EVALUATING CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Evaluating Customer Relationship Management for the Joplin, Missouri Fire Department

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CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

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Abstract

The Joplin Missouri Fire Department provides a variety of emergency services to its citizens and visitors. Community growth, social/economic evolvement, engineering improvements and changes in service needs creates the continual need to evaluate service delivery. The department does not have a method or program in place to obtain input from our customers. Lack of communication and understanding can lead to dissatisfied customers, loss of community support for the department, and loss of financial backing. The purpose of this study was to identify methods to obtain input on service needs, quality assurance and department direction from our customers. Descriptive research was utilized to answer research questions: Which groups are usually identified by fire departments as customers when addressing customer relations management? How do fire departments identify and seek input from their customers? How do customers desire to interact and provide input to fire service providers? How can the information gained through customer interaction/input be utilized? How does fire department personnel learn effective customer relations skills and develop appropriate knowledge and attitude required for success? What methods are used in private sector service industries to maintain effective customer service relationships? Procedures included a questionnaire to fire chiefs, community customers, and service provider businesses in Missouri. A literature review was conducted. Results show a number of tools and programs that can be utilized in developing a Customer Relationship Management Initiative. Recommendations: Commit to a Fire Department Customer Relationship Management Program, obtain local government support, develop a Fire Department Citizen Advisory Board, and lead a Customer Relationship Management Initiative.

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Evaluating Customer Relationship Management for the Joplin, Missouri Fire Department

Introduction

The City of Joplin Fire Department has been providing emergency services for the community for over 125 years. Joplin serves as a regional center for commerce, education and medical services which results in its permanent population of 50,000 swelling to over 270,000 on a daily basis. Because of community growth, social/economic evolvement and changing service needs, there is a continual need to evaluate service delivery and department direction. The problem is the department does not have any organized program to obtain input from our citizens which makes it impossible to assure that we are meeting the service expectations of our customers. Low customer satisfaction can lead to loss of community support and financial backing for the fire department.

The purpose of this research project is to identify methods which could be implemented by the Joplin Fire Department to obtain ongoing input on service needs and quality assurance from our customers.

Descriptive research will be conducted to answer the following research questions: Which groups are usually identified by fire departments as customers when addressing customer relations management? How do fire departments identify and seek input from their customers? How do customers desire to interact and provide input to fire service providers? How can the information gained through customer interaction/input be utilized? How do fire department personnel learn effective customer relations skills and develop appropriate knowledge and attitude required for success? What methods are used in private sector service industries to maintain effective customer service relationships?

Background and Significance

The City of Joplin, Missouri, lies in the southwest portion of the state bordering Oklahoma and Kansas. The Joplin Fire Department provides a full range of emergency services including fire suppression, emergency medical services, tactical rescue, hazardous materials response, prevention, emergency management, and education services.

The City has a current population of 50,000 while daytime service population in this regional commercial and industrial community swells to over 270,000. Examining the demographics of the permanent residents of Joplin, we can identify a number of factors that may influence service needs and perception of this segment of customers. The majority of the population (95.8%) lives in households with an average size of 2.28, while 4.2% of the City's population lives in a group setting (United States Census Bureau, 2000). There are over 21,328 housing units in the City, 53.6% of which are owner occupied. Persons receiving emergency services are often the very young, under 5 years (7.1%) and those 62 and older, 17.9%.

The City has been experiencing growth in both structures and square miles over the past ten years which is precipitating enhancements to public safety resources. With the primary funding source for City services being sales tax, the creation and annexation of commercial and industrial zones has been a priority. The Joplin Fire Department was successful in 2006 in passage of a local Public Safety Sales Tax to fund two additional fire stations, 27 personnel, 3 new apparatus and a regional public safety training facility. During the process of selling the needs and solutions to the community, it became obvious that we had not been successful in staying in tune with our customers on an

ongoing basis. We had to educate the public on the services and service levels that we historically provided to the community before we could explain the short comings of those services created by growth of the city. Although people knew they had a fire department, many had no idea the scope of responsibility and services that the Joplin Fire Department had assumed over the years. Going beyond the task of fire suppression which is most recognized by the public, the department provides advanced life support emergency medical services, specialized rescue teams, level A hazardous materials response and a regional terrorism response team. During this initiative, it was clear that many people did not realize that the fire department provided all of these services nor what resources were required to accomplish these tasks.

In 2007, the Joplin Fire Department began a process to update our building and fire code to the latest addition of the International Code Series. We had to convince the City Council to approve the code and in order for that to happen, they had to believe the community was behind it. So our job again was to educate the community on the history of our current code, the needs and benefit of updating to the 2006 version of codes. To accomplish this, we had to identify the stake holders (the customers) at various levels and develop a dialogue to facilitate information and idea exchange.

The City of Joplin also pursued an increase in service and business license fees in 2008. The fees charged for services provided by the Fire Department and other City departments had not been increased in 30 years and revenue needs dictated an update. This was another instance where we needed to communicate to our customers the situation, the needs, the solution, and the benefits of the proposal. This was also another

example of how a pre-existing customer relationship management program could have made implementation of customer service changes easier.

