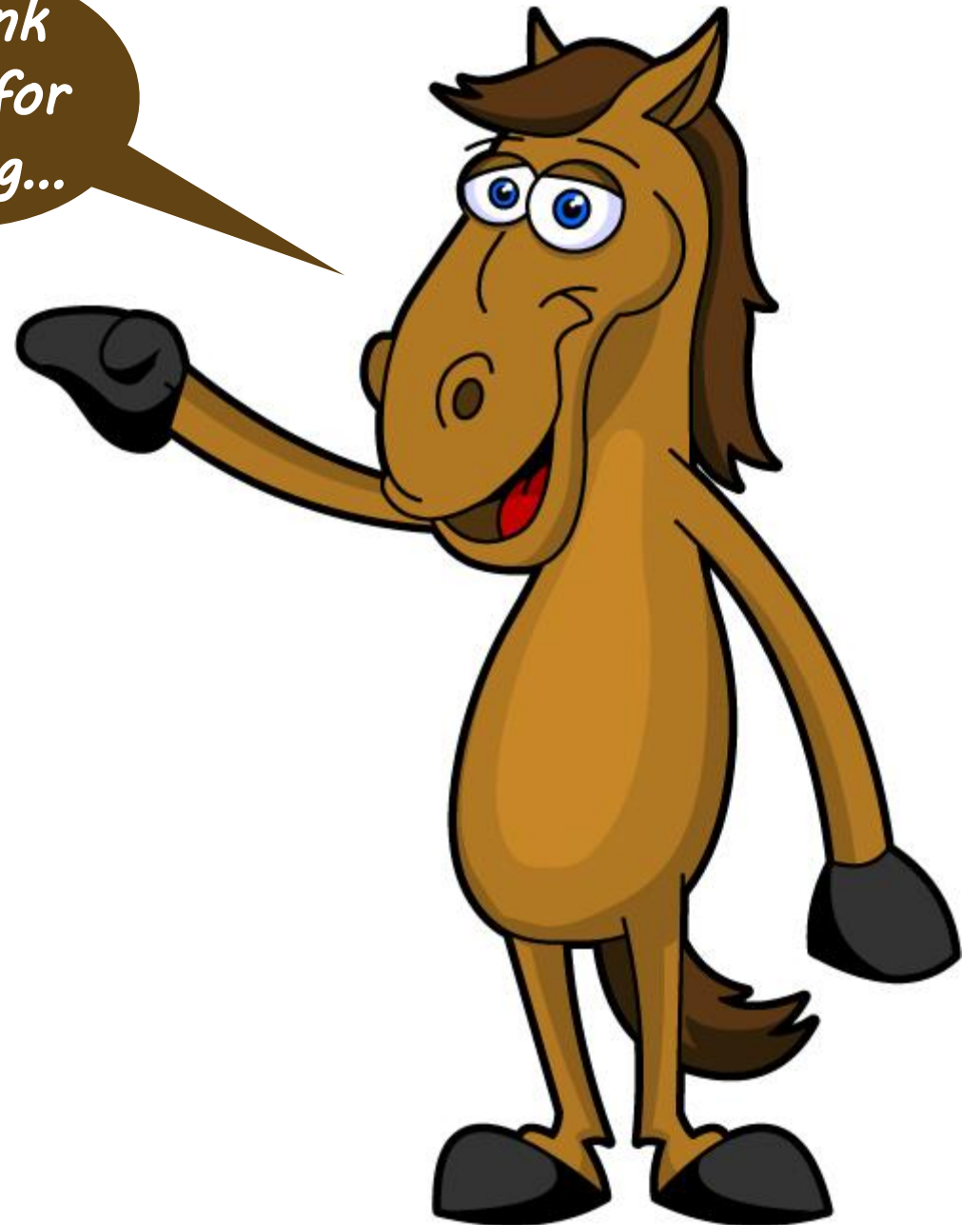


# *From the HORSE'S MOUTH*

**How to Get Your Customers to  
Share Their Voice**

Jeff Ernst  
Co-founder, SlapFive

*Thank  
you for  
asking...*



# Hi There, I'm Jeff Ernst, and I'm customer-obsessed!!!

Now that I got that off my chest, why should you listen to me? Because I'm inside your customers' heads.

As CMO of several fast growing tech companies, I was always the one who knew the customers best. I ran the customer advisory boards, satisfaction surveys, user groups, customer conferences, and reference programs. I was always the one advocating for our customers best interests with the executive teams and developers, and have the scars to show for it.

Then I had the opportunity to be an analyst at Forrester. What a rush that was. I got to help pioneering CMOs learn how to deliver better customer experiences, and truly understand the behaviors of their buyers and customers. I did dozens of custom research projects for our clients where I interviewed their customers and found out what really matters to them.

Now I'm founder of SlapFive, which helps companies capture their customer voice, and inject it into every marketing, sales, and customer success initiative to earn trust and drive growth. Which involves in-depth research into buyer behaviors.

In all, I've done over 1,000 buyer and customer interviews across 17 industries.

**I know what makes your customers tick. And what makes them talk.**



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# When it came to customer voice, I had it all wrong. Until...

My whole career, I begged customers to do favors in exchange for cash payments and other forms of bribery.

When they said “yes”, I put them through the burdensome process of writing a classic case study or asked them to take endless reference calls or speak at conferences.

And I would seek out those great testimonial quotes that we loved to plaster all over our websites. You know, the ones that say: “Company XYZ rocks!! I’d recommend them to everyone looking for an ABC solution.”

Then after a few years as a Forrester analyst, they asked me to run Forrester’s marketing. So I did what any good former analyst would do. I interviewed a bunch of buyers and customers to find out why they buy and renew, and more importantly, why they don’t. There was no amount of marketing or sales messages that would overcome the questions, fears, and doubts that kept people from buying. This confirmed what I always believed in: the need for customer voice.

**So I launched a Customer Voice Program.**

When I started the program, I fell into the same trap. I started begging customers for favors. And Duh, guess what, it didn’t work. So I went back and looked at what the buyers told me.

Buyers didn’t want platitudes, grandiose claims, and marketing speak. They wanted a crystal ball into what life would be like as a customer. They wanted to know what pitfalls they’d hit. They wanted advice from other clients on how to get the most value out of working with the firm.

So I did a 180. I started asking our customers questions that would surface insights that knocked down buyer concerns. I used their responses in ways that made the customer look good. I asked at the right times in the customer experience.

