

# THE DIRECTOR

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## NFDA 2020

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## *Hearing Your Customers'*

# *Voice*

**WHAT IS VoC DATA, WHY DOES IT MATTER AND HOW CAN YOU CAPTURE IT?**

BY WELTON HONG

NFDA's annual consumer survey is a huge deal, and I know many funeral service providers look forward to the insights it can offer, along with the data necessary for better understanding industry trends and how a funeral home's services need to match them.

With that said, I hope all funeral directors are already taking proactive measures to understand families in their area. Professionals in any industry should know their clientele intimately. Benchmarks gleaned from NFDA's annual survey are great for big-picture assessment, but they're not all you need to make informed decisions about marketing your firm. You need those big-picture benchmarks, plus a deep dive into "voice of the customer" data.

Consider it in the context of planning a major vacation. I hope by the time you're reading this that COVID-19 has eased up and family vacations are becoming a reality again for many people. That like sounds wishful thinking as I write it, but I like to be optimistic. We're not there yet, but let's dream about it for a moment.

When planning a vacation, you must first decide on some big-picture items. How much can you spend, who's going, when does the trip fit into your schedule and what's your destination?

Once you have the big picture, you concentrate on the details, deciding to spend four days on the coast and three in the mountains. You read reviews,

book hotels and make a list of all the attractions, restaurants and scenic vistas you want to include in your trip.

Without either of these processes, your trip would be more difficult, perhaps even unsuccessful. Similarly, without both benchmark data and analysis from organizations such as NFDA and your own "voice of the customer" data, your marketing will be more difficult and has a higher chance at being unsuccessful.

### **WHAT IS VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER?**

Voice of the customer, or VoC, is a term used in marketing and several methodologies for process improvement, including Six Sigma. It sounds technical because it has a fancy acronym, but the concept is simple. It literally refers to the overall "voice" of your target audience.

You listen to this voice by hearing, gathering and reviewing feedback and data from consumers, including previous clientele, potential clientele and those simply in your target audience.

Still not convinced that VoC data is important to your funeral home? Consider this: More than 95% of people say the experience a business provides – and whether it's relevant and appropriate – is a top factor in making a purchase decision or remaining loyal. And more than half of all consumers expect

businesses to respond to feedback in proactive ways.

But you can't respond to feedback or incorporate it in your services if you don't gather it in the first place.

### GATHERING VoC FOR YOUR FIRM

Luckily, you don't have to conduct a massive survey along the lines of NFDA for your purposes. Organic VoC can come from sources much closer to home. Here are just a few ways you might capture customer feedback for your funeral home:

**REVIEWS** Some readers may already know that I'm a massive advocate for generating reviews, particularly on Google. Reviews have value in search engine optimization, online marketing and brand reputation.

They also provide a gold mine of customer feedback. Often the information in reviews is more honest and complete than what you might get in a direct conversation with clientele because reviewers write for the benefit of other consumers. Reviews provide data on what you're doing right, what you might be doing wrong and the overall consensus about how well you're meeting families' needs.

**1:1 CONVERSATIONS** Direct conversations with clientele can also be valuable, especially when you have a specific question. For example, you might want to know if a new casket option is more preferred than an old one or what people think is the most important part of a memorial service. By asking families as you meet with them, you can get an idea of the consensus, as well as outliers that might also need to be considered.

**PRAISE AND COMPLAINTS** Just being aware and ready to listen helps you and your staff gather VoC feedback. Train staff to jot down praises and complaints heard from clientele or others and then share that information in weekly huddle meetings. This can be a great method for discovering small changes that can make a big difference.

**SOCIAL SURVEYS** Ask questions on social media to understand what people are interested in. Poll followers to find out whether preplanning is something they have considered and determine what is most holding them back from planning their own final arrangements. You can collect data while encouraging engagement on your profiles, which also helps increase your reach on social media.

### ANALYZING VoC DATA

Concerns, questions or comments you've never even considered to be VoC data can bring to light consumer challenges, thoughts and worries that even the most experienced funeral home directors haven't

thought about. Work with your team to determine whether these are common trends in VoC feedback and whether it would be beneficial to your firm and clientele to address them.

**POSITIVE TRENDS** Chances are you're doing a lot right, and VoC data can help you move forward with confidence or make sound decisions to invest more in those areas.

**NEGATIVE TRENDS** No one is perfect, and VoC feedback helps you know where you might improve. Remember that a single negative piece of feedback doesn't necessarily mean you should change your entire process. But if you notice a trend in the data, it might be time to address the issues.

Use everything you learn to make continual process improvements and power your marketing.

If customer feedback turns up common worries or concerns, write blog posts, downloadable checklists and social media statuses to answer those questions. You'll position yourself as a trustworthy expert and will potentially perform better in search results. If people are asking the questions out loud, there's a very good chance they're typing them into browser bars as well.

VoC also helps you understand which specific services are gaining traction – and are potentially worth boosting with paid ads – and which aren't working out well and may need rethinking.

Alternatively, feedback can help you understand where potential clientele misunderstood your message, giving you the opportunity to tweak landing pages, ad copy or blog posts.

### USING BENCHMARK DATA ALONGSIDE VoC

Remember that marketing should never be developed in a vacuum. Benchmark data is a great place to start when you're creating your own processes to capture the unique voice of your customers.

In fact, you can easily start today. As you peruse the data from NFDA's consumer survey, look for information that surprises you. Is it also true for your clientele? If you see a point covered in the survey data that you've never considered, discuss it with your team. Is it potentially relevant to your firm and should you find out more about how your target audience feels about it?

Every person has unique experiences that inform his or her view of the world. Using benchmark information from other organizations helps ensure that your own experience doesn't limit your ability to capture adequate VoC data to inform your marketing and business practices. ☰

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