

Business

'How can we ensure our new shop ticks all the boxes with customers?'

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A health-food café wants to know how to conduct a satisfaction survey so its second outlet goes down well

Opening your second premises is one of the biggest learning curves for any retail business. You want to know what customers really think about your flagship store so you can make the next one even better. Spencer Craig, director of **Pure California**, a healthy food and drinks outlet in Soho, London, is hungry for information.

"Discovering what people like about us is the easy bit - they tell you when they come back day after day. But finding out what we could do better is much harder because if people don't like you, they simply don't come back. It's not as if you can run after them down the street and ask why," he says.

Mr Craig has already decided to ask customers to complete a survey, but he wants to know the best way of eliciting responses that will highlight areas for development. "It needs to be on a minimal budget because we're a small business," he insists. "And we want it to be easy to complete - five or 10 questions, say. People in London don't have the time or inclination to fill out loads of pages about what they like or don't like about us versus another food and drinks outlet."

Ultimately, he says, the challenge is to create a survey that is cheap, short and provides answers that can be turned into action. "Perhaps customers will need persuading to do it," he adds. "We wondered if we should offer a free lunch voucher, for example, to those who fill out the survey."

The idea for **Pure California**, which opened its Soho café last May, came when Mr Craig worked in a London office and got fed up of being able to buy nothing but full-fat lunches in local sandwich shops. It occurred to him that there was a gap in the market for healthier foods. "I've been to the US and I got talking with Greg Castle, my business partner, about how easy it is to get healthy food in New York, but not in London." Mr Craig was also keen to promote choice as a key element of **Pure California**. "If you have somewhere selling soup, that's their speciality. Likewise sandwiches. So we decided to offer different foods at different times of the day, and different days of the week." So at breakfast, you can buy anything from porridge to toast to fruit salads. At lunch, you can grab wraps, sandwiches, freshly tossed salads and soups. Then, in the afternoon, you can pop in for a smoothie or snack.

Among the things that Mr Craig believes customers might have a view on is speed of service. "As we've got busier, we want to ensure people don't feel they're waiting too long. They might also want more information on what's in the food. There's always room for improvement."

www.purecalifornia.co.uk

'People in London don't have time to fill out loads of pages about what they like or don't like about us'

WHATTHE EXPERTS SAY

Paul Cooper

DIRECTOR, INSTITUTE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

"Mr Craig clearly favours the personal touch and he should capitalise on this by finding the time to talk to customers instead of, or on top of, a survey. Staff could also get involved and each session would take just a couple of minutes, which could be done while the customer is queuing.

"What a nice touch it would be to ask people if they would answer a few questions, ensuring they are told why - free publicity - and perhaps offering them a free meal or drink for participating. It's also a great indicator, to both customers and staff, that you really care about service.

"Use checklists, so your qualitative results can become quantitative, and ask the staff for their views too' they should really know their customers in any successful business."

NickCoates

HEAD OF RESEARCH, FRESHMINDS (THE BUSINESS RESEARCH CONSULTANCY)

"A few tried-and-tested tricks can help you get the most from your survey. You have to ask the right questions in the right way, so strip out the nice-to-know from the need-to-know. Brainstorm, draft and refine, and ask what you'll be able to do practically from the answers. Be ruthless, and test it on friends.

"Mix up ratings with open questions' you'll find that asking people for concrete examples of what they like in other stores can provide great ideas for improvement. You'll also want to know some simple things about your customers, such as age, income and where they like to shop. That way, you can get a sense of what a typical customer looks like' and predict demand better. And yes, some kind of reward always helps."

Stewart Masterton

BUSINESS ADVISER, BUSINESS LINK FOR LONDON

"Mr Craig has two options for his survey: conducting it himself or hiring the expertise of a market research agency. While an agency can be expensive, it is a good investment as it can generate more impartial and reliable results.

"The questionnaire should encourage meaningful responses - ie, more than 'yes' or 'no' answers - and walk-in customers and surrounding businesses should be targeted.

"To broaden the survey's reach, Mr Craig might consider seeking responses via his phone-ordering or web-ordering service. An incentive is a good way of increasing participation and should be considered. At least 150 surveys should be completed.

"As this is a small-scale project, Mr Craig may benefit by using a freelance researcher. I suggest he visits the free online directory on the British Market Research Association website or the Research Buyers Guide website for details of reputable people."

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