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Maximizing Feedback with Enterprise Feedback Management Systems

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By Karen Schwartz

A New Technology for an Old Business Problem

If you have a CRM system in place, you're getting all of the customer feedback you need, right?

Not everybody thinks so. There are more effective ways to gather and manage customer feedback, and when it comes to feedback, there is no such thing as too much, as long as you have methods in place to understand it, manage it, and ultimately use it to your advantage.

That's where **Enterprise Feedback Management (EFM)** comes in. The term isn't well-known and was in fact coined by the enterprise software vendor community, but what it describes is legitimately important to companies that strive to better serve customers. At its simplest (and least useful) level, EFM is an expansion of the survey platforms sold to companies by vendors like Confirm it, RightNow Technologies and MarketTools, allowing for the interception of customer transactions in an effort to find out what went wrong and fix it. In fact, it's these companies that are the biggest *EFM software* vendors today.

When used comprehensively—usually in combination with a *customer relationship management (CRM) system*—EFM software solutions help systematically collect and analyze customer feedback from multiple channels in real time, with the goal of using that information to create changes that improve response time, service, and ultimately, profitability. That feedback can come from many sources, including conversations, Web site actions, social media networks and online chat.

So as opposed to a survey platform, which might sample 1,000 people to understand what they collectively think about a specific issue, EFM can be used to find out if a specific customer has a problem, with the goal of immediately resolving it. EFM software implementations are often a prelude to a [customer experience management](#) program.

Let's say, for example, that a customer starts a web-based transaction, but ultimately aborts it. An EFM system would issue an alert, which is routed to the right person on the team. That person would immediately reach out to the customer and rectify the problem. Along the way, the company collects a central repository of customer insights, which can be mined in any of dozens of productive ways, and used to reengineer business processes.

You might ask why you need an EFM system if you've got a *CRM software system*. Brad Bortner, a principal analyst at Forrester Research, says that simply put, CRM software has never been very good at the survey part of the equation. He believes that over time, major CRM vendors may buy EFM vendors to create more full-featured offerings. But for the time being, it's about finding hooks between the two.

However you want to slice and dice it, one thing is clear: The concept of listening to your customers at every connection point, and working to fix their problems, is a powerful one. If EFM does the job, go for it. Finding a way is what it's all about. ■

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By [Lisa Starks](#)

I don't think customers have the time nor patience to complete customer surveys that companies probably don't even read, let alone learn from.

Your comment strikes a very salient point when soliciting customer feedback. I recently had the opportunity to hear and meet Richard Hanks, President of [Mindshare Technologies](#) at the CRM Evolution conference in New York. That meeting also encouraged me to read his book titled

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“When used comprehensively, and usually in concert with a *CRM system*, EFM software solutions help systematically collect and analyze customer feedback from multiple channels in real time, with the goal of using that information to create changes that improve response time, service, and ultimately, profitability.”

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Delivering and Measuring Customer Service. According to Hanks, customers are quite willing to give their feedback as long as it will be acted upon. In his research, 85% of survey respondents said they are willing to complete survey responses, 72% share their customer experiences on social networks and 40% expect the businesses they mention to be listening.

By *salsmeek*

I think part of the difficulty in gathering the voice of the customer on social media is finding real information sources and separating actionable customer feedback from noise. Customer comments left on facebook aren't publicly available if you're not their friend. Also, it seems to me that the 72% of customers cited in the prior post that share their experiences on Twitter are largely producing noise.

Achieving a true voice of the customer requires constant monitoring of multiple social media channels. While you may not be able to access your customers' Facebook comments, you can create a company/fan page and encourage customers to join - and subsequently get their feedback. Twitter's 140 character brevity may make much of the tweets non-actionable, but the tweets that are acted upon can produce big growth in customer share and recurring sales.

By *Graham P.*

What software program do you recommend to do EFM or gather the voice of customer?

Depending upon your customer support strategy and business objectives, if you're looking for a closed loop solution you will likely find that multiple information systems may be required to systemically gather and act on customer feedback using social channels and proactive surveys. There are social media monitoring tools, often called social listening tools, that will detect a mention of your company or product name and send you an alert. Social listening tool vendors include Alterian, Attensity, Cisco's SocialMiner, Cymfony, JitterJam, Meltwater Buzz, Motif, Overtone, Radian6, SAS Institute, Spiral16, Scout Labs and Visible Technologies. There are also free social listening tools such as Google Alerts, ekstreme.com, Technorati, SocialMention, Summize and many others. A few EFM vendors include Allegiance, EFM Systems, Inquisite, Interview-EFM, IBM's SPSS Data Collection for Enterprise Feedback Management, Mindshare and Vovici. Also recognize the role of your CRM system. While social listening and EFM software tools are becoming more popular, most users have not integrated customer feedback with automated actionable response. For many companies, this type of automation will also require integration to their customer relationship management system.

By *Mimi Sasen*

Can you explain the major functions of EFM software?

EFM systems centralize the collection, management, and use of customer feedback throughout your organization. EFM programs create simple or complex surveys, with features such as progressive profiling, question and page rotation, branching and advanced skip patterns, approval processing and advanced reporting.

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