And guess what? I not only discovered what types of customer stories were most effective at earning trust and driving buying decisions, I also discovered that the level of customer participation in my Customer Voice Program skyrocketed.

**In this eBook, you’ll hear the critical lessons I learned.**

# We live and work in a trust economy.

Your prospects and customers trust their peers and colleagues way more than your marketing and sales messages. Why? There are many reasons, but two stand out...

1

## Purchases Gone Bad

95% of IT projects fail to deliver the results or benefits that the company was hoping for when they embarked on the project. The result is usually major projects not living up to expectations, significant amounts of rework, or even total abandonment.

This has made buyers more risk-averse when making major purchases, and even more skeptical of the promises of suppliers, since buyers who make these types of purchases are putting their careers and reputations on the line.



2

## Sellers Lie

Buyers know that the claims that marketers and sales people make are purposely crafted to make our products sound so fantastic that it's beyond believable. We make bold claims of technical superiority, flexible architectures, scalability, ease of integration, feature-rich, and lots of other techno-jargon. And we rarely back them up with concrete proof points.

But buyers aren't stupid. They know that no product is perfect and no usage experience goes without a hitch.

**So what can we do about it?**

# We have to inject the customer voice...

...into all of our marketing, sales, and customer success initiatives. “Great,” you say, but it’s not that easy. Why? Because of how we’re doing it today...

## Classic Customer Case Studies



We beg customers to let us write a case study or do a testimonial video about them. You know the story: “customer X was in a world of hurt, they used our solution, and now their life is a dream come true.”

Since you’re looking for them to shill for you, they have to get approval from legal or PR folks. Then they sit through a 1 hour interview. Then they review draft 1, draft 2, and draft 3 to make sure what your writer made up isn’t too far fetched. Then they have to get final approval on the PDF from legal. UGH!



## Customer Reference Programs



We also beg our customers to join our customer reference program, and get on phone calls to answer the questions and knock down the doubts that our buyers still have even after weeks of talking to our sales reps.

Since we never have enough references, we burn out those we have until they finally put up their hands and say “enough is enough”. And worst of all, they’ll tell you that they have to answer the exact same 5 or 6 questions every time they take one of these calls.

**These are huge burdens on your customers, and there’s nothing in it for them.**



## Before we talk about the better way, let's first take a look at what motivates people to share their voice...

I surveyed buyers of business technology, and asked them this one multiple choice question:

**Rate each factor on a scale of 1-10 in terms of how much it contributes to your willingness to publicly share your customer experience with a vendor.**

I trust that the company looks out for my success & best interests	9.0
I feel the company has helped build my reputation & career	8.6
I feel the company listens to my feedback and uses it	7.5
I get recognized for my success and contributions	7.1
I like to be helpful to others	6.7
I like the product features and functions	5.0
I earn points that I can redeem for discounts and rebates	2.2

Source: SlapFive survey of 163 business technology buyers, April 2015

Notice that the top answers are all about trusting the company, feeling successful, building personal capital, and being heard.

Now I will admit that there were a few write-in answers saying things like “They take me to Red Sox games.” But look what was at the bottom: personal rewards.

And how ironic is it that the power of reciprocity and being helpful to others plays a bigger role than liking the product!!

**Which leads to another critical issue.**

When talking to people about capturing their customer voice, I too often get this “Yeah, but...”

“Yeah, but we just pay our customers to do favors for us.”

If you go to TripAdvisor to check out a vacation resort, and you know the resort paid its guests \$200 to get them to write 5 star reviews, how much trust do you put in those reviews?

So why is it OK for B2B companies to pay customers cash to write reviews on G2Crowd, agree to a case study, take reference calls, or speak at events? Do you assume your buyers are naive enough to believe these sponsored stories? Just like there’s a big distinction between “paid media” and “earned media”, there’s a big distinction between:

**Paid Customer Advocacy:** a brand pays or rewards its customers to do favors for the brand

**Earned Customer Advocacy:** a brand engages customers in a two-way exchange of value

In other words:



Let’s dig into the first lesson learned, it’s about what to ask.

*1. Don't ask customers to give you their testimonials, endorsements or recommendations; instead give them the opportunity to share their knowledge, experience, and advice.*

I'm starting with this one because not only is it the most important, it's also the one that will be hardest for most traditional marketing, sales, and executive leaders to accept.

Why? We've been conditioned to seek recommendations. Heck, even our LinkedIn profile has a place for recommendations.

And we're so used to believing that "customer testimonials are solid gold."

But many companies, especially the biggest companies, the ones you think "wouldn't it be awesome if we can get a big brand like P&G to endorse us?" They have PR and legal policies that prevent their employees from giving endorsements or recommendations. So even if they wanted to give you an endorsement, their hands are tied.

**Luckily, buyers don't want endorsements, recommendations, and testimonials anyway.**



## Let's take a look at it from the buyer's perspective.

"I would definitely recommend HubSpot. From our very first interaction through to onboarding and now via our Customer Success Manager, it's always a great experience. It's an excellent marketing tool and I'm glad we chose HubSpot."



**TRISTAN DORMAN**

*Marketing Manager*

[3Sixty Systems](#)

Here's a testimonial quote I pulled right off HubSpot's website. I'm sure the folks on their marketing team get all giddy when they get a quote like this, and they jump to post it to their website, brochures, and Powerpoint decks.

I call this a "Happy Quote". Sure it is very complimentary. We assume because it makes US feel so good, it must have a huge impact on buying decisions.

But 1,000 buyer interviews have taught me that "Happy Quotes" don't help buyers overcome their biggest questions, fears and doubts. Buyers don't want platitudes and broad-brush claims. They want examples of the good and the bad things that your customers have experienced. They want advice on how they can be successful should they decide to move forward with the stuff you sell.

# 1,000 buyer interviews show what buyers REALLY want to know.

1

## Ouch! I'm in Pain

- Why should we change the status quo?
- What should our goals be?
- What are our business & technical needs?
- How would we get buy-in?
- Is our organization ready?
- What are all the things we need to consider?

2

## How Do I Solve It?

- Who's had a similar problem or goal?
- What have companies like ours done about it?
- What was their outcome?
- What solution approaches should we consider?
- How will each impact the way we do business?

3

## Who Do I Choose?

- Which vendors have a viable solution for us?
- How well does each vendor meet our criteria?
- What are the differences?
- What are the experiences of their customers?
- Your solution is: too slow, too expensive, too rigid...

4

## Let's Do It!

- What obstacles will we encounter?
- How do we get people to use it?
- What secrets to success have others discovered?
- How do we get the most out of the solution?

