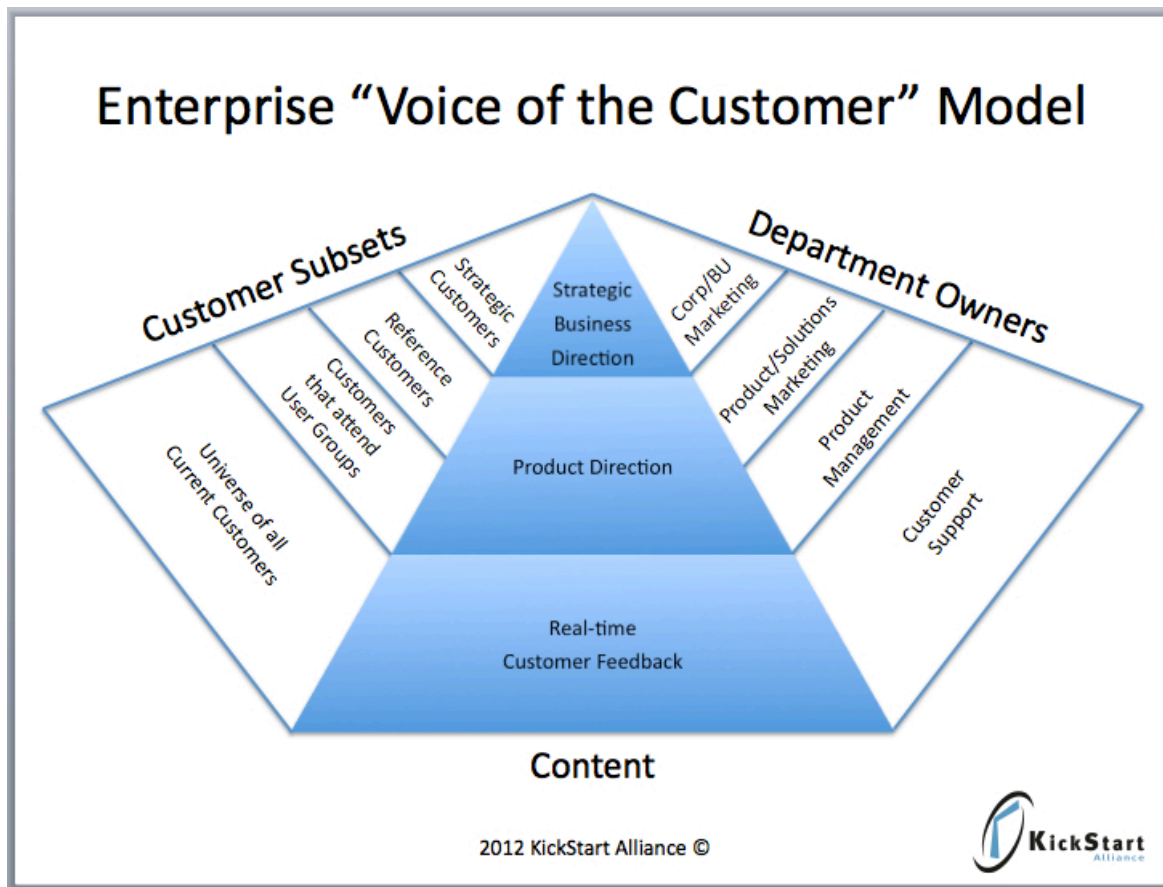# The 3 Dimensions of an Enterprise "Voice of the Customer" Model
The secret to building a world-class VOC program
By Mike Gospe

More companies today are making it a priority to update and energize their customer interactions. Yet while recognizing and treating the value of customer input and feedback as a priority is a good thing, allowing each department open reign of their own interaction with customers, out of sync with other interactions being driven by other departments, can only lead to internal confusion and duplication of resources. And this says nothing of the growing annoyance customers are likely to feel as they are bombarded with multiple uncoordinated requests from vendor sources. The secret to harnessing the power of customer input is to ensure that each touch point is part of a comprehensive "voice of the customer" (VOC) model – a model that is shared across the enterprise.

In reality, gathering, sharing, and acting upon customer input and feedback is not a task that lives with a single individual or a single team. Different departments require different pieces of customer data at different times. Adopting a comprehensive VOC model allows everyone across the enterprise to see the "big picture" and to leverage data that is captured by others, while making their data available to all. The following model illustrates how some world-class enterprise companies are coordinating their VOC efforts.

