

NAHB Research Center

What Do You Customers Want? Satisfaction Surveys Help You Know

Understanding your customers' needs is a basic tenet for any successful business, and building material suppliers are certainly no exception. Gauging customer satisfaction is valuable and gathering that information can be simple. With this in mind, it seems strange that all suppliers do not survey their builders. Without this vital information, how do you really know where you stand with your customers or what you need to improve? Satisfaction surveys are key to enhancing your value as a supplier and securing a healthy relationship with your builders.

Most builders are willing to provide feedback because they benefit from the improvements that you make as a result. In fact, leading builders, including every winner of the 2000 National Housing Quality Award, often take the initiative to provide satisfaction feedback to their suppliers on a regular basis. But not all builders are so proactive. As a supplier, you need to put together your own survey to obtain their feedback. Developing a survey takes very little time and effort but can result in measurable business improvements.

GETTING STARTED

When designing your survey, be sure to keep a builder focus. You obviously need to ask questions about their satisfaction with your product and service performance. Also ask questions that capture their feelings about your company overall.

Warranty service is a good area on which to focus some of your inquiries. Ask for the operational feedback necessary to manage a service department including response times, courtesy of personnel, and whether service calls result in problem resolution. This is important feedback. Builders also need to be asked if they feel that your company stands behind the product after the sale.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

For suppliers without survey programs in place, it may seem that all you hear from your customers are complaints. Be prepared for some pleasantly surprising findings once you initiate a program. The surveys will let you see many things customers really like about your products and services. Even when a rating is lower than you expect, it provides you with information you need to know. It sets clear direction for improvement priorities. As time goes on, builder surveys give feedback on progress made and direct you toward new opportunities for improvement.

Survey information should be shared freely within your organization. Use it as a way to

communicate the voice of the customer. Reinforce the importance of customer satisfaction by reviewing results in management and production meetings. To really get everyone's attention, tie bonuses and incentives to builder survey ratings.

Are these surveys actually worth doing? Let actions speak louder than words. More and more suppliers are actively soliciting satisfaction feedback from their builders. It is extremely rare for suppliers who start survey programs ever to stop, because their companies thrive as a result of these efforts. Their surveys keep them on the right track and they rarely want to lose that competitive edge.

For a free sample of "Builder Satisfaction Survey," call the NAHB Research Center's ToolBase Hotline at 800/898-2842.

The NAHB Research Center is the not-for-profit research arm of the National Association of Home Builders, and is located in Upper Marlboro, MD. In its nearly 40 years of service to the home building industry, the Research Center has provided product research and building process improvements that have been widely adopted by home builders in the United States. Through testing and certification services, the NAHB Research Center seal is recognized throughout the world as a mark of product quality and an assurance of product performance.

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