Nonresident service users/customers include those commuting in to work, attending one of our educational institutions, healthcare, shopping or transiting through on the major east/west highway. The City has two major hospitals with over 1,000 beds and several thousand employees. There are 15 primary public schools, two colleges and a university with thousands of students throughout the community. There is a large commercial district in the City with numerous large box stores, strip malls and a large enclosed shopping mall. These people, totaling 150,000 or more a day, often utilize our EMS, rescue, fire and other services. Because they do not live in the City, their perspective on public safety services may be different than residents and our ability to interact and gain input can be more challenging.

The focus of this applied research project is to identify methods, programs, and technology for obtaining ongoing input from our customers on service needs and service quality. The concepts important to this research were discussed in two units in the Executive Fire Officer Program Course, Executive Leadership, Unit 2 Using Feedback, (NFA, 2005) and Unit 10 Networking (NFA, 2005).

This research project also supports a number of the operational goals of the United States Fire Administration (United States Fire Administration) [USFA], 2008). Examining methods of assessing customer service needs and service satisfaction which can be targeted at community groups such as the very young and the very old is congruent with USFA operational objective “Reduce loss of life from fire in the age group 14 years old and below” and “Reduce the loss of life from fire in the age group 65

years old and above" (USFA, 2008, pp.II-2). Additionally, developing a method to obtain timely customer input on service needs and perception will enable the Joplin Fire Department "To respond appropriately in a timely manner to emerging needs" (USFA, 2008, pp.II-2) which is a USFA operational goal.

Literature Review

The literature review for this research project will examine various types of tools and programs available for Customer Relationship Management in both public and private sector service operations. The review will also identify benefits that can be gained by utilizing customer relations practices.

The majority of articles and data reviewed for this project were obtained from professional journals and publications. In addition, U.S. Government Internet sites offered program and statistical information. The Internet was used extensively in this research project. Material was also obtained from the Joplin Public Library.

The Value of Customer Interaction and Customer Satisfaction

The literature review on customer service revealed an infinite number of ideas on how to address customer service issues in both the public and private sector. Business leaders focus on various methods to first identify customers and then gain access to their thoughts, desires, and ideas related to the product or service. But the first question is, why worry about the customers? What could really happen if customer service is not a priority? One of the most common mistakes a business can make is to forget the reason it exists – serve the customer (Alexander, 2002). We must remember that for every customer who takes the time to complain, there are 26 others who have not. In addition, wronged customers are more vocal than satisfied customers, and on average, will explain

their displeasure to16 people. Ninety-one percent of unhappy customers will not do business with you again. According to Alexander, “No matter how nice your store or how great your products, if the customers are not treated well they will find a new place to shop”. If you’re lucky, the unhappy customer will let you know; this will allow you to identify the issues and try to resolve them.

Another way to look at the importance of maintaining a good relationship with your customers is to ask yourself, What if you couldn’t take any new customers? Would you pay closer attention to your current customers needs (Crandall, 1997)? It costs six times more to do business with a new customer than an established one.

America’s hospitals have been on a “customer relations” kick for years according to Michael Romano (Romano, 2002, p28). They had pledged to pamper patients with superior service and first class amenities to attract new patients and maintain current customers. Many of these efforts to date may have been superficial and less than effective in truly improving customer service. Some hospitals operated under the assumption that the patient needed them more than they needed the patient. This lack of customer priority has led to service issues like two-hour waits in the emergency room, and seemingly uncaring medical staff. But declining reimbursements, increased competition, and a more selective clientele has brought back a realization that customer service makes good economic sense.

Paramount to the issue of the importance of customer service is the definition of good customer service. Regardless of the service or product you are providing, customer service is transaction specific (Wilson, 2004). The same service delivered to a customer on two different days, in two different situations, and with different moods will not work

the same. People have different needs on different days, and the tasks of fulfilling those needs may vary drastically. Wilson stated that everyone likes to know that their feelings, opinions, and needs, do count. With this approach, asking a customer open-ended questions in a non-threatening and caring way, opens the door for them to feel good about explaining what type of service mood they are in. In addition, Wilson indicated that no matter what specific approach a business took toward customer service, it must be flexible, sensitive and transaction specific.

In the banking industry, customer/representative relations would be expected to be critical to business success. An empirical based research project on the subject reinforced the belief that customer satisfaction is linked to bank performance (Jham and Khan, 2008). The study pointed to customer satisfaction with a number of bank services and the relationship between internal and external customers being critical to developing relationships. The research data further linked customer satisfaction to the bank's sales and profitability.

