



Includes:
7 Key Ways
Your Brand
Can Listen

INFLUENCE

Angus Nelson

HOW TO LISTEN TO YOUR CUSTOMERS
AND BUILD A LEGACY BRAND

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How to Listen to Your Customers and Build a Legacy Brand

By Angus Nelson



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What does the Inauguration of the 45th American President and Blockbuster have in common? The organizations weren't listening.

I know, probably an answer far less snarky than what you were expecting. However, there are far more pragmatic and important realities impacting your business you need to recognize. Whenever holiday season arrives, do you happen to notice the absence of many notable brands we grew up with? Companies like Zenith, Circuit City, Blockbuster, and Borders are nowhere on your shopping list — they are ghosts of Holidays past, for sure.

In great part because they didn't listen.

Last year, an outsider took the Oath to the greatest office in the land as the 45th President of the United States, much to the dismay of both Republican and Democrat alike. One

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organization can't believe their candidate won, the other can't believe their candidate didn't. Neither listened.

**Whether it's politics or products
one thing must be present for success:**

Listening to your customers.

Too often, organizations get so caught up in their own hubris, failing to change, grow, or innovate beyond their initial successes. Or worse, they try to change too much, too fast and, as Dave Packard of Hewlett Packard states, "a company is more likely to die from indigestion of too much opportunity than starvation from too little."

Far too many companies are creating the products and services *they think* consumers want, but often aren't fully considering *why* their customer/donor/client would even want them in the first place. (we'll simply call "customers" from here)

Are you listening?

People always want the next new and shiny anything, marketers have trained us for it. As such, companies will jump into the newest trends, use the latest catchphrases, and portray that they're fashionable to the current state of economy. They throw around terms like "innovation", "disruption", and "digital transformation."

That's great and all... but a problem arises when your customer's experience is changed to something they neither want nor expect. You don't simply change for the sake of changing.

Innovation begins and ends with the customer.

Or, on the other hand, organizations think they can continue to stay the course and not waver from what has worked in the past... Our American politics just got a big dose of reality in this department. Neither the Republican nor Democratic Party took time to listen, observe, and respect their very real and passionate constituency. Both paid a heavy price.

You, first, must hear the voice of your customer.



Five Billion to Bankrupt

Blockbuster thought their audience adored their in-store experience and a bag a popcorn for an evening of entertainment. By the time they realized people loved the actual movies on-demand, with or without popcorn, it had become too late. In two years, they went from a \$5 billion dollar company to bankrupt.

The critical component is this: Customer Experience

Some would question, “We’re good, as long as we are matching our product to demand, right?” That’s a good start, but if you stop there, you may miss it. Blockbuster had a good product — movies.

They had a terrible process: The logistics of traveling to a store, finding a movie in-stock, penalties for late returns, and all of the time it consumed became intolerable the instant someone else offered a better experience.

What does that actually mean?

Customer experience is the primary factor to company relevance

While some companies can argue for a Snapchat geofilter campaign, AR/VR experience, or wearable notifications, others simply don’t need them.

Innovation is not about tech-goo, it’s about customers’ happy interaction with your brand or service. Your company doesn’t need to be everywhere in everything... you need to be into the product and service that serves your customers best.

Innovation is nothing if the customer isn’t the foundational part of the equation.

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Important Questions to Ask

- Are you laser focused on why your customer does or doesn't do business with you?
- What does your customer want or need from your product or service?
- Are you delivering the way your customer desires best?
- What does your customer FEEL when working with your brand?

Deaf and Blindsided

Over the last year, we've witnessed Brexit and the US Presidential Campaign model what a lack of understanding for their "customer" looks like (and France might be next). Those in authority became silo'd, entrenched in their own echo chambers of what they perceive to be simple reasoning, established norm, and expected outcome.

We've also witnessed Radio Shack, Staples, and Sears on the brink because they haven't been listening either. These brands all missed tremendous opportunities to transition into digital retail

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fast enough. They, too, believed their own models were sustainable and ignored the changing customer base.

They weren't listening.

