

# Beyond CSAT — building brands with integrated insights to drive results

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### Abstract

*Connectivity and complexity seem to go hand in hand in our daily lives. It is estimated that every second 127 new devices are connected to the Internet. And most of this connectivity can be powered from the palm of our hands. With the amazingly powerful tool that is today's smartphone, we can accomplish more and more — search for jobs, connect with friends and family, check the security of our homes, stream music and video, monitor our washer and dryer — the list goes on and on. As a result, consumers are more dependent than ever on their smartphones and have an increasing need for support to fix technical problems and to learn how to take advantage of a connected life. Such a landscape of unmet needs represents an enticing and, at the same time, daunting business opportunity. To meet these needs with products and services that delight rather than frustrate consumers, across the millions of different types of needs they are likely to face, requires a comprehensive and agile consumer insights programme that is integrated into the operational structure of the service provider who seeks to fill this gap. That is exactly what Asurion, the industry-leading provider of tech care and protection plans, has been developing in partnership with national carriers and retailers. Asurion is dedicated to providing a customer experience focused on three principles: Remarkably Human, Delightfully Simple and Actually Helpful. The company's customer insights programme leverages a multi-modal approach to identify critical drivers behind variations in CSAT (customer satisfaction), NPS (net promoter score), churn and LOE (level of effort). Then through deep collaboration with cross-functional teams, Asurion's customer insights team applies those learnings to help develop solutions, leveraging the latest tech tools, particularly AI. This investment in deep customer insights helps identify opportunity areas, leading to customer interactions that feel customised and deliver not only specific solutions, but also added value that drives satisfaction and loyalty. Most critically, customer satisfaction and loyalty ultimately translate into positive top-line and bottom-line financial results.*

### Keywords

*connectivity, smartphones, technical support, tech care, multi-modal approach, customer satisfaction (CSAT), net promoter score (NPS), level of effort (LOE)*

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## INTRODUCTION

Smartphones have become indispensable in the lives of consumers. Smartphones connect consumers to important people in their lives and enable an even wider social connectivity. They enable the always-on monitoring of news, entertainment, finances, health, homes and work. As smartphones grow increasingly essential to consumers, the many points of connectivity add convenience, but also complexity.

The central role of smartphones in consumers' lives creates challenges and opportunities for the carriers and retailers who sell them. If the consumer loses or damages the phone, life can come to a halt, and there is intense urgency to get a replacement as quickly and seamlessly as possible. How that process is handled can either significantly enhance the relationship between the consumer and the provider or create lasting negative effects. Additionally, as the smartphone plays an increasingly vital role in facilitating the consumer's connected life, the need has increased for a single source, the one place to go, for tech support to ensure that all the connections and functionality of that smartphone work well across apps and devices and that the total tech ecosystem works to enrich, not complicate, the consumer's life. The provider that delivers that sort of solution can deliver increased loyalty and decreased churn and realise a more robust bottom line.

## INTEGRATED INSIGHTS

To respond to and, more importantly, anticipate consumer needs in this complex environment, providers need to rely on a comprehensive, integrated insights system that goes beyond simple CSAT (customer satisfaction) measurement. Asurion, one of the leaders in providing tech care and protection plans to major carriers and

retailers for almost a quarter of a century, has partnered with its clients to develop a sophisticated, state-of-the-art suite of voice-of-the-customer (VOC) strategic and analytic tools.

The customer listening programme depends upon a multi-modal matrix of performance measurements and diagnostic tools. It begins with extensive, continuous measurement of customer satisfaction using Net Promoter Scores (NPS) to assess relationship and transaction satisfaction, as well as measures of customer ease of experience and loyalty. NPS is calculated on the basis of responses to a single rating question that asks: 'How likely is it that you would recommend us to a friend?' The rating scale is 11 points, where 10 is 'Extremely Likely' and 0 is 'Not at All Likely'. The 'net' in the NPS is a simple calculation of the difference between those who provide a rating of 9 or 10, called Promoters, and those who provide a rating of 0–6, called Detractors. (Those who are in the middle, with a rating of 7 or 8, are called Passives.) If 60 per cent of a sample qualify as Promoters and 20 per cent qualify as Detractors, then the NPS calculation is  $60 - 20 = +40$ .