Customer Service Programs, Benchmarks

Just as there are many definitions of good customer service, there are numerous methods and theories to achieve customer satisfaction. The literature reveals many programs which have migrated successfully through different service and product industries. David Brond (2006) makes the observation that consumers are taking a more active role in their health and how their healthcare is delivered. This has caused hospitals to become more service-minded to attract and retain customers. Strategically, hospitals should promote a customer focused culture that engenders service excellence and promotes professionalism. He identified five basic components that hospital customer

service programs should incorporate: service standards with a customer service assessment as part of an employee's annual review, an appraisal of service aptitude in the hiring process, creation of mandatory annual customer service training, development and promotion of an employee recognition and reward program related to customer service, and, use of an outside contractor to continually measure internal and external customer satisfaction.

When examining Customer Relationship Management CRM strategies, you must view both inside and outside approaches (McKay, 2008). Internal customer relations process and training must be in place before dealing with external customer contact issues to allow a smoother interface. McKay describes eight general benchmarks for a customer service program; be transparent, which means in general being open, upfront and honest with customers, apply listening skills more to customers than speaking, align sales and marketing so that everyone is speaking from one page to the customer, develop internal visibility by using analytics to present a better ongoing picture of operations to the entire organization, update, upgrade and innovate, involves monitoring technology as it relates to customer service management and staying on the leading edge, make adoption of new programs easy, stay the course through economic downturns, be proactive in customer service as well as reactive in that if a potential customer problem is perceived, action should be taken to avoid it.

In the insurance industry, heightened competition, along with more informed and demanding consumers, is causing insurers to re-examine their customer relationship management strategy (CRM Magazine, 2008). Insurers can no longer afford to provide poor customer service and must try to understand each policyholder and their needs. To

address this need, insurers are increasingly relying on CRM software programs to gather and analyze customer information. With this data, insurers can better address individual customer needs and improve customer satisfaction.

The knowledge and passion toward the product of the service/sales consultant is vital to the customer relationship and satisfaction according to Hi Mountain Recreation general manager Chuck South (Johnson, 2008). Hi Mountain, a motor sport retail company believes employees provide better customer service if they are passionate enthusiasts themselves. Employees are encouraged through discount sale and lease to ride the snowmobiles, watercraft and, motorcycles that they sell. Being enthusiasts is one way for employees to stay current on trends, because they are out talking to the customers about what they want and need. In addition, Hi Mountain has utilized focus groups to evaluate various options for gear and accessory inventory.

In the Hotel Industry, it is vital to understand your hotel's services, positioning in the market, and how service is delivered according to Ally Dombey (Dombey, 2008). Mystery shopping programs support the development and management of service delivery in hotels, transforming an intangible asset into what the customer wants. Programs can identify areas for improvement by recognizing and rewarding employees and customer service, identifying areas for revenue improvements and making service a top priority.

Some banks are tying good customer service to monetary rewards which can average $100-$500 per employee per month (Banking Wire, 2008). The Umpqua Bank based in Portland Washington, bases service awards on six measurements: new account surveys, in-lobby opinion cards, secret shoppers, retention of existing customers,

accounts lost and a cross-sell ratio. This program is targeted at front line tellers, greeters, and customer service personnel.

Tools and Technology

Customer Advisory Boards have been a popular corporate strategic initiative to connect with the mind-set of the customer. Some bankers are adopting this tool to gather input from their customer base, review business plans, preview ad campaigns, test new products and service ideas (Dorman, 2008). Advisory boards generally consist of eight to twelve members from high priority customer groups within different geographic areas. Key factors to success of customer advisory boards include clearly defining program goals, including only the correct customers on the board, setting and adhering to a meaningful agenda, engage and inform participants, but do not sell, utilize an impartial program facilitator, and act appropriately on member feedback.

A customer advisory board has enabled telecommunications company “Cimco” to achieve nearly perfect customer retention (Compton, 2004). Cimco is among the growing ranks of companies using customer advisory boards comprised of key representatives from their client base. Since 2002, Cimco has held quarterly meetings with about twelve client executives on the advisory board discussing current and proposed services. The advisory board can provide valuable feedback as customers have the opportunity to pool their collective experiences and present them in a coherent manner. Cimco credits the advisory board with contributing to better than 95% customer retention and improved launches of new service initiatives.

Although there are numerous tools one can use to determine what customers desire, customer advisory boards are an effective and cost effective method for many

companies (Ross, 1997). One of the primary benefits of a customer advisory board is the development of an ongoing dialogue with your customers which promotes a better customer relationship. Customer advisory boards can provide answers to many important business operational questions: how to rank and align our product offerings and future development with market needs, how to integrate customer needs with core competencies to maximize sales, how to acquire more high profit customers, identify the next advance in our industry, and increase customer retention rates (Geehan and Sheldon, 2005).

Technology developments have contributed greatly to the tools and methods available for CRM over the past 20 years. In the insurance industry alone, software licenses, subscriptions, support and maintenance of CRM products, are a billion dollar business and expected to top 1.5 billion by 2012 (MarketWatch, 2008). Consona CRM Inc., provides customer management software to over 1500 companies in various industries (CRM Magazine, 2008). Their Onyx product provides a full range of customer management functions including marketing, sales, service, and quality management.

