

# Deliver better online experience by using feedback mechanism effectively

More companies are beginning to recognise the value of the sort of customer relationship effort made by Corporate Apparel. Companies want to do studies and monitor changes in the data they collect.

**M MUNEEER** | FEBRUARY 17, 2021 / 02:57 PM IST



Most enterprise websites have a customer feedback mechanism, usually an e-mail address or a link, sometimes with a template already set up, asking for comments or at least giving customers a place to go to when in doubt/ ask questions. However, many companies treat these communication systems lightly; too many of them answer the enquiries slowly, or not at all. Few have used them as an effective marketing research resource.

Here's how one company in the business-to-business space has made use of the feedback mechanism effectively. This company, Corporate Apparel Unlimited, is an Internet-based direct sales e-tailer, selling corporate-branded clothing and it was started by a husband-wife duo from a small town.

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Using the information about its website coming in from customers through e-mail, as well as over the phone, and enhancing that understanding with focus group research, Corporate Apparel was able to redesign their website and boost sales, and identify a significant, secondary source of revenue that wasn't part of the original business plan.

The company had a promising start. Despite a crowded Internet marketplace for corporate-branded goods and big-time competitors such as Lands' End, by the first half of the launch year, Corporate Apparel's website was averaging about 2500 clicks a month, indicating a high level of interest in the company's products.

Meanwhile, sales were limping along. Their first step was to examine



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the customer feedback it received. Using e-mail from customers and comments made at the site's operators, the company realised its website had a lot of problems. It was hard to navigate, and while customers could finish buying goods right on the website, many found the ordering process too complex, and called company operators to complete the sale. And there was more: Some customers wanted a print catalog to look at, which the company hadn't yet produced. And many wanted to buy the sturdy, basic casual clothing without a corporate brand, an option the company didn't offer.

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First, Corporate Apparel overhauled its website, creating "special landing pages" – one for each popular search term (jackets, shirts, sweatshirts) that's made available on the site's home page. They were helped in this process by an online focus group of 12 business executives who had never seen the site before. After taking part in the evaluation, the participants filled out a questionnaire exploring what they found difficult to achieve while browsing through the site, such as placing an order or learning about a specific product.

The company also couldn't ignore the small percentage of customers who wanted a company catalogue. They did not have the budget to start a catalogue business, but was able to make a deal with its largest clothing supplier, which agreed to do an extra print run of its own catalogue that would have a Corporate Apparel-branded cover – at no cost to Corporate Apparel, except postage. Customers now could buy the catalogue from the site.

It was an important step, as over 40% of customers who have requested catalogues were placing orders.

In response to enquiries, the company also added two special features to its corporate site that would appeal to event organisers. One feature, called "Event Collection," sells apparel and accessories catering to specific events, and the "Event Wizard" enables event planners to ask Corporate Apparel employees for shopping assistance. Also in response to trends in customer enquiries, they established a second website to sell a secondary line of clothing to customers who wanted the apparel without embroidery.

There was an opportunity for the company to set up a secondary brand, selling greater volume and at lower prices. The wholesale site has similar infrastructure and design as Corporate Apparel's original site, but the product categories are somewhat different, offering children's clothing, for example.

The success of the second site has far eclipsed that of the first. The wholesale site contributed half of the company's overall revenue. The same period sales in the initial launch timeframe were approximately nine times greater. And that is a result of their second site. The company now receives about 1,800 calls a month from customers, up from 200 calls produced by the first site alone.

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More companies are beginning to recognise the value of the sort of customer relationship effort made by Corporate Apparel. Companies want to do studies and monitor changes in the data they collect. And when they see something happening that's negative, they drill down and try to understand the problem. They pick the methodology according to what best fits that need, and take that problem and find the best solution.

More people are doing product evaluation and research, and often want to go to the site directly to

make a purchase. In terms of e-commerce, the whole idea is to make the shopping experience as easy as possible. See how Amazon is doing!

**M MUNEER** is the managing director of CustomerLab Solutions, an innovative consulting firm delivering measurable results to clients.

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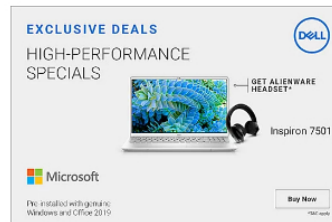
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