Ten Keys to Voice of Customer Program Success
Results of National Benchmark Study

By Cynthia Grimm and Christine Mazur

Through our extensive experience measuring the Voice of the Customer (VoC) in hundreds of organizations, CX Solutions (formerly TARP) has identified ten areas that are key to VoC program effectiveness.

Ten Keys to Voice of the Customer Program Success

1. **Senior Sponsorship** – the degree to which senior leaders own and promote the importance of CX and the Voice of the Customer. Successful programs have senior leaders who regularly and visibly reinforce the importance of customer listening and using VoC-driven insight to focus and direct performance improvements. Additionally, senior leaders ensure that necessary financial, human and technology resources are committed to support the program.

2. **Organizational Engagement** – the degree to which managers and employees buy-in to the importance of CX and embrace/utilize insights drawn from the VoC program. Successful programs have formal efforts to (1) ensure that all managers, employees and partners understand and buy into the organization's efforts to listen and respond to customers, (2) regularly and frequently review VoC data and insights, both within and across departments and silos, to understand customer experiences and opportunities for improvement.

3. **Methods of Listening and Learning** – the number and variety of ways an organization attempt to capture the VoC. Successful programs use a variety of methods, both structured and unstructured, to capture customer feedback.

4. **Metrics & Targets** – key CX measures and indices and the criteria used to evaluate performance on those measures/indices. Successful programs typically have a few core outcome measures of customer experience and loyalty (e.g., Overall satisfaction, NPS, etc.), as well as metrics that can be used to diagnose issues and determine key drivers of satisfaction. Additionally, there is a formal process for setting targets for all measures that is rooted in business objectives.

5. **Data Analysis and Integration** – the methods used to integrate data from different VoC sources, and analyze those data to draw insights into and set priorities for managing and improving customer experience. Optimizing VoC requires (1) maximizing the insight drawn from any given data source and (2) making all VoC data sources "work together". Analysis needs to identify key drivers and set priorities for action based on the impact on clearly defined business metrics.

6. **Sharing VoC Data and Insights** – the methods, channels, and technologies used to share VoC data and insights with managers, employees and partners. Successful VoC programs rely on a combination of best practices and technology to ensure that data and insights are shared organization-wide. Senior leaders regularly share VoC results and insights at company-wide events. Each department or unit regularly reviews results and insights that are specific to that department/unit.

7. **Responding to Individual Customers** – the processes and resources dedicated to sensing and responding to customer questions, problems, and requests captured via VoC channels and data sources. Successful VoC programs have processes in place to quickly and efficiently "close the loop" on any customer questions or problems voiced through the VoC program. This includes clear criteria

for triggering "hot alerts", designated internal owners of the follow-up, and clearly defined business rules for method and time frame for follow-up actions either with the customer or internally.

8. **Developing Employees and Partners** – the methods used to leverage insights drawn from the VoC program to develop and employer managers, employees and partners. Successful VoC programs often use customer feedback as an element in performance management and to identify top performers or those requiring additional coaching.

9. **Systemic Improvement** – the process by which insights drawn from the VoC program are used to focus and direct efforts to improve business policies, processes, operations and customer interface points. Successfully programs have formal action planning processes that assign ownership and clear metrics for determining successful improvement.

10. **Sustainability** – the degree to which the organization has committed the necessary resources, and maintains the necessary organization focus and attention, to ensure that is VoC program endures and matures. Organizations with successful VoC programs tend to do the following:

   - Tie incentives and compensation to VoC results and CX improvement

   - Recognize and reward top performers

   - Publicize and celebrate systemic improvement efforts that have had measurable positive impact on customer retention and business results

   - Continually look for opportunities to improve and refine the VoC program itself.
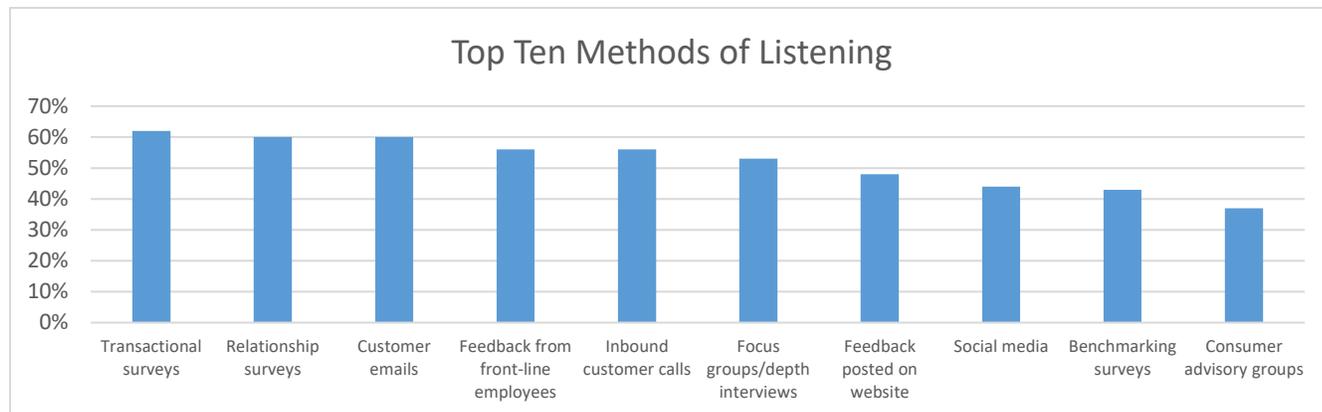
National Benchmarking Study