Firms are beginning to realize the benefits of customer relationship management software accord (Wolosky, 2008). The Marks, Paneth and Shron company have been using "Interaction" CRM software and their clients welcome the opportunity to take back control of their preferences. They also report a strong sense of community among partners and customers. Parente Randoph has been evaluating methods of expanding the utility of CRM software. They currently use it for making connections with customers and maintaining relationships. They hope to expand software use to improve proposal and referral tracking.

Employee Customer Service Training

The success of CRM programs and software utilization is correlated closely to the training and performance of employees. The importance of employee customer relations training is a major focus of franchise restaurant chain Melting Pot (Berta, 2008). Faced with flat customer counts amidst the challenging economy the company focused efforts on training all of their employees to provide the best possible customer service. They found their company excelled when they invested in the education and training of their employees. They spend between 1.5 to 2% of a unit's revenue on training and are confident it not only improves customer service which results in customer recruitment and retention.

"After years of feeble attempts to improve customer relations, hospitals are turning to professionals and spending huge dollars to keep their patients happy", Romano, (2002, p.28). Companies like Disney, a leader in customer service and Ritz-Carlton along with a few independent consultants have developed customer service training programs geared toward the health care industry. Baptist Health Care Corporation converted an internal customer service training program into a nationally recognized healthcare leadership institute centered on guest relations. Hospitals are expected to spend over $50 million a year on customer service consulting alone. But the industry believes these programs pay off by fostering an employee culture that puts patients first and that a satisfied customer is always good for business. In addition, many hospitals have identified the relationship between employee satisfaction and patient satisfaction. Many customer service programs begin with revitalizing the workforce and addressing employee empowerment, motivation and development.

Walt Disney's philosophy on customer service and employee training has not only facilitated ongoing success for his companies but should be a guide for all organizations according to Joe Miurtagh (2008). Paramount to success is instilling your companies vision, values and beliefs into your employees. With a shared dream and understanding that personal and corporate success is reliant on customer satisfaction any organization can maximize success.

The best customer service is likely provided by people who enjoy helping customers. Training can teach a process or create skills, however it can not transform a person who dislikes people into someone who enjoys helping people (Clark, 2008). Because of this the biggest challenge to providing good customer service may be hiring the right people for the jobs. When interviewing candidates you must consider what attitudes and attributes are critical for success. When hiring a nurse's aid you may look for compassion and cheerfulness. A hotel selecting a front desk clerk may be looking for the ability to offer hospitality in a welcoming manner. Required operational and skill training fits nicely into the base characteristics.

Literature Review Summary

The task of providing not only good customer service but of maintaining a positive relationship with customers is a challenge faced by all businesses. The literature review for this study identified efforts by both public and privately operated organizations at connecting with their customers, developing customer service programs and training their employees in customer relations. The literature also reveals technology advances in software which enables business to better manage customer relations programs. The information available on the merits and methods of customer relationship

management in private and public sector service organizations should be a compass for fire departments desiring to better service their customers.

Procedures

Survey Instruments

Questionnaires were utilized as a primary tool to gather data to answer six research questions. This process was conducted between July 18th and August 10th, 2008. A questionnaire was developed to research questions one, two, four and five and was distributed via e-mail to Fire Chiefs in Missouri, and neighboring Midwest states of Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Iowa, and Illinois. (Appendix A). The questionnaire was distributed with a cover letter explaining the study (Appendix B) to 45 fire departments, with a population between 7,000 and 150,000. Individual community and fire department WEB sites were used to obtain e-mail addresses of the fire chiefs for the study. From a total of 45 questionnaires distributed, 20 completed documents were received back.

To address research question numbers three and four, a questionnaire (Appendix C) was distributed to the fire department's customer base of citizens at a community event in Joplin on August 1st, and at a local truck stop along an interstate highway traversing our city on August 6th. A total of 200 questionnaires were completed.

A questionnaire was distributed with a cover letter explaining the study (Appendix E) to various regional public and private sector service related businesses to address research question number six (Appendix D). The questionnaire was sent electronically to 50 businesses including hospitals, colleges, utilities and cable television providers in Missouri. A total of 20 questionnaires were returned from the business agencies.

Literature Review

The research for this study began with literature review in February of 2008 and continued through July, 2008. The internet was used extensively to access much of the data used in this study. Direct access to EBSCO host sites from the researcher's residence was used extensively. Internet sites of government agencies and associations were also used.

Assumptions

It is assumed that information obtained from published material researched for this study is authoritative and unbiased. It is further assumed that information derived from respondents to the Fire Chief Questionnaire is representative of the regional situation on the topic. It is also assumed that customer relationship management programs and strategies in other areas of the region, county, and in the private sector, are valuable in comparison purposes for this study.

Limitations

The relatively small number of questionnaires returned from the business entities is a limiting factor in this study. A factor to be considered in this is that the questionnaire was distributed electronically and many of them were blocked from delivery by the receiving agency's security software. The researcher did take steps to alert some of the agencies by telephone when possible to assure receipt of the questionnaires.