Bain & Company developed NPS, which has become a widely used overall satisfaction measure owing, in part, to research that demonstrates the impactful business results associated with positive NPS.<sup>1</sup>

Asurion uses NPS not only to measure overall relationship, but also to assess the experience of numerous individual transaction types. In some cases, Asurion will substitute a customer satisfaction scale for NPS to meet partner needs. Survey results from transaction touchpoints across both claims and tech support are analysed on a granular basis to determine which transactions are rated relatively more or less positive. Specifically, surveys are issued in near real time at point of support request. This

can include point of claim on the Asurion website via weblink or after a claim with a call centre via interactive voice response (IVR), post claim via e-mail survey or Readex card survey and/or post tech support interaction via IVR survey or chat survey. When an issue is identified, numerous diagnostic tools are applied, including social media listening, in-depth conversations with customers in person or virtually, custom quantitative surveys, text analytics and internal front-line feedback. Potential solutions to identified problems can then be developed and tested in Asurion's labs.

A critical element in this system is understanding the consumer journey and the elements that drive overall CSAT at every step. This deep diagnostic approach identifies actions to improve service delivery, which result in higher NPS scores. While measuring and delivering insights to indicate where actions can deliver overall results is a critical first step, efforts can still fall short without clear incentives that ensure actions are taken. Individual or team performance incentives are linked to actions that translate into positive top-line and bottom-line financial results. In addition to measuring the overall experience via Asurion NPS, Vendor NPS, specific product NPS, CSAT or overall satisfaction, survey feedback is also gathered on level of effort (LOE), representative resolution rate (did the expert or representative solve the customer's problem), and five star (a metric used for chat) to measure and assess performance across the organisation from leadership to call centre agents. Asurion also establishes and tracks formal goals for NPS and other customer experience metrics at the enterprise level; these metrics and goals are incorporated into objectives and key results (OKRs) for teams throughout the enterprise.

To effectively drive results, the process of cascading enterprise-wide OKRs

through the organisation is critical to Asurion's high performance. Once the enterprise-level OKRs are set, they are communicated down to leaders and team members who create OKRs relevant to their functions. Objectives for team members are aligned with the larger objectives of their leader and the organisation and are focused on what they are individually going to accomplish each quarter over the course of the year. Each team member also commits to outcomes, metrics or deliverables that enable success of their objective. To ensure OKRs are achieved, commitments are tracked via a goal-tracking system. Team members and leaders engage in quarterly check-ins to review progress, align on development going forward and reconfirm goals/objectives for the remainder of the year. The cascading of goals and leader-team member check-ins ensure Asurion's high performance standards are achieved.

In addition to collaborative goal setting, incentives are used to increase the likelihood of success. Incentives can take traditional forms such as competition-based rewards (eg a rep's relative performance in using the 'serve, solve, sell' benefits approach), straight financial incentives as either commission or bonus and/or the prospect of being promoted. Acceptance to Asurion's world-class leadership development programme is a much coveted internally developed reward. This programme has been in place for over ten years and is empirically linked to both customer retention and CSAT improvement. The programme was leveraged to quickly implement a 'same day network' and has grown to include several hundred employees who together receive a star rating of 4.98 out of 5.0. They help to create a culture of excellence other employees seek to live up to.

## DEEP DIVE TO INSIGHTS

The increased complexity consumers face in maximising the utility of their smartphones is mirrored in the complexity that must be managed in identifying meaningful opportunities to improve the customer experience. In providing smartphone service and support, literally hundreds of distinct customer journeys have been identified. The integrated insights process determines the frequency of each of those distinct journeys, some that happen 10 per cent or more of the time, some that happen less than 1 per cent of the time.

The insights system captures granular performance metrics that frame and focus the diagnostic efforts. For instance, it is possible to look at differences in NPS results by the time it takes to complete a given process. When a drop-off in NPS is identified, the specific transactions associated with those ratings can be analysed to determine what distinguishes it from its more satisfying counterparts. So if one-day completion is the gold standard, what drivers explain a two-day process? Are those the same factors that contribute to a three- or four-day completion process? These factors are not identified via consumer feedback — the difference in NPS drivers is used to identify where the process should be investigated, and then process specialists dig into the internal data to identify potential root causes.