Can you now see why testimonials, endorsements, and recommendations don't help?



# There's much more in it for your customers to share their...

## **Knowledge:** everyone wants to feel smart

By giving your customers the opportunity to share the knowledge they've gained by working with your company and your solution, you tap into the inner desire that every human being has to feel smart, and showcase their expertise both within their company and their professional networks.

## **Experience:** everyone wants to look successful

Our professional reputations are the sum of our successful experiences. Your customers want to brag about their successes. They want to be known as thought leaders in their industry. Let them talk about what they've done, and the effort it took for them to achieve the success they have.

## **Advice:** everyone wants to be heard

We all love to give advice, even when the other person doesn't want it. Ask your customers to share their feedback on their experience and they will thank you for the opportunity. Even better, ask them what advice they'd give to peers, and they will talk forever about the things your buyers just happen to care the most about.

This gives buyers the crystal ball they want...



And in my experience, almost **ALWAYS** gets around the customer's PR & legal restrictions.

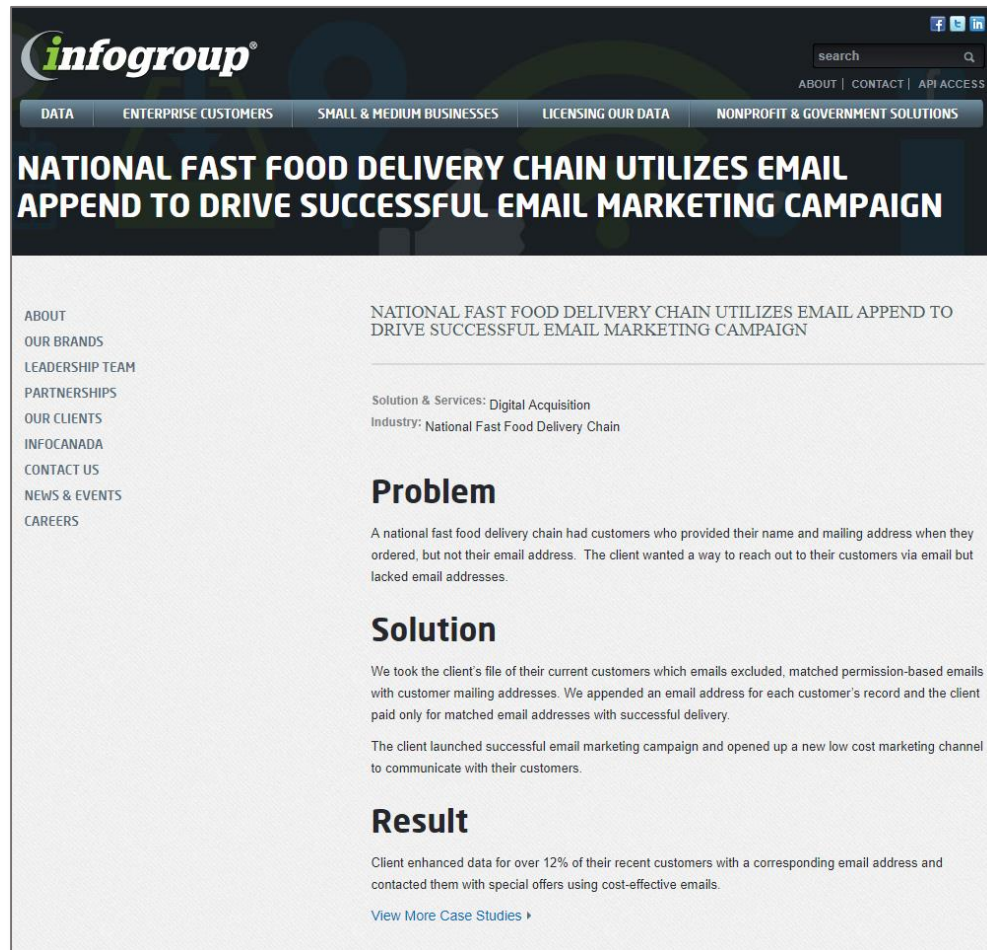
*2. Make the customer the hero of the story so it helps them build their reputation within your customer base, in their company, and in their industry.*

Whenever we tell a customer story, we make our products and their self-proclaimed competitive differentiators the star of the story.

So why would your customer want to go through all the trouble of participating in a customer story, only to make your product a hero?

Answer: They wouldn't.

# Here's how most customer stories are told.



Go to any B2B website in the world and you'll see customer stories just like this one. If you don't believe me, go to your own website. Then go to your biggest competitor. See what I mean?

**Headline:** "A (customer's industry) firm uses (our product) to drive (the functional area our product supports)."

**Problem:** Company X was in a world of hurt.

**Solution:** They bought and implemented product Y because it was better than competitor Z for these reasons.

**Result:** Everything is perfect and they're living in paradise.

These stories are written in the third person by a professional writer.

There's no customer voice other than a perfunctory "happy quote" in the sidebar. They're full of marketing-speak.

**Worst of all, no one wants to read them.**



# Here's how you can make your customer the hero of the story.

We feature the customer front and center.

But more importantly, it is told in her voice. No really, it is her actual voice on audio and video, responding to the most important things on the minds of our buyers.

She's not shilling for the vendor. In fact, she hardly even mentions the vendor's name. She's sharing her knowledge, experience, and advice for peers based on what she's done so far.

So it's super helpful for buyers.

But it is also super easy for the customer to answer a couple questions. Gone are the 60 minute interviews, weeks of back and forth reviews of draft documents, and arduous effort to get signoff by the PR department.

And by the way, make her look even more like a hero by sharing this with her boss and peers.

The screenshot shows a webpage for Iron Mountain's 'CUSTOMER SUCCESS STORY'. It features a portrait of Adele Revella, Founder & CEO of Buyer Persona Institute. To the right of her photo, the title 'Buyer Persona Institute Launches New Product with Confidence' is displayed. Below the title, key details are listed: INDUSTRY: Market Research, LOCATION: Seattle, WA, PRODUCT: Software Escrow, and USE CASE: Reduce third-party technology risk. A 'STRATEGIC INITIATIVE' section describes ensuring software reliability and disaster-proofing. Below the text is a video player with a blue progress bar and a 'SHOW COMMENTS' button. To the right of the video player are two blue boxes with white text: 'What business goals does this initiative support and how will it help you achieve those goals?' and 'Describe the risks your business would face if you didn't have escrow?'.

