

Project: Freedom Graphics Inc CSR Study on Service Relationships

Purpose: Due to increased expansion of Freedom's operations, the company wished to assess their customer service relationships with sales staff from across the country and the service relationships with end-clients.

Result: Research program identified areas of the relationship which needed improvement for both internal and external relationships. The final outcome was the development of a training program that covered key expectations of the service-sales and service-customer relationships.

Summary of Research Stages

- **Advisory Committee:** The Advisory Committee established the key issues to address in the research process including areas of concern and current issues with service relationships. An online forum with this group was also used to collect additional insight and keep them involved throughout the process to ensure buy-in of end results.
- **Sales Staff Interviews:** Key informant interviews with sales staff of Freedom Graphics' four locations identified the expectations of their relationships with the customer service representatives at the Milton, WI location as well as what they feel their clients expect from the relationship.
- **Sales Staff Online Survey:** Following interviews with the Freedom Graphics' sales force an online survey was distributed to all salespeople to quantify their level of satisfaction with the customer service representatives at the Milton office. Ratings were compared to client ratings to formulate the training program and identify areas of weakness.
- **Customer Service Representative Interviews:** In-depth interviews with the customer service representatives were completed in-person at the Milton office. These interviews identified gaps from the service representatives' perspective and were used to develop the focus group guide, interview guide with customers, and online questionnaires.
- **Customer Service Representative Focus Group:** An on-site focus group with the customer service representatives without the presence of the department manager allowed the group to build upon information collected during in-depth interviews. The group identified further problem areas in the service relationship and provided possible solutions for the common problems.
- **Customer Interviews:** Phone interviews with three-to-five major clients of each customer service representative at the Milton office developed a better understanding of important issues from the client's perspective. Phone interviews with customers were used to develop the customer survey as well as to identify possible solutions to service issues.
- **Customer Online Survey:** Similar to the sales staff online survey, all Milton customers were asked to rate their relationship with their customer service representative and salesperson at Freedom Graphics. The ratings helped close the loop on the research and identified major areas where service improvement was necessary.
- **Training Program:** Final recommendations were made to management and the customer service representatives that identified the areas where improvement was necessary. The final outcome was a new set of training guidelines and information provided to the customer service representative to avoid future service problems. Management was also provided with ratings for each individual customer service representative in order to better assess their development as an employee. Freedom Graphics also utilized the findings of the service improvement research program to implement standards at their other three locations across the United States.

Testimonial: APR proved to be a highly qualified and responsive research organization. We were interested in an independent and unbiased assessment of our customers' needs and expectations and how well we were meeting these, and then to use this information to improve customer service. APR's comprehensive approach to the research process and the many techniques they implemented for us were invaluable to our efforts. Importantly, they were not afraid to tell us where and how we needed to improve.

- Richard Greene, Executive Vice-President, Freedom Graphic Systems