Results

This study was intended to investigate customer relationship management methods, programs and tools used in other fire departments, agencies or businesses and utilize research information to develop options for a CRM initiative in Joplin. The results

of this research project were obtained using a questionnaire to fire chiefs in surrounding States, a questionnaire to citizens in Joplin, and a questionnaire to businesses in Missouri. The research questions are listed here with results and findings.

Which groups are usually identified by fire departments as Customers when addressing customer relations management? This question was answered by 20 fire departments that responded to a questionnaire.

Table 1. Customer Groups

	Number	**Percent**
Persons Receiving Service (fire, rescue, EMS, etc.)	**19**	**95%**
Building Owners	**19**	**95%**
Contractors	**18**	**90%**
All Residents	**20**	**100%**
Other	**3**	**15%**

Comments: Other targets include transient customers such as travelers, truckers and commuters. Schools, Daycare Centers and Service Groups

It should be noted that all 20 respondents considered all residents of their community to be customers. The vast majority 90% to 95% recognized anyone receiving service, building owners and contractors also to be customers regardless of where they may live. A few identified the importance of recognizing people transiting through their community (travelers and truckers)

How do fire departments identify and seek input from their customers? Responding fire departments identified a number of methods they used to interact with customers.

Table 2. Fire Department Interaction Methods

	Number	**Percent**
Customer Service Survey	**16**	**80%**
Advisory Board	**2**	**10%**
Open Meetings	**12**	**60%**
Web Based Input	**11**	**55%**

Customer service surveys were reported tools by 80% of respondents, some done randomly and others post-service. Only 10 percent of the reporting departments used advisory boards.

How do customers desire to interact and provide input to fire service providers? Surveys distributed at a community gathering and a local truck stop resulted in 200 responses.

Table 3. Customer's Preferred Methods for Interaction with Service Provider

	Number	**Percent**
Post service survey	**40**	**20%**
Mail out surveys (random or inclusive)	**80**	**40%**
Citizen Advisory Board	**24**	**12%**
Station Open Houses	**72**	**36%**
Web Based Customer Input	**32**	**16%**
Other:	**4**	**2%**

Mail out customer surveys and station open houses were identified as the preferred methods for customer interaction with the fire department according to respondents.

How can the information gained through customer interaction/input be utilized?

This question was answered by both fire department and customer survey groups.

Table 4. Uses for Customer Input (Fire Department's Responses)

	Number	**Percent**
Improve Service Delivery	**6**	**30%**
Identify New Service Needs	**5**	**25%**
General Information with No Specific Action	**2**	**10%**
Do Not Collect Data or Do Not Use Data	**2**	**10%**

Table 5. Uses for Customer Input (Customer Responses)

Customer Service Improvements	**36**	**18%**
Improved Understanding of Services and Needs	**76**	**19%**
New Services to Address Unmet Needs	**60**	**15%**
Community Based Initiatives	**60**	**15%**
Other	**8**	**4%**

How do fire department personnel learn effective customer relations skills and develop appropriate knowledge and attitude required for success?

Fire Departments were asked if they provided customer relationship management training to their employees.

Table 6. Customer Relations Training

Yes	**No**
17	**85%**
3	**15%**

Comments: For both internal and external customers
NFA and Mid-America Regional Programs
Brunacini's Program

Of the 85% of responding departments that provided customer service training, 75% mandated the training for all personnel.

What methods are used in private sector service industries to maintain effective customer service relationships?

A questionnaire completed by 20 service related businesses revealed a high interest in customer satisfaction and a number of methods being used.

Table 7. Customer Interaction Tools

Post Service Written Survey	**20**	**100%**
Post Service Phone Calls	**7**	**35%**
Direct Service Feedback	**5**	**25%**
Website	**17**	**85%**
Media(radio, TV, print)	**11**	**55%**
Focus Groups	**4**	**20%**
Internal Electronic Reporting	**5**	**25%**

Discussion

Relationship between Study Results and Literature Review

The importance of developing and maintaining good relationships with customers was highlighted throughout the literature. Lavan Alexander (2002) brought the issue down to the basic premise that service businesses exist to serve the customer. If we fail to please the customer, they will go elsewhere for service. A similar picture can be drawn by asking yourself what if you couldn’t receive any new customer (Crandall, 1997). My research revealed a similar understanding from the business respondents exemplified in the large number of customer service programs and efforts reported. The fire department respondents reported some activity related to customer service, but much of it was limited to post-service feed-back.

Studies examining CRM in the banking industry present a clear link between customer satisfaction and the bank's financial performance (Jham and Khan, 2008). Impact on public support for funding was reported as a benefit of CRM by 35% of fire department respondents. This premise of customer satisfaction impacting customer base and revenue was acknowledged by 75% of business respondents.

The concept of using customer advisory boards to assist in measuring customer satisfaction with services and company direction was prevalent in the literature. Cimco communications touts a nearly perfect customer retention rate which they credit in part to a customer advisory board (Compton, 2004). Advisory boards were not mentioned by any of the 20 business respondents in my research, but 10% of the fire departments reported using this tool.

