increase client loyalty. Such a process may even expand the distributors market share within their region as well as increase their market share of products within their existing client base.

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Appendix A

We are continuously attempting to provide the best possible service to you, the valued customer. Clearly, using feedback from the customer can only better their services. As a Masters of Applied Psychology student at University of Wisconsin Stout I have taken their concerns for their customers and am attempting to gain the feedback to better their services to the customers. Would you please take a moment and complete this survey.

Thank you,

Would you please list your Delivery person and your Sales Representative (a list of personnel is included at the end of the survey):

Delivery Person _____ Sales Representative _____

Please answer the following questions by writing the number that best represents your feelings with:

1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

	Company	Other Similar Suppliers	Not Applicable
1) When speaking with the receptionist my needs are handled quickly.	_____	_____	_____
2) When speaking with the receptionist my needs are handled politely.	_____	_____	_____
3) There is consistency among personnel that visit/service my business.	_____	_____	_____
4) Out-of-stocks are not an issue at my business.	_____	_____	_____
5) The product expiration dates are monitored regularly.	_____	_____	_____
6) Management has been available for my needs, questions and concerns.	_____	_____	_____
7) Ownership has been available for my needs, questions and concerns.	_____	_____	_____

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	Company	Other Similar Suppliers	Not Applicable
8) My sales representative reviews my business performance with me periodically.	_____	_____	_____
9) My supplier builds quality displays.	_____	_____	_____
10) Deliveries are consistently made within scheduled delivery times.	_____	_____	_____
11) Delivery personnel assist with stocking at time of delivery.	_____	_____	_____
12) Sales representatives are timely in responding to my needs and concerns.	_____	_____	_____
13) Team Leaders are accessible for my needs and concerns.	_____	_____	_____
14) Sales Representatives are approachable when I have needs and concerns.	_____	_____	_____
15) Sales Representatives have a working knowledge of my business.	_____	_____	_____
16) Management have a working knowledge of my business.	_____	_____	_____
17) My supplier exhibits professional conduct.	_____	_____	_____
18) The service that I receive is on a personal basis.	_____	_____	_____
19) I have a positive relationship with my supplier.	_____	_____	_____

Overall customer service:

1 = Poor 2 = Needs Improvement 3 = Average 4 = Good 5 = Excellent

Company: _____
 Other similar suppliers _____
 All other suppliers: _____

Additional comments:

What positive qualities come to mind when recalling the company and their customer service?

What improvements could be assessed to better serve you and your business?