[Click here to see this example in action.](#)

*3. Make the customer feel like an insider by listening to their feedback.  
And responding to it.*

One of my clients told me recently that she does Net Promoter Score (NPS) surveys of her entire customer base every 6 months. Now I'm not an NPS fan for many reasons, a big one is because when you ask people a hypothetical question (How likely are you to recommend our company to a friend or colleague?) their answer bears no resemblance to whether they actually do recommend your company. The latter is a true measure of loyalty and satisfaction. And I told her this.

Her response was, "We capture great feedback in the comments, and that's the whole value we get out of the survey, it's not about the score."

I asked her "What do you do with the feedback?"

"Well, we route it around to our execs and product folks so they can get ideas on how to improve the product," she said.

"And how do you close the loop with the customer?"

Crickets.

# You need to close the customer feedback loop

Guess what happens when you ask your customers for feedback over and over again, but then keep them totally in the dark about the feedback you got, and what you do with it?

Yup, you're right. They quickly think, "Why bother, they don't even look at it."

On the other hand, guess what happens when you close the feedback loop with your customers?

Yup again. You make them feel like a company insider, a VIP who has a stake in the success of your company, and who's opinions are treasured.

**And they will crawl to the ends of the earth to share their voice without you even asking.**



## But don't just share a summary of the survey results.

Here's another little tidbit. Customers are insanely curious about the input that other customers are giving your firm. People take comfort in knowing that others are struggling with the same issues. And they want to know that they're not alone in wanting a particular feature or service improvement.

When they know they're not alone, they feel like part of the tribe. And when they're part of the tribe, they'll be even MORE eager to share their voice.

So how do you give them this kind of visibility?

Here's an example where we asked a bunch of customers for their feedback on a concept, captured their answers in audio format, packaged up all the responses on a single page (we call it a storyboard), and then share the page with all customers who responded.

Share it with those who didn't respond as well, it will give them FOMO, so they respond next time.



[Click here to see this example in action.](#)

*4. Offer the customer lots of choices in the types and levels of permission she gives you to use her stories.*

One of most valuable lessons I learned running the global customer voice program at Forrester happened on a Hail Mary play.

I was talking with our key client contacts at a HUGE software company in Redmond, WA. Wink, wink. They had incredible stories of the value their product teams got working with Forrester's cloud and mobile analysts.

So I jumped on them and asked, "This is great, can we capture your voice to share with people who don't see the light like you do?"

His response was, "Sorry, it's in our contract that you're not even allowed to mention publicly that we're a client."

Oh Sugar. Then I threw the Doug Flutie miracle pass. "What if we just use these stories to make you look like a hero within (HUGE software company in Redmond, WA)?"

That was not only perfectly fine, he rolled out the red carpet. We used stories from power users to double the size of our subscription by having him share those stories with people from other business units and departments that had never worked with us.



# Give customers control and you give them comfort.

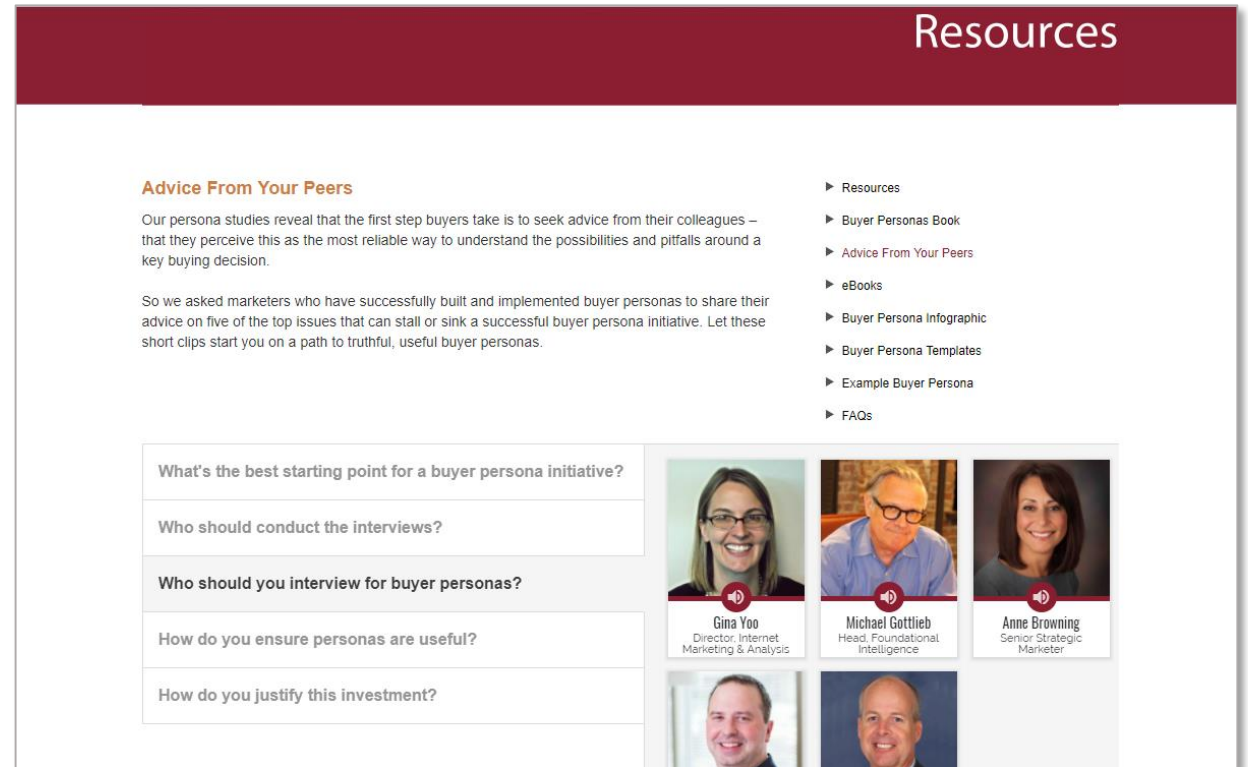
What do you think when you see a case study on a vendor's website that is titled something like "Major Telco Achieves 800% ROI With Vendor X", and every bit of information has been sanitized and anonymized?

Unfulfilled, right? You don't have to go the total anonymous route when a customer has a gag order. There are other options.

In working with dozens of companies across many industries to capture their customer voice, the MOST restrictive permission I've ever seen was a customer who said "You can use my name, title, and photo, but just don't use my company name."

