

HOW KEY SURVEY IS HELPING THE WORLD'S LARGEST CRUISE AGENCY TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER FEEDBACK AND AGENT PERFORMANCE

By directly relating customer feedback to the specific employees that that customer dealt with, National Leisure Group is using Key Survey to measure and improve both employee performance and customer satisfaction. This data – much more focused and specific than anything NLG has had in the past – is leading to better training, more accurate evaluations, and more satisfied customers.

Key Survey is a powerful, automated tool for getting actionable information.

If you've been on a cruise recently, then chances are that you've done business with NLG – they're the world's largest cruise agency, five times the size of their competitors Travelocity, Expedia or Cruise.com. More than twenty million people have booked cruises through NLG, and in 2005 alone they handled \$800 million in sales through 288,000 reservations.

NLG's head office is in Woburn, Massachusetts, but only a fraction of their thousand or so employees are based there. Many of the rest work from major offices in Virginia Beach and Florida, but NLG also has sixteen retail locations across Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire, and several dozen agents working from locations around the country. With this size and geographical diversity, tracking agent performance can be difficult – but in NLG's service-oriented field, it's critical.

When service counts, feedback is essential.

"One of our main inputs is customer surveying," said Christina Orfanos, NLG's Director of Customer Operations. "My job is to understand what the customer experience is, and what's really great about Key Survey is the fact that we can tie our survey to an individual customer."

NLG began using Key Survey in July 2003, at first for a completely different purpose.

"I was looking for a tool to do internal employment satisfaction surveys. That was the original function," said Julianna Hale, Director of Human Resources, Internal Communications. "We did use it for that at first. Then, we realized it had a much broader and efficient application for feedback on meetings, presentations and events – but it ended up getting more and more popular for different reasons."

Key Survey is a multi-purposed tool – get information on anything.

Hale also started using Key Survey as a nomination form for their employee recognition program, and as a registration tool. "Our employees actually register through Key Survey when we have meetings, company events, or learning and development programs," she said. "It's really a great registration tool, and a great feedback tool."

"We went from there to using it for exit interviews," Hale said, "and we then rolled it to the customer service department. Christina Orfanos, who at that time was the Director of Customer Service, used the tool team-wide for team development. Her role changed to the head of the company's quality assurance and customer experience, and she began using the survey tool to better understand and improve our customers' experience."

Orfanos began using Key Survey in the fall of 2005, with surveys aimed at customers immediately after making a reservation, and a second survey for when they returned home.

It's easy to use, efficient, and flexible.

“We have three distinct NLG owned brands,” Orfanos said. “We built surveys for each of those brands; we try to keep them as concise as possible, so we created multiple post-booking surveys in order to really get a sense of the different ways that customers reached us, what their experience has been with us, and why they came to us.”

Key Survey's ability to import data from other applications has allowed NLG to associate specific customers with specific salespeople. Surveys are sent out by email, with a link to the survey's webpage. This contains the customer's reservation number.

“We can tie it right back to the customer reservation,” Orfanos said. “We can include the product type, cruise or land vacation, when they made a reservation, and who, specifically they made the reservation with. So we tie the survey results right back to a given agent, and then we can quantify that.”

Exchange data – automatically – with other applications.

These scores can be qualified by individual employee, by team and by team leader, meaning that NLG can see the effectiveness of any group, of a team leader or coach, or of the organization as a whole.

“We use a rating scale of one to seven, and there are four to six satisfaction-related questions in each survey,” Orfanos said. The exact number of questions varies, since NLG's surveys are able to branch depending on customers' earlier answers – not all customers are asked the same questions. “We take the resulting information and communicate it to specific groups based on these results. It's used to provide feedback on the front-line agents' management and training and to our product team, as well.”

Get specific feedback – aggregate an individual's performance on particular matters.

Another team under Orfanos uses Key Survey to evaluate agent performance differently – her quality assurance team uses it to monitor and report on sales and service phonecalls.

“We have about 300 people in sales, and 100 in service,” said Orfanos, “and a team of four specialists whose job it is to listen in on phonecalls.” In the past NLG had used Excel for this, but now this team simply enters their feedback on a Key Survey form, grading agents in fields such as listening skills, communications skills and accuracy.

“This isn't a traditional use for Key Survey,” Orfanos said, “but we use it because we find the reporting excellent. It allows us to have all the information in one place.”

Key Survey gives you your data when you need it – quickly.

As well as quantifying satisfaction data and tracking performance specifics, Key Survey allows NLG's customer relations department a third major benefit: rapid response. Survey results are looked at daily, and negative responses – unfavorable comments, or very low ratings – result in a phonecall to the unhappy customer in the hope of satisfying them.

NLG is presently working with Key Survey to go further: to directly integrate Key Survey into their data warehouse system. And the performance information they're gathering now will be used to create benchmarks that will play an important role in agent and supervisor performance reviews. They're also working to find a way to survey customers who phoned and who didn't make a reservation, in order to find why they didn't.

Key Survey can integrate seamlessly with your existing applications.

"We've set up a department to create benchmarks for customer satisfaction all the way down to the agent level," said Hale. "We're gathering data from customers and capturing several different elements through the company. The information that we get will be a catalyst for the next steps."

Already, less than a year into full deployment, Key Survey has allowed NLG to get a much better grasp of customer opinion and their competitive landscape – which other companies their customers have considered, and why they chose NLG. And it's providing them with metrics and feedback that will differentiate NLG from any other travel provider.

Key Survey gives you a comprehensive picture of exactly where you stand – and how to improve.

"We're understanding the knowledge base of the customer," Orfanos said, "and the paths they take to get to us. Key Survey is helping us to improve marketing and customer-service efficiency all across the organization."

"Our mission statement," agreed Hale, "to deliver a remarkable experience, can and will only happen if we know the kind of experiences our customers expect and ultimately receive. And with Key Survey, we are able to do just that."