This diagnostic analysis is not a one-size-fits-all process. In some cases, consumers may be willing for a resolution to take more time. What is important is to understand where resolution time affects satisfaction. For instance, Asurion identified one particular interaction where NPS dropped by 30 points when the resolution took more than a single day. Cross-functional teams did a deep dive into the elements of that particular process and

determined that providing the customer with more opportunities to handle important steps directly through a digital interface could shorten the cycle time. Once those changes were implemented, NPS levels recovered the 30 points.

At times, text analytics proves to be a particularly powerful tool to dig into performance issues. For instance, longer interaction handling time can erode satisfaction. Asurion noted that an unexpectedly large number of tech support calls were taking in excess of 25 minutes to complete, leading to lower levels of satisfaction. The number and variety of these calls made it difficult to discern any pattern that would explain why the calls were taking so long. By using text analytics to mine the transcripts, two important topics were identified to be most associated with the lengthier interactions. Once those topics were highlighted, the process improvement team worked to anticipate issues and address them more efficiently. It is important to note that handling time in and of itself is not a metric that drives service delivery at Asurion — the important thing is to track when length of call leads to lower satisfaction and to identify the driver.

This root cause analysis led to a dramatic decrease in the number of calls that lasted over 25 minutes, resulting in higher levels of satisfaction among customers. At the same time, the more efficient interactions resulted in operational cost savings with a direct financial benefit to the organisation.

## EXCELLING AT EVERY STEP

Another important element built into the insights process is to take a total system view of transactions, rather than looking at each individual step in the customer journey. By doing so, Asurion helps its partners understand the cumulative positive effect



of delighting the customer at every step of the process.

For instance, when a customer needs to make a claim, it is critical to start the process on the right foot and ensure that the customer understands the available options for initiating the claim (for instance, phone call, text, chat) and can choose the path that best meets needs. Failure to begin the process by empowering the customer generally erodes satisfaction.

Once the customer chooses the preferred way to enter the claim process, it is essential to maintain a single point of contact — or at least a perceived single point of contact. Asurion has learned it is okay to transfer a customer from a bot to a live representative so long as that transfer is seamless to the customer and feels like a continued single point of contact. If the customer feels like she has been transferred to a resource that does not understand her needs and must start over, her satisfaction will erode. Inherent in the single point of contact is the related expectation that the problem will be resolved in a single step. Adding additional steps generally erodes satisfaction.

Finally, the faster the claim resolution takes place, the more positive the customer will be about the experience. This generally means aiming to resolve the issue in the same day or by the next day. Customers whose claims are resolved on the same day they are submitted are 39 per cent less likely to churn than those whose resolution takes longer than one day.

When these four important criteria are all met for customers filing a claim — a successful start, a single point of contact, a one-step resolution, and resolution time of next day or sooner — customer satisfaction measures are quite strong. In fact, if this positive scenario is compared with its opposite, when all four criteria fail to be met, the NPS for the positive scenario

tends to be +110 points higher than for the negative scenario (note: the maximum NPS range is 200 points).

## ACTIVE LISTENING

Generally, when capturing NPS scores, Asurion follows up with an open-ended question that asks customers to provide some explanation for why they have rated their experience as they have. Asurion mines these verbatim responses as an early warning detection system to identify issues that need to be addressed.

For instance, when new content was added to Asurion's website for customers who wanted to file claims, a team of analysts who monitor the customer feedback verbatim along the claims journey each day compared notes when unexpected mentions of the third-party authentication vendor were flagged. Unexpectedly, many customers experienced some difficulties with the authentication process designed to ensure that they are real humans and not a bot (ie check the boxes where you see a bicycle). While the claim process itself worked fine, this difficulty in entering the claim system was generating material drop-offs in survey ratings, indicating dissatisfaction. The issue was elevated, the vendor was contacted and the issue was remediated. Through constant monitoring and internal dialogue that will soon be artificial intelligence (AI) enabled, the issue was identified and addressed quickly.

