

Are Surveys A Waste of Time and \$?

by Charles Wendel

I have long thought that most surveys are a waste of time. Just ask President Hillary. But, banks continue to spend dollars on them. In surveying the Greek gods, the Oracles of Delphi climbed a mountain and then breathed smoke (holy smoke!) from a tripod vase before answering questions. Recent studies suggest that the Oracles were in fact inhaling a gas and were drugged when they answered the questions asked of them.

Bankers may be “drugged” as well, drugged by market research firms from whom they buy research products and, by some coincidence are also selected for awards from the same companies. What a surprise! Sometimes when I walk around a bank I see so many plaques it reminds me of my kids’ room 20 years ago when they got trophies for showing up.

OK, you are thinking, he is just jealous that he did not think of this idea first...maybe.

This week I received a LinkedIn survey, the first I had received from them. I was immediately hooked in by curiosity and the promise of a \$5 (!) Starbucks or Amazon gift card. The survey consisted of eight multiple-choice questions.

Question 1. “When you think of financial services technology, which of the companies listed below comes to mind first?” Choice: BofA, Chase, Capital One, Wells, or none of the above.

What does “when I think of financial services technology” mean? As a consumer? As a business owner? Does “financial services technology” mean digital banking?? The term was never defined.

Question 2. “Have you heard of the financial services technology from the following companies? “ Same banks listed. Are they asking “Have you heard that these banks offer digitally-enabled products?” Again, what does this question mean? It is so vague to be useless.

Another question. “If you were in the market to use or purchase financial services technology, how likely would you be to consider...?” Financial Services technology for what? Cash management? Credit card management? Lending?

If this survey had been created 25 or so years ago, there would have been one firm that would have jumped out above all others, Citibank. It was the undisputed tech leader among banks, but in this survey, appropriately, it did not rated a mention. Too many bad loans over the past decades took management attention away from what was once its greatest strength and it remains a tech laggard.

While these types of surveys seem useless, asking the customer more detailed and probing questions provides much value. In the rare cases in which we gain access to a

customer, they provide substantial insights. They also say things that the bank may not want to hear. From some recent interviews, customers mentioned incorrect billing, no response to solving a regularly occurring operational problem, RM turnover, canned products being offered instead of the solutions they need, a lagging technology offer from their bank, etc. These issues need to be uncovered, probed further, and, more important, addressed.

Towards the end of this survey there was one question about a specific bank, Capital One, that made me think they were sponsoring the survey. If you did sponsor the survey, Capital One, please get your money back and give it at a Miami-based consulting firm I can recommend.

Maybe I can even come up with an award.