Think about it, the customer has gotten around his company's policy by having you use the industry rather than his company name. If your buyer is really curious about who the company is, all he has to do is look him up on LinkedIn.

See the example to the right where you still get a lot of authentic advice even without the company names.



The screenshot shows a 'Resources' page with a dark red header. Below the header, there's a section titled 'Advice From Your Peers' in orange. The text below it says: 'Our persona studies reveal that the first step buyers take is to seek advice from their colleagues – that they perceive this as the most reliable way to understand the possibilities and pitfalls around a key buying decision. So we asked marketers who have successfully built and implemented buyer personas to share their advice on five of the top issues that can stall or sink a successful buyer persona initiative. Let these short clips start you on a path to truthful, useful buyer personas.'

To the right of this text is a vertical list of resources with arrows pointing to the right:

- Resources
- Buyer Personas Book
- Advice From Your Peers
- eBooks
- Buyer Persona Infographic
- Buyer Persona Templates
- Example Buyer Persona
- FAQs

Below the text and list is a grid of video clips. On the left, there are five questions in a light gray box:

- What's the best starting point for a buyer persona initiative?
- Who should conduct the interviews?
- Who should you interview for buyer personas?
- How do you ensure personas are useful?
- How do you justify this investment?

On the right, there are six video thumbnails with speaker icons. The first three have names and titles below them:

- Gina Yoo, Director, Internet Marketing & Analysis
- Michael Gottlieb, Head, Foundational Intelligence
- Anne Browning, Senior Strategic Marketer

The bottom row shows two more thumbnails without names.

[Click here to see this example in action.](#)

# Here are two more dimensions you can use to give the customer control.

## Story Permissions: who can see it?

Let's say you have a customer with a great story to share, but she's just a little nervous about it appearing on CNN. Instead of using it publicly, ask her:

- **Can we use it with your fellow customers of our company?** All your customers can get a ton of value from hearing about experiences and advice from your best customers. So give it to 'em.
- **Can we use it within your company?** If your company has a land & expand model, there is huge value in using customer stories to expand usage across a customer, like I did at Microsoft, oops, I mean large software company in Redmond.



## Story Restrictions: who cannot see it?

Let's say you have another customer with a fantastic story but he doesn't want to expose trade secrets or competitive advantage. Here's the answer:

- **Viewing restrictions.** Make it so the digital asset that contains his story expires 24 hours after it is shared with a buyer, and so the buyer can't share it with anyone else.
- **Viewer restrictions.** Allow the customer to specify a blacklist of companies that his story can't be shared with.



## *5. Strike at the magic moments in the customer relationship.*

There's an old expression in the B2B customer experience world that your customer will never be happier than he is on the day he first signs his contract. Seriously. He's gone through a brutal, lengthy process convincing his peers of the need to change, gaining consensus on the best approach to solve the problem, evaluating vendors, and making a big decision.

What a relief!! It only goes downhill from there.

There's no better time to ask him "What evaluation criteria did you use when comparing providers?"

Many B2B companies have followed Salesforce.com's strategy of spending a big chunk of their marketing budgets on customer events, with expert sessions, lavish parties, and famous keynote speakers.

Whether you're doing this, or even low-key customer events for those on a modest marketing budget, the iron is hot. Your customers are juiced. They can't help but love you. This is a great time to ask them to "Tell me how you went about ensuring that your end users would embrace this solution."

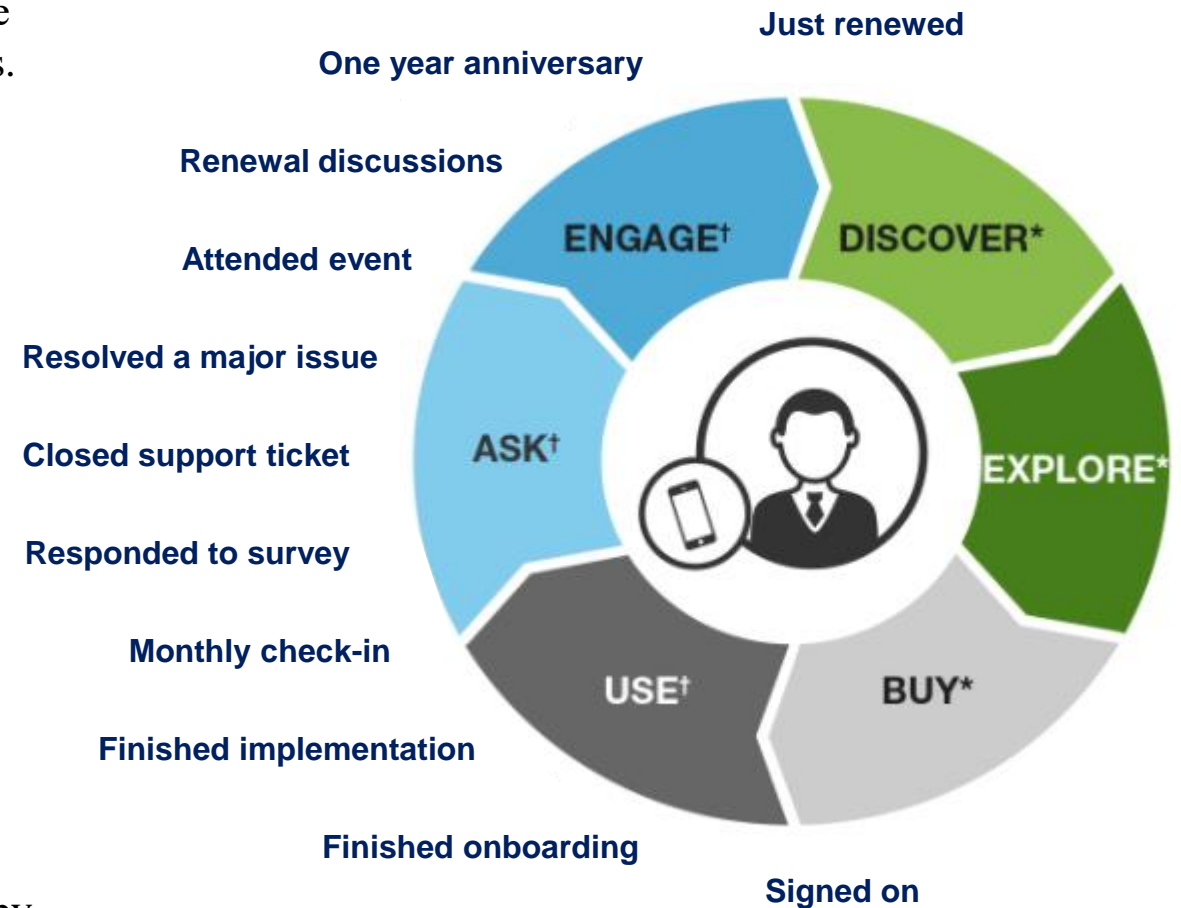
# There are many more “Magic Moments” than you think.

