



Innovate and gain a competitive advantage through analysis of customer complaints

// **What's dangerous is not to evolve, not to invent, not to improve the customer experience. //**

Jeff Bezos
CEO Amazon

Business owners along with their sales teams are constantly searching for that elusive competitive advantage that will take their product or service from ordinary to highly desirable. This is often defined by the business as the key differentiator. Without the ability to read our customers' minds, how do we know what would give our product the edge over similar offerings on the market?

Discovering how your product can be elevated to the next level is not that much of a mystery. The problem is, we have been looking for the answers in the wrong place. Customers tell you every day what they think of your product, just ask the complaints department. Customer feedback has been used to improve products for millennia, and organisations that recognise complaints for what they really are - constructive feedback are ahead of the game. Highly, successful entrepreneurs make it a habit to consult consumers, listening intently for any information, especially criticism, that will give them that light bulb moment.

Famous innovators such as Thomas Edison advocated that an invention was only as good as what the customer thought of it. While more recently, Elon Musk, perhaps the most high-profile innovator of our time, pointed out that seeking feedback is one of the best ways to innovate - "You want to be extra-rigorous about making the best possible thing you can. Find everything that's wrong with it and fix it. Seek negative feedback"



Taking onboard past and present innovators' advice to seek out our customers' grievances as a pathway to advance our product/service is the first step, but how do we turn complaints coming through our customer call centres into strategies that will eventually delight those same customers?

Handling complaints is a specialised area that needs tried and proven processes that can track trends and deliver the type of analysis that will inform an organisation on which product improvements will deliver the best value to their customers.

So how can we create this constructive feedback loop that will help us innovate and build strong relationships with customers who will ultimately sing our praises and recommend our products and service? Here are some steps to help.

Utilise the shared knowledge captured by the organisation's complaints management software across all channels to:

- Consider the resources being diverted to solve common complaints and investigate if there is a business case to innovate the product or service to avoid this diversion of resources in the future.
- Examine how customers are using products differently to evaluate if there is an unseen market that has not been tapped.
- Investigate why certain customers regularly feel that their needs are unmet by a product/service and work out how to shore up the issue to create a differentiator and therefore a competitive advantage.
- Utilise the reporting capabilities to assess how cross-departmental handling of a complaint, such as the engineering department making modifications based on complaints lodged in the system, is quietly innovating products.

Creating a competitive advantage out of what was originally a complaint seems counterintuitive but as we have discovered customers are very willing to be a free focus group, helping us gather the information needed to uncover key differentiators that will hopefully provide that elusive advantage.