The importance of employee customer service training was emphasized throughout the literature review. The large budgets allocated to customer service training by businesses like Melting Pot restaurants at 1.5% to 2% of total revenue reinforce the importance (Berta, 2008). All 20 business respondents indicated that they provided customer relations training to their employees. Only 15% of fire department respondents indicated that they did not provide customer service training to their employees.

Interpretation of Results

The efficacy of customer relationship management is acknowledged by fire department respondents in the study with 100% recognizing various customer bases. Results showed that 80% of the fire departments surveyed had used post-service customer surveys, while 60% reported using open meetings to gain input and maintain dialogue with customers. Maintaining traditional support and respect from the public was

reported by 55% of fire department respondents as a benefit to CRM. It may be interpreted that fire department activity is geared more to narrow service quality measurement than to broad service delivery issues.

Because only 38% of respondents had ever received service from a fire department, it would be prudent for departments to recognize that post service-surveys are only connecting with a small portion of customers. We must develop CRM programs that reach all potential users of our services, including transients. Customer respondents indicated their preference for surveys, station open houses and Web based interaction with their fire departments which should point us toward those methods. Nearly all customer respondents indicated that interaction/feedback by customers with fire department could result in improvements in service, mutual understanding of needs and better development of community fire service need solutions.

Organizational Implications

The research in this paper reveals valuable information for the Joplin Fire Department regarding the need to develop and implement a comprehensive customer relationship management program in the City of Joplin, Missouri. Data collected indicates that service related businesses in Missouri put great emphasis and effort toward customer service improvement to attract and maintain customers. Information received from regional fire departments indicated a moderate level of understanding of the potential benefits of a CRM program. However, comprehensive customer service programs within responding departments were not visible. The research further showed that residents of, and visitors to, the City, would like to have input into the services provided by the fire department. Although it could appear to fire service personnel that

they operate a monopoly and customer satisfaction is of no consequence: this is far from true. Fire departments are constantly competing for shrinking budget dollars with other operational departments. Service delivery, service quality, and customer satisfaction, is paramount for both operational funding and future support of service growth projects. The Joplin Fire Department has a mission to provide the best possible public safety services to the community. To accomplish this in a changing environment within a diverse community, we must find ways to communicate with our customers. The department is in a position to be a change agent by developing and implementing a detailed customer relationship management program.

Recommendations

The Joplin Fire Department needs to be receptive and responsive to the needs and desires of its customers. To accomplish this, they should develop a comprehensive program to communicate with customers, gather data and work in collaboration with the people we serve, to assure quality, effectiveness and efficiency. Tools and programs sited in this study should be considered, but tailoring the approach to the needs and goals will be critical to success. As determined by the study, the following recommendations are presented:

The first recommendation is that the Joplin Fire Department commit to developing a formal customer relationship management program. This program should include methods which gather information from current service customers and potential customers. The focus should include future needs assessment as well as service benchmarking and service quality measurement. Adding this initiative to the department

strategic plan and developing a timetable for enabling components, would set this initiative in motion.

The second recommendation is that the Fire Department obtain a formal commitment for the customer relations program from the local government agency. This would be accomplished by adoption of a resolution by the Joplin City Council supporting the effort. This step would illustrate to the citizens the support of the local elected officials for this program.

The third recommendation would be that the Fire Department develop a citizen advisory board which would become part of the overall initiative. This advisory board should be comprised of members from various segments of the community and act as a direct link to fire administrators from the community customers. This board would not only provide valuable information on the perspective of the citizens on the fire department but would invaluable in the development and facilitation of community buy-in on major projects.

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Appendix A

Customer Relationship Management
Fire Department
Questionnaire

Department Name
Population:
Square Miles:

1. Regarding your department's activities in customer relations, what groups do you consider to be customers? (check all that apply)
   - ☐ Persons Receiving Services (fire, rescue, EMS, etc.)
   - ☐ Building Owners
   - ☐ Contractors
   - ☐ All Residents
   - ☐ Other

2. What methods do you use to interact with your customers?
   - ☐ Customer Service Survey (describe use)
   - ☐ Advisory Board (describe use
   - ☐ Open Meetings (describe use)
   - ☐ Web Based Customer Input (describe use)

3. How do you assess and measure the perception and satisfaction levels of your customers? (Please describe)

4. How do you use the data collected from your customers?

5. Do you teach your personnel customer relations skills? ☐ yes ☐ no

6. If yes to question # 5. What is your target group for customer service training?

   First Line Supervisors ☐
   New Recruits ☐
   Chief Officers ☐
   All Personnel ☐

7. What benefits can a fire department realize from interacting with their customers?

Comments:

Gary S. Trulson
3020 North Park Ave.
Joplin, MO
64801

Appendix B

September 16, 2008

Chief

I am the Fire Chief in Joplin, MO and a student in the National Fire Academy Executive Officer Program. As part of my requirements for my last class, I am conducting an applied research project. The focus of my research is "Customer Relationship Management". As part of my research I am seeking information from fire departments of similar size to Joplin in the Midwest, to help facilitate future solutions for our community.