## FILLING A WHITE SPACE

As Asurion worked with its business partners to drive partner loyalty and CSAT, it became apparent that a certain amount of customer dissatisfaction was driven by the numerous, highly personalised complex tasks that customers complete with their smartphones. Yes, there are the expected

questions about how to move everything from your old smartphone to your new smartphone and questions about how to prolong battery life. As the pace of change in the world of Internet of Things (IoT) has accelerated, however, with an estimated 127 new devices connecting to the Internet every second,<sup>2</sup> customers were increasingly frustrated in their efforts to integrate new technology into their lives in ways that enabled them to enjoy the benefits of that technology.

In working with its wireless carrier and retail partners, Asurion saw an opportunity to fill that gap with enhanced protection plans that not only insure the physical equipment, but also provide readily accessible expert support to help address numerous pain points in IoT adoption and related tech life and completely address the tech care needs of customers.

With the customer experience at the forefront, this tech support can be accessed based on preference — over the phone by voice or text, in a store or even coming to the customer's home. In developing this tech support service, Asurion considered not only the practical problems that customers often face, but also the emotional dynamics they bring to challenging situations. Often customers feel a mix of frustration, impatience and embarrassment with the tech difficulties they are trying to solve. Tech experts or coaches, whether bot or human, are trained to provide support in an empathetic, understanding fashion that encourages subsequent interactions with the service. For customers filing claims, those who interacted with a trained tech expert reported NPS scores 12 points higher than those who did not.

Since this 'concierge' level of service comes under the umbrella of the carrier's or retailer's product protection plan, the carrier or retailer benefits through higher overall NPS scores, compared with

customers who have not interacted with tech support. And that greater level of satisfaction translates into reduced churn and higher loyalty for the wireless carrier or retailer, with attendant positive financial outcomes.

## BEYOND SURVEYS

While tools like NPS are essential to insights discovery, examining behavioural data at a granular level also provides valuable insights. For instance, the insights team and their internal partners noticed some customers who buy a protection plan appear to have buyer's remorse and soon cancel the plan. Diagnostic efforts focused on looking at available behavioural data to understand the difference in experiences between those who cancelled and those who did not.

The analysis found that those who cancelled tended not to have had any further interaction with the carrier or retailer after signing up for the plan. If, however, the customer was encouraged to experience the service by downloading an app to enhance their knowledge and experience with their new phone, that engagement was associated with less churn. And engaging with a tech expert had a similar impact on reduced churn. Further, when the customer has a claim experience engaging both with an app and with a tech expert, churn is approximately 50 per cent lower. This churn reduction more than justified the investment in steps to proactively engage customers at the start of their subscription.

## THE FINANCIAL IMPACT OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Asurion's efforts to increase customer engagement and customer satisfaction to ensure relevance in increasingly complex

lives are not without cost, of course. This raises an important business question: do these investments in customer engagement and customer satisfaction result in sufficient improvements in business performance to generate a meaningful return to the company? We have already touched on reduction in operating costs, increase in volumes of calls handled and higher loyalty. Benefits to the business, however, go well beyond that.

It is helpful to look to the scientific marketing literature to gain a perspective on this important question. Whether or not investments in customer satisfaction produce a net financial benefit to the firm is best answered by studying *investor behaviour*, at least for publicly listed firms. Indeed, it is often assumed that investors (and therefore the stock market overall) react only to changes in a firm's expected future earnings, which sometimes leads to a perception that 'only quarterly earnings reports matter'. Careful empirical research into the determinants of stock prices and stock returns, however, has shown otherwise. In particular, Fornell et al. (2016)<sup>3</sup> conducted an extensive longitudinal study of the relationship between customer satisfaction levels (as measured periodically by the ACSI, the American Customer Satisfaction Index) and firm value (as measured by stock prices). They document that, over a 15-year period (2000–2014), an investment portfolio based on a firm's customer satisfaction scores would have yielded a cumulative return of 518 per cent. By comparison, investing in the S&P500 would have yielded a cumulative return of 31 per cent over the same time period. Note that this long sample period includes the major financial crisis that started in 2007.

Another predictor of future returns, revenue growth, can be predicted by understanding the relevance of a brand in consumers' lives. Relevance is a leading

indicator of both revenue and profit growth as measured by Prophet's BRI Study,<sup>4</sup> which assesses Relentless Relevance among 51,000 consumers across 700 brands annually. Relevance is a calculation averaging 16 attributes across four dimensions: customer obsession, ruthless pragmatism, distinctively inspiring and pervasively innovative. Data reveals that the revenue growth of the most relevant brands outperformed the S&P 500 average revenue growth by 230 per cent and EBIT growth by 1,040 per cent over the past ten years.