I’d be a failure as a former Forrester analyst if I didn’t include at least one perfunctory Forrester graphic I used in my reports. Here it is, the Customer Lifecycle.

Look at those events I put around the lifecycle. Each one of those is a customer touchpoint where they feel engaged with your people and your company, and it is at those times of engagement that the customer is in the ideal mindset to share her voice.

## Here are some examples:

- The customer has finished implementation – ask “how did the implementation process compare to your expectations?”
- In a monthly check-in, the customer tells your CSM about a cool use of a feature – ask “what advice do you have to others on how to use the xyz feature?”
- During renewal discussions, the customer shares a value story with your rep – ask “tell me about the value you got by doing abc?”



*6. Have the “Asks” come from the customer’s trusted contact at your company.*

What happens when you get an email from someone you’ve never heard of? Delete.

Way too many companies I work with were having their marketers, who were total strangers to their customers, reach out with “asks” for testimonials and case studies, or requests to respond to polls and surveys.

Your customers are just as busy as you are. They have email inboxes just as overloaded as yours. And they take the same measures you take to eliminate noise in their daily life.

It takes time to build relationships with customers, and not every relationship is equal. But when we help our customers, and they start to feel the love, not surprisingly, oxytocin, “the love hormone”, is released in their brains.

And just like romantic or family relationships, this makes them feel trust, and feel a connection and want to reciprocate.

That’s why it is 100 times more effective to have the people they trust the most in your company be the ones who ask them to share their voice.



# Who has the trusted relationships with customers in your company?

## Sales Rep:

I know we started this book by talking about how people don't trust sales reps. But a GOOD sales rep overcame the trust gap and earned the buyer's business. So in the very early days of the customer lifecycle, your sales reps likely have the closest relationships with your customers. Have them ask about experiences during the buying process.

## Executive Sponsor:

You have "premier" customers, the ones with big brand names, big contract values, or just big potential revenue. And each premier customer has an executive sponsor. In the normal course of meetings between the client and the executive sponsor, this is a great time to ask the customer to share her voice.

## Customer Success Manager:

Right after the purchase, your company hands the customer off from a "hunter" to a "farmer" to nurture and grow. Today we call these nurturing souls Customer Success Managers, because they have a vested interest in the success of the customer. They are in weekly contact, which builds the trust. They also hear amazing value stories that today go untapped. Start tapping them.

## Professional Service:

You have a complicated solution that requires extensive professional services to get it going and keep it running. Or you are in the professional services business. Those consultants spend a lot of time onsite with your customer. They go to dinner, have a few cocktails, even get invited to weddings. You get the idea by now, right?

*7. Capture the golden nuggets of “spontaneous testimony”, and turn them into reusable customer voice assets.*

Your employee, Bill, has gone way above and beyond the call of duty, working all weekend, on his daughter's birthday no less, to solve a customer's Severity 1 issue.

The customer is so overwhelmed with gratitude for Bill that...wait, let me start over. The customer feels so guilty about Bill missing his daughter's birthday party that she writes a letter to Bill's boss, telling the story of his heroic actions and how they saved the day and made sure that everything was working perfectly at the start of business Monday morning.

Bill's boss forwards the email to the department head and copies Bill and the HR director, with an “attaboy, that's the type of customer focus we like to see, Bill.”

At his next performance review, Bill gets an extra comment next to his score for “Attentiveness to Customer Needs”.

The email gets dragged to a folder and nothing else happens with it. No one else sees it.

**An amazing customer story dies on the vine.**

# Turn spontaneous testimony into reusable customer voice assets.

## “Love Letters”:

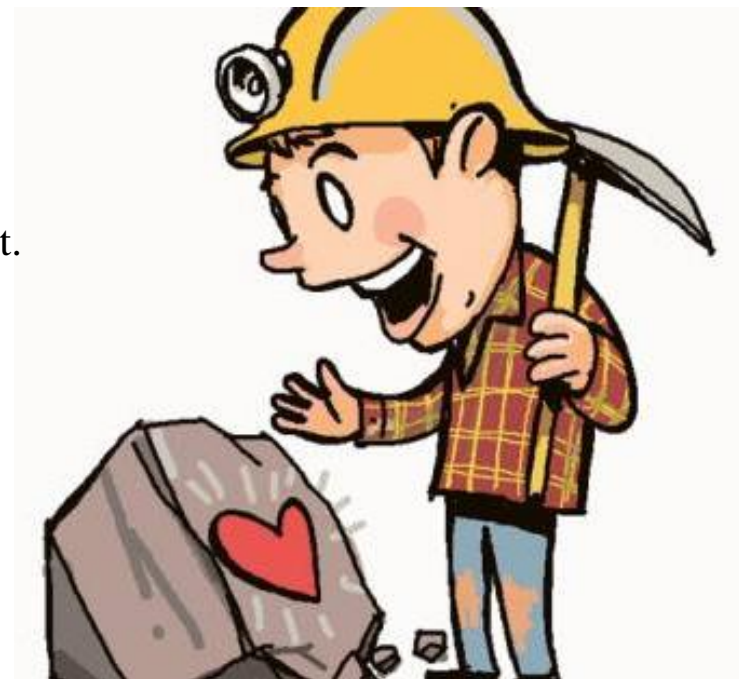
I call the email the customer sent about Bill a customer love letter. And as the settlers said, “there’s gold in them there” love letters, you just have to mine it. Again, we’re not looking for the “XYZ company rocks” platitudes. What we’re looking for is the emotional part, where the customer tells the story of the dire situation and the great result.

## Survey and Feedback Forms:

You know by now I’m not a big fan of NPS, but everyone does some form of customer satisfaction survey or event feedback form. Forget the numeric ratings, because we all know “a 2 at 10 is a 10 at 2.” Instead mine the comments for golden nuggets of customer voice that can knock down the questions, fears and doubts of your buyers.

## Now watch as I cleverly combine two of my strategies...

Don’t stop at mining the golden nugget from the email or survey response. Remember that this feedback the customer just gave is one of those Magic Moments, so this is the perfect time to reach out and ask the customer to tell the full story, expanding on the tidbits they shared in the email or form.



