

Customer care

Activity 8: Using customer care data

Introduction

In today's highly-competitive trading conditions, businesses know that looking after their customers makes the critical difference between success and failure.

Customer care is a widely researched aspect of business. Businesses often spend large sums of money on training their staff in customer care, so they want to know what impact this has.

This activity gives learners the opportunity to engage with some of this research by analysing a set of raw data and drawing their own conclusions. As the data can be handled in a spreadsheet, some Information technology (IT) can be embedded as well. The use of IT can be further extended by Internet research.

This approach not only allows learners to develop their data-handling and IT skills, but also enables them to appreciate the importance to business of good customer care, but through active learning, rather than a lecture.

The material for this activity has been gleaned from various sources. The statistics vary somewhat from industry to industry and are quite complex, so a set of typical, simplified data has been created. Learners who want to explore the topic in more depth can track down further research findings on the Internet.

Learning objectives/outcomes

Learners should be able to:

- extract data from a table
- perform calculations to make the data easier to understand
- interpret the data in order to draw conclusions about the importance of customer care.

Resources required

- Copies of Sheet 8.1: Results of research into customer behaviour.
- Computers with a spreadsheet application installed if you wish to embed IT skills (optional).
- A data projector will be useful for displaying learners' work, but is not essential. Pens and large sheets of paper are adequate.

Starting points

Learners will find it easier to understand the context of this activity if they have already completed some of the other Customer care activities. **Activity 1: My best and worst experiences as a customer** makes an ideal starting point.

As a minimum, learners will need to be familiar with the calculation of percentages. If some do not feel confident, this is an opportunity for them to learn and practise the skill. If they are using IT, learners will need basic knowledge of how to use a spreadsheet application.

If you do not feel confident about embedding numeracy and IT in your sessions, consult your mathematics and IT specialist colleagues. Their help might take the form of coaching prior to teaching the topic, or team-teaching with you during the learning session. Both these strategies will extend your own skills.

Planning learning in multiple environments

This activity can be integrated into individual learning plans in a number of ways. It can be done as:

- independent study outside formal learning sessions
- an activity in the workplace, perhaps with another learner who is on placement at the same company
- part of a series of classroom-based sessions on customer care.

Suggested approach

The activity initially asks learners to work individually. This encourages independent thought. The subsequent work in groups provides learners with practice in explaining their thoughts to their peers and exploring different points of view. Together, these two parts of the activity help learners to develop the cognitive skills of analysis, comparison and evaluation.

You will find more information about approaches to active learning in Part 3 of **Cross-curricular themes: continuing professional development guide**.

Stage 1

Introduce the topic. You might like to establish the link between good business and good customer care by quoting Theodore Levitt, formerly a professor at Harvard Business School, who said:

“The purpose of business is to create and keep customers.”

Explain that they are going to look at the results of some research into customer behaviour and draw their own conclusions.

Explain the task:

“Your mission is to find out why customer care is so important. Start by working individually. Study the data on the table and calculate percentages from the raw data. Then get together with two or three other learners to discuss what the data means. Prepare a list of ‘findings’ that you can present to everyone.”

Provide each learner with a copy of **Sheet 8.1: Results of research into customer behaviour**.

Stage 2

Learners study the data in the table individually and calculate percentages.

You will have an opportunity to observe how they tackle this task and ask questions to check their understanding.

If you have a learner who is particularly competent at mathematics and who completes the task very quickly, you might like to appoint them the role of ‘Maths checker’. Any learner can call on the ‘Maths checker’ to check they have completed the calculations correctly.

Stage 3

Learners move into groups of three or four. You may wish to facilitate how the learners form groups for this stage, especially if there is a risk of learners forming unhelpful groupings. For example, this may present an opportunity to run a small skills workshop for some learners to improve their percentage calculation and interpretation skills or charting.

In their groups, learners can discuss what the data means and produce a list of findings.