The main takeaway is that changes in important customer metrics, even though they are not financial metrics, contain information about the future of a business that is not reflected in earnings and other financial data collected during the same period. The marketing profession offers, of course, an intuitive explanation for this phenomenon: satisfied customers are more likely to become or remain loyal to the brand, to increase their consumption of the brand and/or to recommend the brand to others, all of which impact future revenue generation in ways that current cash flows may not (yet) reflect. In other words, customer satisfaction can be a leading indicator of future firm performance, holding other drivers of that performance constant.

A simple example illustrates this important principle. Suppose that, before the investments in customer engagement, 80 per cent of Company X's customers typically renewed their annual subscription. If the typical per-customer annual gross margin is \$100, then each customer (on average) generates the following stream of gross margins to the company:

$$\begin{aligned} &\$100 + \$100 \times 0.8 + \$100 \times 0.8 \times 0.8 \\ &+ \dots = \$100 / (1 - 0.8) = \$500. \end{aligned}$$

Note that, for simplicity, this calculation is expressed in constant dollars. Now, if



Company X's investment results in higher loyalty rates (say, from 80 per cent renewal to 90 per cent), but also in a somewhat lower gross margin (say, from \$100 to \$90), then the long-term stream of gross margins becomes

$$\begin{aligned} & \$90 + \$90 \times 0.9 + \$90 \times 0.9 \times 0.9 \\ & + \dots = \$90 / (1 - 0.9) = \$900. \end{aligned}$$

So, again as an illustration, for every 1,000 Company X customers, the expected gross margin stream for the company increases from \$500,000 to \$900,000. Note that the percentage increase in customer loyalty was only 12.5 per cent (10/80), but the expected long-term gross margin increase is 80 per cent (400/500).

These investments in customer satisfaction can be evaluated using traditional financial investment criteria, so long as one is willing to take a long-term view of the business. In so doing, note that the foregoing example was simplified in a few ways: cost-of-capital numbers were not considered, nor was the impact of higher retention rates (lower churn). Additional sources of revenue can be generated from customers increasing their spending with Company X and spreading positive word of mouth to other consumers.

While the exact numbers are proprietary information, it can be reported that (1) Asurion's customer satisfaction rates increased substantially as a result of customer engagement investments and that (2) Asurion's clients' churn rates declined radically, setting Asurion's performance above industry expectations, a prime example of 'doing well by doing good'.

## CONCLUSION

Smartphones have introduced a steady stream of change into the lives of consumers. Every day, the potential of smartphones to enhance lives through greater

functionality and connectivity expands. That constant change creates challenges for consumers, as they struggle to master new tools and to manage the complex web of connections that flow through their smartphones.

Asurion continues to strive to be a leader in customer experience, seeing it as a potent differentiator in an increasingly competitive and complex world. Despite access to more customer data than at any point in history, only 23 per cent of companies surveyed in a recent Harvard Business Review study believe their organisation understands why their customers act the way they do.<sup>5</sup> Asurion is willing to follow the advice of Martin Lindstrom, founder and chairman of Lindstrom Company and author of *Small Data: The Tiny Clues That Uncover Huge Trends*: 'Get your hands dirty to see the world from the customer's point of view. You have to put yourself in their shoes and feel what they feel. Then you have something valuable.' Asurion's omnichannel front-line customer experience team does just that by following the customer digitally, in home doing replacement and repairs and in store to uncover a deeper understanding of the consumer's spoken and unspoken needs. These integrated insights fuel continuous improvements in customer experience.

To successfully deliver on Asurion's customer experience principles Remarkably Human, Delightfully Simple and Actually Helpful, the company's customer experience measurement team continues to push the envelope to integrate cutting-edge tools and techniques like advanced text analytics and AI to more rapidly identify issues and quickly remediate them. In delivering this state-of-the-art, proactive level of service, Asurion helps its partners enhance the image of their brands, generate greater brand loyalty and, most importantly, hold itself accountable to drive better business results.

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