I would greatly appreciate your help by taking approximately 5 minutes to complete the attached questionnaire. This questionnaire is completely confidential and information from it will only be utilized in my research paper. This questionnaire is a fill document that you may complete and "**save as a Word Document**" and then return to me **as an attachment** in a reply e-mail at garyt911@netscape.com. Because of completion deadlines I ask that you complete and return the questionnaire by August 1st, 2008. Thanks again for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Gary S. Trulson, Fire Chief

National Fire Academy Student

417-434-2312

Appendix C

Fire Department Customer Relationship Management
Citizen/Customer
Questionnaire

Resident of:

☐Joplin
☐Webb City
☐Carl Junction
☐Other

1. Have you received services from your community Fire Department?

☐Yes-type of service ☐Fire ☐EMS ☐Rescue ☐Education ☐Inspections
☐No ☐ Other_____

2. As a citizen and potential customer do you wish to provide input and direction to your fire department regarding type of services provided, quality of services, locations of stations, etc?

☐ Yes Comments:
☐ No Comments:

3. Do you currently have an opportunity to provide input to your fire department?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes how do you provide input.

4. What methods would you like to see your fire department use to allow your input and interaction as a customer with them?

☐Post service survey
☐Mail out surveys (random or inclusive)
☐Citizen Advisory Board
☐Station Open Houses

5. What benefits would be achieved by facilitating citizen/customer interaction and feed-back with local fire departments?

☐Customer Service Improvements
☐Improved Understanding of Services and Needs
☐New Services to Address Unmet Needs
☐Community Based Initiatives
☐Other

Appendix D

Customer Relationship Management
Business
Questionnaire

Business Name:
Type of Business
Service Area
Number of Current Customers
Potential Customer Base

1. How do you identify and track your customers?

2. Regarding your organization's activities in customer relations, what groups do you consider being customers? (check all that apply)
   - ☐ Persons Receiving Services
   - ☐ Potential Customers
   - ☐ All Residents
   - ☐ Other

3. What methods do you utilize to gain feed-back from your customers?

   - ☐ Customer Service Survey (describe use)
   - ☐ Customer Advisory Board (describe use
   - ☐ Web Based Customer Input (describe use)
   - ☐ Other (describe)

4. What methods do you utilize to encourage customer input/involvement?
   a.
   b.
   c.

5. Do you provide your personnel with customer relations training? ☐ yes ☐ no
   (Please describe)

6. What is your target group for customer service training?

   New Employees ☐
   First Line Supervisors ☐
   Management Staff ☐
   All Personnel ☐

7. What benefits do you realize from interacting with your customers?
   (Please describe)

Gary S. Trulson
3020 North Park Ave.
Joplin, MO
64801

Appendix E

September 16, 2008

Dear Customer Service Specialist,

I am the Fire Chief in Joplin, MO and a student in the National Fire Academy Executive Officer program. As part of my requirements for my final class, I am conducting an applied research project. The focus of my research is "Customer Relations Management". As part of my research I am seeking information from private sector businesses to help facilitate future solutions for our fire department activities related to our customers.

I would greatly appreciate your help by taking approximately 5 minutes to complete the attached questionnaire. This questionnaire is completely confidential and information from it will only be utilized in my research paper. This questionnaire is a fill document that you may complete and "**save as a Word Document**" and then return to me **as an attachment** in a reply e-mail at garyt911@netscape.com. Because of completion deadlines I ask that you complete and return the questionnaire by August 1st 2008. Thanks again for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Gary S. Trulson, Fire Chief

National Fire Academy Student

417-434-2312

Appendix F

Customer Relationship Management
Fire Department Questionnaire
Results

Total Number of Respondents: **20 Respondents**

Type Jurisdiction

Population	< 10,000	10,000 to 29,999	30,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 69,999	70,000 & larger
	2 - 10%	**7 – 35%**	**3 – 15%**	**4 – 20%**	**4 – 20%**
Square Miles	>20	20 – 39.9	40 – 59.9	60 – 79.9	<80
	5 – 25%	**5 – 25%**	**2 – 10%**	**1 – 5%**	**7 – 35%**

1. Regarding your department's activities in customer relations, what groups do you consider being customers?

	Number Responses	Percent
Persons Receiving Service (fire, rescue, EMS,etc.)	**19**	**95%**
Building Owners	**19**	**95%**
Contractors	**18**	**90%**
All Residents	**20**	**100%**
Other	**3**	**15%**

Comments: Other targets include transient customers such as travelers, truckers and commuters. Schools, Daycare Centers and Service Groups

2. What methods do you use to interact with your customers?

Customer Service Survey	**16**	**80%**
Advisory Board	**2**	**10%**
Open Meetings	**12**	**60%**
Web Based Input	**11**	**55%**

3. How do you assess and measure the perception and satisfaction levels of your customers?

Evaluate Data from Formal Surveys	**9**	**45%**
Informal Interaction with Customers	**7**	**35%**
Unsolicited Written Comment	**5**	**25%**
Support of Funding Initiatives	**2**	**10%**
No Method of Assessment	**2**	**10%**