## *8. Make it drop-dead simple for your customers to share their voice.*

Remember the classic customer case studies and customer reference programs we talked about earlier? Well, these are a real P.I.T.A. for your customers. They involve way too much time, effort, and pain.

Because of that, they are a really big “ask”, so it not only burns them out, it burns your customer equity. There are far simpler ways to let customers share their voice.

Not to mention the fact that your buyers today have the attention span of a gnat. We all have ADD. We want things in bite sized morsels, to address our information need at the moment, no more no less.

After all, would you read a novel on American History to find out who won the Civil War? No, if you forgot what you learned in high school history class, you’d just go to Wikipedia and read the first three sentences. Done.

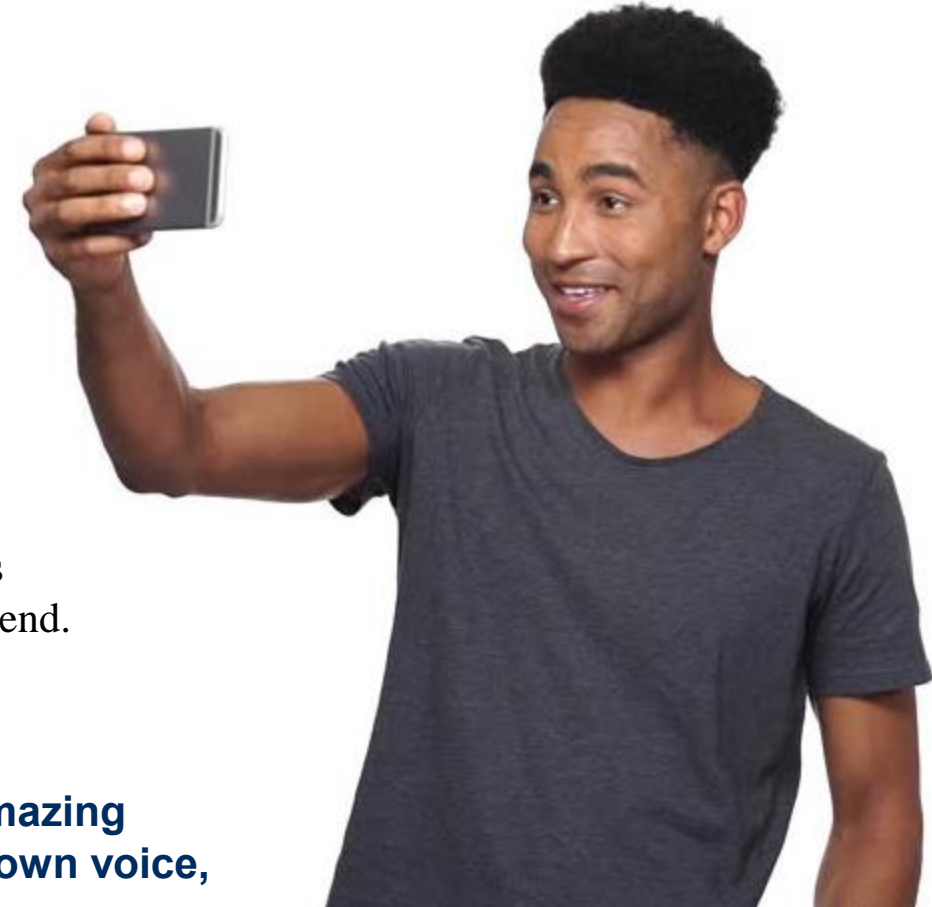
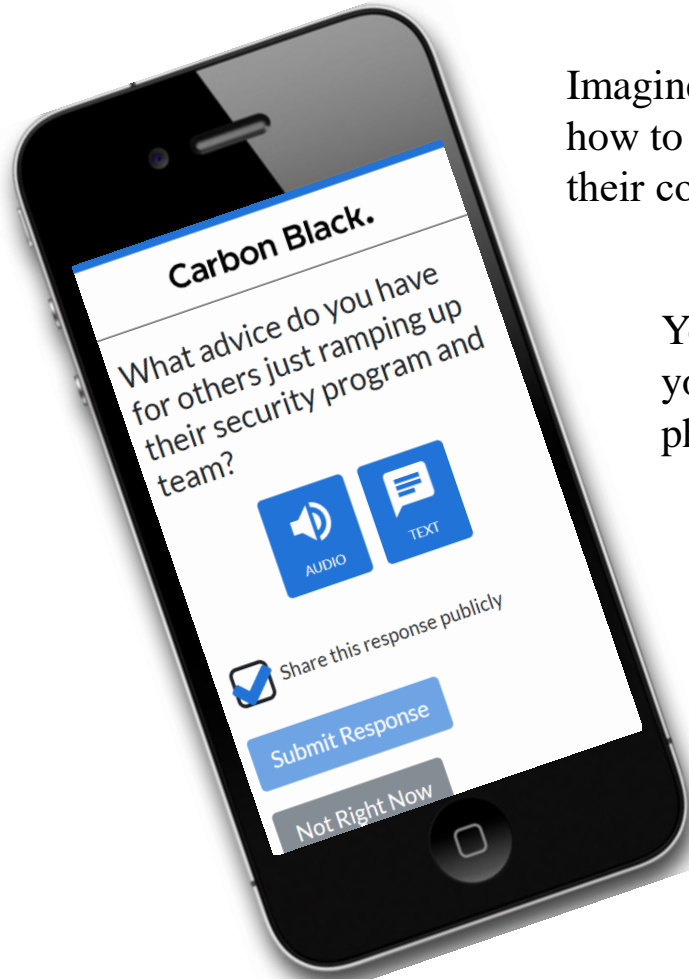
# Let the customer use his favorite little device to share his voice.

Imagine if you knew your buyers struggled with how to fit your anti-virus software product into their company's current security initiatives.

You could send this simple question to a group of your customers, that they see on their mobile phone.

Your customer simply taps a button and starts talking, for 60 seconds, maybe 90, and taps Send.

**Boom! You've now captured an amazing customer story, in the customer's own voice, as a reusable asset.**





So there you go, 8 things you can do right away.

## 8 ways to get customers to share their voice

1. Ask for knowledge, experiences & advice, not testimonials, endorsements & recommendations.
2. Make the customer the hero of the story to build their reputation.
3. Make them an insider by listening to feedback AND responding.
4. Offer customer choices on levels and types of permission to share.
5. Strike at magic moments in the customer relationship.
6. Have the “asks” come from their trusted contact.
7. Capture spontaneous testimony and turn it into reusable assets.
8. Make it drop-dead simple for your customers to share.