If embedding IT, learners can put their findings onto a slide. If not, they can write them on a large sheet of paper. Encourage learners to express their findings as simply as possible. Where appropriate, encourage them to move from percentages to other ways of expressing the data, for example ‘over half of customers’ or ‘one in five customers’.

Some learners may like to use visual representation, especially if they are using IT and can generate graphs and charts. You could expand the activity to cover development of these skills if appropriate.

Many learners find it difficult to understand and interpret abstract ideas such as percentages in meaningful ways. They need time to find words that make the abstract representation meaningful to them personally. It is worth spending some time on this and discussion in groups is helpful to tease out their understanding. There are ideas for further reinforcement in the Embedding literacy, language and numeracy section below.

You will gain useful information for assessment for learning by listening to learners' discussions, enabling you to clear up misconceptions.

Stage 4: Consolidating, checking and reflecting on learning

Each group will have similar findings, so it may be appropriate for the groups to draw lots to see which group will present their findings. The other learners can challenge, offer suggestions and seek clarification.

Pose questions that will lead learners towards higher-order thinking, such as:

- Why do customers tend to tell other people when they are unhappy, rather than complain to the company?
- Why is customer loyalty important to businesses?
- What role does customer care play in creating customer loyalty?
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Give them time to think about the questions. For example, learners could go back into their small groups for a few minutes to discuss their answers.

Some points to draw out from discussion might include the following:

- Providing opportunities for customers to give you feedback can help you improve your business.
- You may need to encourage customers to give you feedback, for example by providing incentives.
- Good customer care can enhance trust in a product, service, department, colleague or company.
- Good customer care has a positive affect not only your customers today, but also in the future. For example, a new customer may become a regular customer.

Invite learners to reflect on the learning process. Here are some suggestions of questions you could ask.

- What did you enjoy about working in a small group?
- What did you find difficult about working in a small group?
- What will you do differently the next time you work in a small group?

Alternative approaches

Most of this activity can be completed outside of formal learning sessions by learners working independently or in small groups. The findings can be presented and discussed in a tutorial or in a formal whole-group session.

Obtain (or construct) some similar data to represent an organisation in your own industry. Remember that effective organisations conduct internal as well as external customer satisfaction surveys to monitor the effectiveness of services provided by different teams or

departments. You can ask learners to evaluate these critically and to draw conclusions about effective customer care.

Differentiation to meet individual needs

The table can be simplified by removing some of the items. For instance, the last two lines can be removed. Differing levels of support can be provided during Stages 2 and 3. Questions during the final debrief can be pitched at different levels. The activity can be readily extended for those learners who need a bigger challenge.

Challenges – what learners might do next

Learners could conduct their own market research, for example with customers at your organisation's canteen or learning centre. This could make the activity tangible and if it was planned in collaboration with the management of the canteen or learning centre, it would become a real-life project. Learners would need to use a range of skills to write up their research.

Very confident learners could undertake a short piece of Internet research linked to this activity. They could be set a challenge to:

- find at least one other statistic relevant to the topic (one that has not been used during the activity). For instance, finding statistics on 'how profitability has impacted on a rise in customer retention', or even 'how many positive customer encounters it takes to amend a negative one'
- find out a statistic about customer behaviour that is specific to their subject or vocational area.

If they need a tip to get started, suggest they put the terms 'customer loyalty' or 'customer retention' into a search engine.

Much of the material on customer behaviour is presented in high-level business language so learners will need to be able to skim read, find relevant sections and grapple with the complex language. This is a challenging but useful skill for future work and study.

Embedding literacy, language and numeracy (LLN)

Every learning activity includes many different opportunities to develop LLN skills. Always try to find a naturally-occurring opportunity where learners can immediately appreciate the relevance and importance of the skills they are learning to use.

Your LLN specialist will be able to help you to identify specific levels and curriculum references relevant to this activity and to create engaging learning activities to develop the skills.

The priority LLN skill that learners will need to complete this activity is numeracy. In particular, learners will need to be able to extract data from a table and calculate percentages.