4. How do you use the data collected from your customers?

Improve Service Delivery	**6**	**30%**
Identify New Service Needs	**5**	**25%**
General Information with No Specific Action	**2**	**10%**
Do Not Collect Data or Do Not Use Data	**2**	**10%**

5. Do you provide your personnel with customer relationship management training?

Yes	No
17	**85%**
3	**15%**

Comments: For both internal and external customers
NFA and Mid-America Regional Programs
Brunacini's Program

6. What is the target group for customer service training?

First Line Supervisors	**0**	**0%**
New Recruits	**2**	**10%**
Chief Officers	**1**	**5%**
All Personnel	**15**	**75%**

7. What benefits can a fire department realize from interacting with their customers?

Gain Feedback from Customer on Service and Direction	**6**	**30%**
Maintain the Traditional Support and Respect from Public	**11**	**55%**
Assessment of Service Quality	**5**	**25%**
Public Support for Funding	**7**	**35%**
Develop Customer Relationships and Improve Communications	**1**	**5%**
Improve Connection with Diverse Population	**1**	**5%**

Appendix G

Fire Department Customer Relationship Management
Joplin Area Citizens Questionnaire
Results

Total Number of Respondents: **200**

Community of Residence

Joplin	**98**
Webb City	**20**
Carl Junction	**16**
Other	**66**

1. Have you received services from your community Fire Department?

	Fire	**EMS**	**Rescue**	**Education**	**Inspections**	**Other**	**Total**	**Percent**
Yes	28	36	8			4	76	38%
No							124	62%

2. As a citizen and potential customer do you wish to provide input and direction to your fire department regarding type of services provided, quality of services, locations of stations, etc?

	Number	**Percent**
Yes	**64**	**32%**
No	**136**	**68%**

Comments:

3. Do you currently have an opportunity to provide input to your fire department?

	Number	**Percent**
Yes	**72**	**36%**
No	**128**	**64%**

Methods: Telephone

4. What methods would you like to see your fire department use to allow your input and interaction as a customer with them?

	Number	Percent
Post service survey	**40**	**20%**
Mail out surveys (random or inclusive)	**80**	**40%**
Citizen Advisory Board	**24**	**12%**
Station Open Houses	**72**	**36%**
Web Based Customer Input	**32**	**16%**
Other:	**4**	**2%**

5. What benefits would be achieved by facilitating citizen/customer interaction and feed-back with local fire departments?

	Number	Percent
Customer Service Improvements	**36**	**18%**
Improved Understanding of Services and Needs	**76**	**19%**
New Services to Address Unmet Needs	**60**	**15%**
Community Based Initiatives	**60**	**15%**
Other	**8**	**4%**

Appendix H

Fire Department Customer Relationship Management
Business Questionnaire
Results

Total Number of Respondents: **20**

Type of Business

Health Care	**11**
Utility	**4**
Education	**4**
Communications	**1**

1. How do you identify and track your customers?

	Number	**Percent**
Internal Customers (Employee Records)	**5**	**25%**
Service, Student and Billing Data	**20**	**100%**
External Correspondences	**4**	**20%**

2. Regarding your organization's activities in customer relations, what groups do you consider being customers?

	Number	**Percent**
Persons Receiving Services	**20**	**100%**
Potential Customers	**19**	**95%**
All Residents	**19**	**95%**
Other Community Partners	**6**	**30%**
Employees	**5**	**25%**

Comments:

3. What methods do you utilize to gain feed-back from your customers?

	Number	**Percent**
Customer Service Survey	**20**	**100%**
Customer Advisory Board	**0**	**0%**
Web Based Customer Input	**17**	**85%**
Unsolicited Customer Input	**10**	**50%**

Methods: Use of an outside vendor for detailed customer satisfaction surveys was common.

4. What methods do you utilize to encourage customer input/involvement?

	Number	Percent
Post Service Written Survey	**20**	**100%**
Post Service Phone Calls	**7**	**35%**
Direct Service Feedback	**5**	**25%**
Website	**17**	**85%**
Media(radio, TV, print)	**11**	**55%**
Focus Groups	**4**	**20%**
Internal Electronic Reporting	**5**	**25%**

5. Do you provide your personnel with customer relations training?

	Number	Percent
Yes	**20**	**100%**
No	**0**	**0%**

6. What is your target group for customer service relations training?

	Number	Percent
New Employees	**4**	**%**
First Line Supervisors		**%**
Management Staff		**%**
All Personnel	**16**	**80%**

7. What benefits do you realize from interacting with your customers?

	Number	Percent
Improve Understanding of Customer Needs to Improve Customer Satisfaction	**20**	**100%**
Improved Customer Satisfaction Facilitates Increase in Customer Base	**15**	**75%**
Customer Satisfaction and Advertising Service are Closely Tied and Increase Customer Base	**5**	**25%**
Customer Feed-back can Precipitate Efficient and Effective Operations	**4**	**20%**