## *9. Give your customer something totally unexpected.*

Wait! You thought we were done, didn't you? That I had given you 8 ways to get your customers to share their voice and now you could go put them into action.

But here's a little surprise for you for reading this far. A #9. Did you get a little dopamine rush from getting something you didn't expect? So will your customers.

As I said earlier, if you offer cash payments or other rewards for customers to share, you're not getting the authentic voice, you're getting "paid advocacy".

There's a BIG difference between offering a reward to get your customers to do something, and surprising your customers with a treat they didn't expect.

According to behavioral economists, rewards condition your customers to wait for the next reward to be offered. A little, unexpected treat, on the other hand, is something they never forget, and it makes want to proactively help you by talking about you with their friends, making referrals, and jumping all over every opportunity you give them to share their voice.

# This is a way of saying “We appreciate you.”

## Do it for a special contribution:

If you give them a surprise the first time they share their voice, every time they do something, or for something minor, they perceive it as a reward and will expect it every time you ask.

Do it when they’ve done something unusually significant, such as sharing an amazing success story that will make a huge difference in your marketing, or when they’ve referred a few friends who became customers.

## Make it personal:

Your team should always log the likes and interests of each customer as they come up in discussion. If you want the customer to love you for life, make it about something you know about them, something personal.

And always include a personal, hand-written thank you note from one of your top executives. In fact, the note can be the whole surprise. Your customer will cherish it.

*How'd  
you  
know?*

**Personal hand-written note from CEO**

**2 tickets for favorite sports team**

**Gift card to favorite restaurant**

**Dinner with top exec**

**Bottle of favorite wine**

**VIP seat at customer event**

**Donation to favorite cause**

**Invite to a company meeting**



**Whatever you do, don't give them your swag.**

Here's the full list for those who want to post it on your office wall...

## ~~8~~ 9 ways to get customers to share their voice

1. Ask for knowledge, experiences & advice, not testimonials, endorsements & recommendations.
2. Make the customer the hero of the story to build their reputation.
3. Make them an insider by listening to feedback AND responding.
4. Offer customer choices on levels and types of permission to share.
5. Strike at magic moments in the customer relationship.
6. Have the “asks” come from their trusted contact.
7. Capture spontaneous testimony and turn it into reusable assets.
8. Make it drop-dead simple for your customers to share.
9. Give them something totally unexpected.

# The Holy Grail is an ongoing Customer Voice Program

This book is purposely focused on giving you things you can start doing today to make customers gush at the chance to share their voice. But I'd be remiss if I didn't point out that the ultimate thing you can do to turn your customer voice efforts into a customer-generated content machine that runs 24x7 is to have a Customer Voice Program.

This clearly takes more planning and design than I can cover in this book, but here are some defining characteristics of a Customer Voice Program, and what I did when I built this program at Forrester.

**FORRESTER®**  
**FRONTLINES**

**Branded program.** I called it Forrester Frontlines, and treated every member like a VIP customer.

**Customers opt in.** They expected that they'd be given regular opportunities to share their voice, and each customer would do it once or twice a month.

**Two-way exchange of value.** In addition to letting them share their voice, I also shared knowledge, experience and advice from people in our company and from other customers, to help them succeed.

**Customer voice used internally and externally.** In addition to capturing customer voice to use in our marketing and sales, we got tremendous feedback on new website features and new products in development that was only used internally.

# Are you doing the right things to capture customer voice?

Now it's time to see how your company is doing today with applying these best practices for getting customers to share their voice.

On the next page you'll find our self-assessment.

## Instructions:

For each row, read the statements under the A and the B columns. Pick which statement best describes how it works in your company today. Then check the appropriate A or B box to match the statement.

You must check one and only one of the two boxes for each row.

## Scoring:

Add up your checks in the A column, and the checks in the B column:

	A	B	Your score
Totals	<u>          </u>	- <u>          </u>	= <u>          </u>

If your score is a positive number, you're a laggard and you've got some serious work to do.

If your score is 0 to -4, you're middle of the road.

If your score is -5 to -9, you're showing promise, keep it up.

**Whatever your score, the team and I at SlapFive are here to help.**





# Are you doing the right things to capture customer voice?

A	B	A	B
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	We love to get testimonial quotes and endorsements, and put them on our website.	We prefer to let customers share their knowledge experiences & advice even if they don't mention us.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	We write case studies in the third-person that focus on the results our solution achieved for the customer.	We gather success stories told in the first-person customer's voice & make the customer the hero of the story.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	We do NPS and satisfaction surveys and compile the feedback for our management and product teams.	We capture customer feedback and advice and share the responses and actions we're taking with all customers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If the customer won't let us use their name, we'll write an anonymous story about them.	We have flexible levels of permissions that allow us to make the customer comfortable while being truly authentic.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	We capture customer voice at the points we need it in our business to make decisions or deliver evidence.	We capture customer voice at the events and milestones in the customer lifecycle when they'll have something to say.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	We have someone in marketing ask for introductions and then do the outreach and interviewing of the customer.	We track who is the trusted contact for each of our customers and have the outreach come from that person.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	When we get unsolicited feedback from customers, we circulate it internally and recognize the employee involved.	When we get unsolicited feedback from customers, we mine it and turn it into easily reusable assets that can be injected anywhere.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	We only seek customer voice for big things like case studies, testimonial videos, and speaking to media, analyst, events.	We make it drop-dead easy for customers to share their voice in audio and video formats, with a couple taps on their phone.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	We offer rewards like cash payments and free services to our customers in exchange for them sharing their voice.	We don't offer rewards, instead we surprise them with unexpected perks and other expressions of our appreciation.
		<b>Totals</b>	



## Need help? Here are some next steps.

### See more ways to unleash the customer voice:

Take a look at these examples of [Customer Voice in Action](#) to see how you can improve on the classic case study and testimonial video formats.

### Get some advice on overcoming your customer voice challenges:

Contact me at [jeff@slapfive.com](mailto:jeff@slapfive.com) to set up a time for a free strategy session to discuss what's getting in your way.

### Scale your program with the SlapFive Customer Voice Engine:

Check out SlapFive, get a demo, and see how it can help you build and scale your customer voice program. SlapFive helps you easily capture your customer voice and inject it into every marketing, sales, and success initiative. [Sign up for a demo here.](#)