At Level 1 and 2, find simple percentage parts of quantities and measurements.

- Understand that there are different ways of calculating percentages. (Adult literacy core curriculum reference N2/L1.8, L2.8)

Useful activities might include:

- Discuss methods for finding 10 per cent and 1 per cent, such as 10p in every pound; divide by 10; 1p in every pound; or divide by 100. Practise finding 10 per cent.
- Check the results of calculations done on a calculator by different methods: for example, rough estimates, re-input the figures in a different order, do inverse calculations.
- Look at how the per cent key works on different calculators. Compare the use of the per cent key with 'long' methods of percentage calculations.
- Practise using multiple representations of abstract concepts such as percentages. Learners use cards to interpret, compare and group the statistics so they gain confidence interpreting the meanings of each form. This is a 'concrete' learning experience where manipulation of the cards, reinforced by discussion with others, reinforces understanding. Make cards for:
 - percentages (abstract/symbolic representation)
 - written explanation of what the percentages represent
 - a visual representation of each percentage (for example, pie chart, percentage component bar chart).
- You could make the cards yourself or, better still, learners could make them and share them with each other. If learners are using IT, this becomes a useful embedded numeracy and IT task.
- Conduct a survey of users of a facility in the college or workplace (such as the learning resource centre) and ask them how satisfied they were with the response they got when they asked for help. Calculate percentages of the sample who were satisfied, fairly satisfied or not satisfied.

Sheet 8.1: Results of research into customer behaviour

Research into customer behaviour: survey results			
		#	%
1	Total number of customers interviewed	540	100
2	Number who had an unsatisfactory customer experience during the past six months	404	
3	Number who had complained during past six months	16	
4	Number who had an unsatisfactory experience but felt it was not worth complaining	367	
5	Number who told more than 20 other people about their unsatisfactory experience	80	
6	Number who stopped using a company during the past six months because of poor customer care	362	
7	Number who regularly complete and return customer satisfaction questionnaires	12	
8	Average cost of attracting a new customer	£1000	
9	Average cost of retaining an existing customer	£200	

Session plan

Aim: To help learners appreciate the importance of good customer care for businesses.

Learning objectives/outcomes

Learners should be able to:

- extract data from a table
- perform calculations to make the data easier to understand
- interpret the data in order to draw conclusions about the importance of customer care.

Time	Teacher plan	Learner activity	Resources
0-10 min	Stage 1 Introduce the topic and explain the task. Give each learner a copy of Sheet 8.1 .		Sheet 8.1.
10-25 min	Stage 2	Study the data in the table and calculate percentages.	Pens. Computers (optional). Calculators (optional).
25-45 min	Stage 3 Facilitate the organisation of groups (if necessary).	Move into groups of three or four. Discuss what the data means and produce a list of findings, on paper or on the computer.	Large sheets of paper. Computers (optional).
45-60 min	Stage 4	Present their findings.	
60-75 min	Stage 5 Pose learners questions to encourage higher order thinking about their findings.	Respond to questions and discuss their answers.	

Assessment of learning objectives/outcomes

- Monitoring of group work and discussion and feedback.
- Learners reflect on what they have learnt and how they learnt.

Differentiation to meet individual needs

- For less confident learners, simplify the table by removing some of the items.
- Offer support according to learners identified learning needs.
- Pitch questions during plenary, at different levels.
- Extend activity for learners who need more challenges, for example, by increasing the complexity of data in the table.

Teacher evaluation

Consider which parts of the session were effective and why.

Learner feedback

Consider whether the activities were suitable for all learners and whether the session helped to develop the expert learners.

Personal, learning and thinking skills developed

- Teamworkers:
 - Reach agreements, managing discussions to achieve results.
- Reflective learners
 - Review progress, acting on the outcomes.

Literacy, language and numeracy skills developed

Language

At Level 1 and 2, use speaking and listening skills to provide and respond to feedback.

References

Levitt, T. (1983). *The Marketing Imagination*. New York: Free Press.