



The Situation

A leading manufacturer of printers that are sold for point of sale applications had been surveying customers to understand the customer's impressions of their products. They used the results of this survey to gauge their position relative to competitive offerings and the needs of their different (large retail, point of sale, office and distributors) markets. They had been using the same questions for several years so the surveys gave them a sense of continuity. The surveys consistently pointed out that the manufacturer was well respected and that the customers saw them as being providers of "leading edge" technology.

The Problem

The survey results didn't line up with sales performance. While the manufacturer was selling well, their market share did not reflect the dominant position presented by the previous surveys. The wrong people were being surveyed, the wrong questions were being asked or there was some combination of both.

The Analysis

We reviewed the survey questions and the research protocols. The survey was built around the assumption that only people who were part of the decision making process for printers should be included. It neglected to take into consideration that people who would be using the printers were different from those buying the printers and that the people buying the printers would be interested in the opinions of the people who had to use them.

Several of the questions essentially told the customer how to answer instead of letting them respond openly. For example one question started with "How likely is it that X and Y would help you overcome a price objection?"

Several of the questions started with a sales pitch for a new product or service and then asked the customer if they were interested as opposed to asking the customers what they liked or didn't like about what they saw as their currently available options.

The survey tried to eliminate people early in the process to focus on a small number of people instead of identifying the role of person involved and getting as much meaningful information from them as possible.



Our Solution

We recommended the following:

- Changing the research protocol to include more people. We felt it was important for the manufacturer to understand how the respondent related to the manufacturer's printer and ask questions that would help the manufacturer understand what it was that people in that role felt was important. Was the customer a buyer of the printers, a user of the printers, and a recommender of the printers or was the customer a person who could benefit from some of the printers capabilities to do their job better? (One example of the latter situation revolved around the printer's capability to print special offers on the back of customer receipts. We thought it would be interesting to find out if people in marketing management had found that this capability either had or, in their opinion, could improve sales.)
- Rephrasing all of the questions that provided the survey participants with the answer before the question was asked.
- Asking questions that helped the manufacturer understand how customers felt about the problems some of the manufacturer's new capabilities solved before presenting the solution.
- Asking questions that helped the manufacturer better understand the customers priorities and the customer's perception of the importance of various features vs. the price of the printers

The Results

The revised study helped the manufacturer:

- Survey more people
- See how their products and services provided value to different functions within their customer's organizations
- Realize the importance and value their customers saw their new technology providing
- Understand how important the problem(s) their features solved were to customers
- Integrate the data gathered in this study with previous studies so previous data was not compromised.
- Get a clearer picture of how customers saw them vs. their competition
- Receive many more useful comments from customers indicating the customer's real feelings regarding their perceptions of the manufacturer's products and solutions