How well do organizations do in these areas? To find out, CX Solutions, in partnership with Voice Crafter, conducted a national benchmarking study to:

   - Determine the extent to which specific practices in each area have been implemented

   - Establish the extent to which implementation of practices in each of these ten areas is correlated with the overall success of a VoC program

   - Identify areas and practices in which organizations have made the most progress

   - Pinpoint areas and practices in which organizations have the greatest opportunities for improvement

The online study resulted in responses from 309 large organizations across North America. *

Key Findings from Benchmarking Study

Most organizations use multiple methods of listening and learning about customer experiences. Fifty-seven percent (57%) use between 2 and 7 methods. Only 8% rely on a single VoC method. The most frequent VoC methods are transactional or relationship surveys and customer emails (see figure 1).

Top Ten Methods of Listening

Method	Percentage
Transactional surveys	62%
Relationship surveys	60%
Customer emails	60%
Feedback from front-line employees	56%
Inbound customer calls	56%
Focus groups/depth interviews	53%
Feedback posted on website	48%
Social media	44%
Benchmarking surveys	43%
Consumer advisory groups	37%

Approximately one-third of organizations characterize their respective VoC programs as "very successful." The remainder characterize their VoC programs as either "Somewhat Successful" or "Not Very Successful."
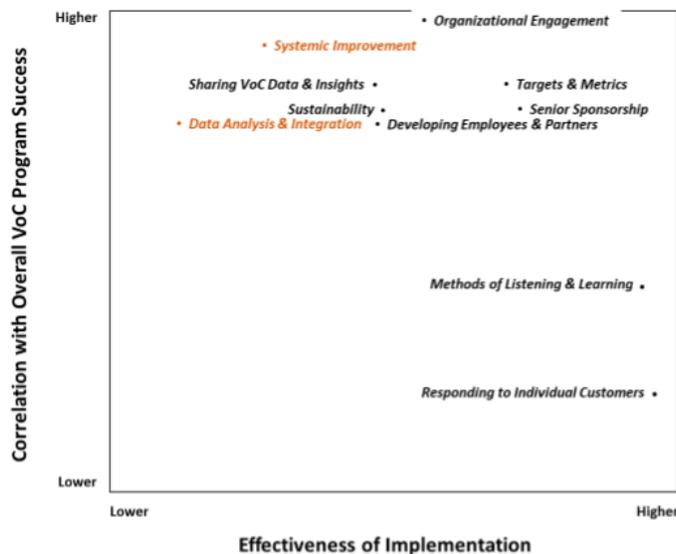
Of the ten VoC practices evaluated… organizations have the most success in implementing practices related to:

- Methods of Listening and Learning about Customer Experiences

- Responding to Individual Customers

…and the least success in implementing practices related to:

- Data Analysis and Integration

- Using the VoC to Drive Systemic Improvement

Based on (1) their strong correlation with overall VoC program success and (2) lack of implementation effectiveness in a majority of organizations, the top opportunities for improvement are with "Data Analysis & Integration" and "Systemic Improvement."

Correlation with Overall VoC Program Success (vertical axis: Lower to Higher)
Effectiveness of Implementation (horizontal axis: Lower to Higher)

- Organizational Engagement
- Systemic Improvement
- Sharing VoC Data & Insights
- Targets & Metrics
- Sustainability
- Senior Sponsorship
- Data Analysis & Integration
- Developing Employees & Partners
- Methods of Listening & Learning
- Responding to Individual Customers

Summary

While all ten areas described in this paper are important for ensuring a successful VoC program, the areas with the greatest impact and, in most organizations, the areas with the greatest opportunity for improvement are "Data Analysis & Integration" and "Using VoC Data to drive Systemic Improvement."

* For more detailed information on the referenced study and a more comprehensive discussion of Voice of Customer practices, see David Randall Brandt (2018) The Current State of Corporate Voice of the Consumer Programs: A Study of Organizational Listening Practices and Effectiveness, International Journal of Listening. Link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10904018.2018.1482747

*Note: **CX Solutions is a CX Research and Consultancy firm** that assists companies with CX program design, Customer Journey Mapping, engagement and communication strategies, CX technology implementation, data analysis, and ongoing management and consultative assistance in terms of actioning VoC results.* **For more information about conducting a VoC assessment or how to improve your VoC or CX program, please contact Cynthia Grimm at CX Solutions: (703) 284-9256**