

Customer satisfaction in plant construction

Press Release

Weinheim, September 12, 2013

Measurement of customer satisfaction, which reflects the unique features and business structures of a company, is a prerequisite for successful and goal-oriented customer retention. A number of special features of the B2B sector, and especially plant construction, make it necessary to consider interdependencies of contact points and business phases in such analyses.

The classical ideal pervading the German machine and plant construction sector is technological leadership. However, in times of economic slowdown and increasing international competition, additional qualities are required in order to survive in the market. A prerequisite for long-term business success is a well-earned customer loyalty that results from a customer-oriented approach to plant construction, service, and B2B relationships. Customer satisfaction analyses can support such a goal-oriented approach – provided they pay due attention to the individual requirements of the respective business structures.

For machine and plant construction, it is necessary to consider special features characteristic of the mode of operation of the market and the business processes. In contrast to the raw materials, c-parts or consumer goods business, this mode of operation is characterized by infrequent contacts with high concentration of contacts across many interfaces. Furthermore, the structure of buying centers needs to be clarified in order to be sure of addressing the actual decision makers on the customer side.

In order to cover all relevant aspects, a customer satisfaction analysis for a company in the machine and plant construction business needs to analyze all project phases. The large number of customer interfaces involved also necessitates careful selection of the contact persons to be inter-

viewed. The sample should include functions with actual operational experience as well as decision makers, i.e. not only management but possibly also purchasing, product development, production and maintenance.

Depending on the objective of a customer satisfaction analysis, various survey methods can be used. For example, an online pulse survey can serve to capture the mood in a market. Telephone or face-to-face interviews allow a deeper and broader acquisition horizon: they offer a much higher level of control over sampling (i.e. all relevant contact persons will be reached) and allow a detailed understanding of qualitative statements, objections, and points of criticism as a basis for a specific measurement design to improve customer orientation. Since the plant construction business is highly project driven, the subjectively perceived satisfaction is often strongly influenced by occasional or recent incidents, making direct monitoring after project completion a meaningful addition.

In addition to the usual criteria of business operations, such as price-performance ratio, response time, delivery reliability, and flexibility, further more specific satisfaction criteria become relevant in plant construction. These include, for example, demonstration and testing centers, consulting services, transparency in the tendering phase, development cooperation, project management and maintenance services. Additionally, the willingness to re-purchase and to recommend a company are collected as central indicators of customer retention and loyalty.

In order to define precise measures for critically evaluated criteria, satisfaction indices should always be recorded in relation to each project phase. Further, use of comparative values, e.g. competitor evaluation or comparison over time, increases the interpretability of the indices and aids in identification of fields relevant for action. In addition to the quantitative measurement of satisfaction, the collection of qualitative evaluations is of great importance. Especially in the business processes in machine and plant construction with its complex contact points, qualitative statements allow identification and elimination of potential sources of dissatisfaction during the various project phases.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact:

Dr. Helmut Weldle, +49 6201 9915 52,
helmut.weldle@schlegelundpartner.de

© Schlegel and Partners 2013