



CUSTOMER TACTICS

Feedback: Zions wants to plumb the depths of your discontent

With its new feedback product, the bank can analyze and respond to employee and customer beefs

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By John Adams

Satisfaction is at the heart of happy employees and customers alike, but gauging that happiness has always been tough.

Zions now believes it's found a way to gather feedback and respond to complaints and suggestions. In so doing, it hopes to increase satisfaction and reduce customer and employee churn.

It's deployed the Allegiance Engage Platform to help analyze and respond in real-time to customer and employee comments and suggestions. And it hopes the platform will also help the bank establish a benchmark of employee and customer attitudes that can be compared with business outcomes.

The bank, which has \$49 billion in assets and nearly 12,000 employees, is also interested in understanding how loyalty and engagement of customers and employees affects profitability enterprise-wide, regionally and locally. "Employees create the difference in allowing us to achieve the results that we are looking for," says Claire Howells, employee engagement and communications advisor for Zions Bancorporation. "So measuring and responding to employee feedback is vital."

Zions hopes to tap into an increasing demand for interactive loyalty and automated, real-time customer service channels. While loyalty perks such as gifts for opening new accounts are on the rise, banks are also looking for ways to handle customer complaints and suggestions in real-time and without making the customer feel "annoyed" or marginalized.

At the same time, firms across industries are looking for ways to allow employees to offer suggestions, enter complaints, or even whistle blow and report ethical violations in an efficient and private manner.

The platform includes tools and analytics delivered through a hosted software as a service offering. The suite includes surveys, mystery shopping programs and a "silent whistle" ethics reporting program.

In addition to providing a real-time index of employee and customer engagement, the platform gives companies the ability to drill down to affiliate, branch or departments. There's also a companion consulting service to help companies use the data for larger decision-making strategies.

"Satisfaction used to be a hot term, and loyalty is also another term that gets used a lot. But we use the term engagement," says John Epeneter, a VP at Allegiance. "An engaged customer or employee goes out of their way to show association with a company as an influencer and promoter of that company. When someone is engaged in their company, they believe that that company really is superior to others. So they aren't driven away as easily."

Users log into the Allegiance system from their bank's site. The main page includes links to products that are tied to the platform, such as "customer voice" or "employee voice" or "silent whistle." Employees can enter complaints, which are secure and private; one feature of the platform allows various components to be tailored for specific types of employees, such as sales, customer service, or human resources.

The platform also contains a survey developed by Allegiance designed to probe attitudes and behaviors of a set of customers, which can then be analyzed to form a plan of action. The survey includes questions such as "does the organization make the customer feel smart about handling money?", which get to the heart of whether the bank's customer-facing staff are satisfying customers.

The surveys work by gathering information on customer or employee attitudes and measures behaviors, complaints or suggestions. While envisioned as an electronic product, the surveys work across other formats, such as voice, paper and mail. The information goes into a central repository, where it's analyzed and compared with data from other users to help the bank come up with a long-term plan based on user feedback.

Employees can track their complaints or suggestions to see if they are being acted upon, and the bank can track complaints as well. The customer and employee sides of the platform can also be combined to see how customer satisfaction and employee happiness are linked together.

Zions deployed the platform in early August. Connie Linardakis, chief human resources officer for Zions, says one of the bank's hopes is to achieve a solution for issues such as employee turnover. "We can drill down into a bank department's data to see what may have happened that's caused the changes in that department," she says. "Are they satisfied on the job? Are they communicating with their manager?"

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