Enterprise "Voice of the Customer" Model

Customer Subsets

- Strategic Customers
- Reference Customers
- Customers that attend User Groups
- Universe of all Current Customers

Department Owners

- Corp/BU Marketing
- Product/Solutions Marketing
- Product Management
- Customer Support

Pyramid levels (top to bottom):
- Strategic Business Direction
- Product Direction
- Real-time Customer Feedback

Content

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This pyramid model is centered on the type of ***content*** enterprise companies are interested in gathering. The range of content types span from: tactical and operational (which centers around customers providing real-time feedback on the day-to-day interaction), to product direction (which centers around gathering information that drives both the short-term product roadmap and the longer-term value-proposition roadmap), to strategic business direction (which focuses on the industry trends, business drivers, and technology priorities that are shaping the customers' businesses). The gathering of each type of content requires a different set of tools and best-practices that engage a specific customer subset. And different departments typically lead the collection of different types of customer input and feedback. The key to a successful VOC program is the alignment and interaction of every customer touch point so that the entire company benefits from the collected information. Customers will also recognize and appreciate any vendor/partner that invests in best-practices that treat them with respect when gathering this information.

<u>Breaking down the silos</u>

The first step to setting up a VOC program is to acknowledge the different types of input and feedback each team needs and the best tools available to collect, analyze, and share that data. Although this may seem obvious, it is surprising that many marketers don't actually know or have access to all the customer data that exists within the enterprise. While systems issues may be part of the limitation, a bigger problem is usually the lack of a consistent set of operational

processes, techniques, and templates for gathering this data and sharing the results internally. (For example: product team A is very effective in conducting focus groups, but product team B is unaware of team A's best practices, so they soldier on by recreating their own set of tools. Meanwhile, the director of product team A leaves the company taking his undocumented knowledge of focus group best practices with him.)

- **Customer support** organizations are interested in getting real-time customer feedback on products, services, ordering, fulfillment, bugs, fixes, etc. As such, their universe consists of every customer. Tools they may use to collect this input and feedback may span online or printed surveys, call centers, and social media.

- **Product management** teams are interested in gathering insight about product use-cases. A key goal of this group is to understand customer priorities that surround feature sets, user interfaces, and such. Those insights are commonly reflected in a product requirements document (PRD). Typical customer interaction points may include product focus groups and user group meetings. It's not practical to get in depth product direction from every customer, so they focus on a smaller subset of identified users.

- **Product marketing** and **solution marketing** teams take a slightly different spin by gathering customer use-case data that provides deeper perspective on the problems the customers are trying to solve. Product marketers may also focus more on vertical segments. This information is typically captured in a market requirements document (MRD). One output of their investigations is the identification of specific customer situations that can be shared via detailed customer reference stories for both marketing and sales purposes.

- **Corporate marketing** and/or **business unit marketing** teams need to cater to the company's brand and longer-term road map as it pertains to the larger value proposition the company offers. This means investing resources to understand more about the industry trends, business drivers, and priorities that are shaping their customers' business. The customer data gathered here is more strategic in nature. A Customer Advisory Board (CAB) is an example of a type of interaction that plays at this level where the focus is only on a few of the most strategic customers (typically 8 – 16).

Because everyone is working hard on many tasks at the same time, it's tempting to take short cuts and to overlook the need to communicate internally about the customer interactions each team is conducting. But, each of these points of customer interaction should not be sheltered or siloed. World-class enterprises appoint a cross-functional team to design and manage their VOC activities based on industry best-practices. The end result is greater awareness throughout the enterprise of the types of quantitative and qualitative customer touch points taking place, along with the adoption of operational best practices used to collect and share this data so that everyone can make the best business decisions possible. Sharing data can be as simple as setting up a SharePoint drive with easy-to-navigate folders relating to the type of customer feedback collected, to marketers evangelizing their VOC efforts by becoming a frequent guest speaker to other internal organizations. One company I worked with created an intranet site specific for capturing competitive knowledge and focus group summaries, as an example.

About the Author
Mike Gospe leads KickStart Alliance's marketing operations practice and VOC programs. As a professional facilitator, he also guides Customer Advisory Board programs and meetings. He's helped companies of all sizes learn to listen to the voice of their customers. Mike is the author of the books, ***Marketing Campaign Development,*** and ***The Marketing High Ground***. He is also a faculty member of San Francisco State University's College of Extended Learning where he teaches the course, "Essentials of Integrated Marketing."