

The 3 Cs: Customer-Centric Channels

Designing channel strategies based on customer understanding

By March 2010 all government departments will be required to have an agreed Channel Strategy in place. This is consistent with the implementation of the cross-government Service Transformation Agreement published with CSR07.

The Channel Strategy needs to respond to customer needs, whilst also ensuring maximum value for taxpayers by offering the most cost effective channels. It also needs to reflect the possibility that the future channel landscape could look very different, as the way people communicate and consume information continues to evolve.

The challenge to government and to public service providers is to ensure that their channel strategies are underpinned by an understanding of customer needs and the drivers of satisfaction, whilst not being too constrained by the behaviours and preferences of today.

Our IIPS breakfast briefing of 16th June tackled some of the core issues which public service

providers will need to address to meet these challenges. Our research shows that - despite the transformational changes of the last decade in the way government communicates and delivers services to the public - levels of satisfaction and concern with technology remain largely unchanged. We explored the need to personalise the channel mix, according to both the type of service and the customer segments that the service is designed to reach. We looked at ways to tackle people's continuing concerns with technology and to identify and address the key barriers, perceived and real.

The IIPS, through its sponsor companies, The Futures Company and TNS-BMRB, can help clients develop a multi-channel strategy for their services that optimises the trade-off between the tax payers' investment and the customers' satisfaction. Some of the techniques that are involved in this include:

Channel insight audit: what does your organisation already know about how your customers prefer to interact with you? Without commissioning additional primary research, our team can help you to analyse and identify key themes from existing evidence and work collaboratively with stakeholders to consider implications in terms of strategy.

Customer journey research and process mapping: do you understand the end-to-end journey that your customers go through when they access your services to complete a task and the best mix of channels to meet their needs at each stage? How does this compare with your process map of delivery? We have considerable experience working with public sector clients to contrast the view from the customer with that of the provider, and in doing so identifying barriers, bottlenecks and opportunities to increase satisfaction and reduce avoidable contact.

Front line research: workers at the front line are closest to the customer and often have the clearest idea of what can work best in terms of service delivery. In many of our projects we draw on insight gained from the front line, triangulating a range of perspectives on the customer experience. Very often, some of the challenges expressed by customers are directly reflected in the feedback from staff. And often staff have the best ideas for potential solutions.

Customer experience measurement and trade-offs: customer satisfaction surveys can be a useful starting point in developing customer strategies, using quantifiable and trend data to understand channel preferences and likely changes over time. We build on traditional customer satisfaction surveys and define key customer metrics against which to track improvement. These may not always be limited to simple satisfaction scores, but include other customer benefits including value for time.

We have recently applied these tools and frameworks with a range of government clients including HMRC, DWP, DH and DfT. If you would be like to understand more about our channel strategy work, please contact:

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