Don't Believe Your Own Hype

Be it hubris, arrogance, or ignorance, they weren't listening to what their constituencies were actually demanding. They believe their own hype, isolate to their own cadre of like-minded, and become paralyzed by assumption.

Will you hear the voice of your people?

Polls, focus groups, and pundits are not the barometer of truth. Anyone will say what they need to say in order to save face, blend in, and acquiesce. This is where groupthink fails us. It's what's beyond the words... the actions that speak loudest.

So, "How can a brand truly listen to their customer?" you ask. Below, we've provided a resource to help you do just that. But first, let me share some examples of those who've weathered history to prevail.

Building A Legacy Brand is Possible

Today, some companies are skyrocketing in growth. They've taken the imperative to listen and create new and creative ways to serve customers faster, more efficiently, and economically. However, even the biggest of disruptors like Airbnb and Uber stand to annihilate themselves if they're not careful to continue listening — their users, drivers, hosts, and regulators are speaking.

Having a vibrant, legacy organization is possible. Study the methodologies of businesses surviving even over a hundred years into this technological century. Brands like IBM, Diebold, Wells Fargo, 3M, and even Nintendo have iterated, innovated, and survived... even thrived.

Did you know Nintendo started in 1889 as a playing card company?

Nintendo's Corporate Mission and Philosophy actually states, "... We believe it is essential not only to provide products of the highest quality, but to treat every customer with attention, consideration and respect. By listening closely to our customers, we constantly improve our products and services."

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Your organization can have a legacy. It may not always look like you started, but it will evolve and improve the more you connect to your customer, listening to what they need, and delivering with excellence.

Innovation is about listening...



Now, let's talk about HOW to listen...

Your customers want you to hear them. They want to be served well and conveniently. They want to become a loyal part of your brand, an advocate even... and, they're willing to pay for it.

Your challenge is to accurately listen - not simply to what they say, but to listen in how they behave.

Here's your 7 techniques to help you best listen to your customers' needs and connection to your brand. Let these guide and anchor your core products, services, and messaging.

1. Listen to what people DO

It's when people are left to themselves, making decisions for what's right for their needs and family, a completely different reality can exist. Your challenge is to provide a safe environment to learn the truth of your audience.

Follow the data and analytics of how people act and behave. **What people do is the indicator, not what they say.** True listening is found in the actions of your tribe.

*“What you do speaks so loudly,
I can't hear what you're saying”*
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

2. Listen to Beta Tests

While a beta version of a pilot or project can indicate some reality, administering beta with varying conditions often creates more accurate realities.

1. Add a cost - free is not measurable
2. Intentional glitches - find people's thresholds, pain points, and attention spans
3. No prizes or rewards announced - incentivizing your audience is not reality

*“Usability testing shows you if something is usable.
Beta testing shows you if people will actually use it.”*
– Rachel Decker, UX Researcher at HubSpot

3. Listen to the Crowdsourcing of Ideas and Improvements

Proposing and/or requesting concepts from your audience reveals some of the deepest and richest opportunities. In addition, your customers will also give you the words for your sales copy simply within their responses.

*"We thought that we had the answers,
it was the questions we had wrong."*

- Bono

4. Listen to Crowdfunding

When people are asked to pre-pay for a product or support the development of one, they are giving to a shared destiny. The dollars reveal their belief and support, validating a market that otherwise didn't exist.

"The unique value of crowdfunding is not money, it's community."

- Ethan Mollick, Wharton University

5. Listen to Those Not Like You

Most of us, on some level, are fearful of those not like us. Be it culture, race, religion, or politics, we find it easier to dismiss than to embrace... therein lies the problem. We would rather stay silent and alone in our misunderstanding than to engage and understand the unfamiliar and unknown.

*"Different people, in good faith, can look at the same fact and interpret it differently.
But that's where an interesting conversation begins."*

- Eric Schlosser

6. Listen to Your Opposition

Our silos are only silos because we've decidedly abandoned any other perspectives. Some believe that if one doesn't agree with you, they are an enemy. This not the case, many marriages would be severely troubled if it was.

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We must step outside of our ego and fears in order to connect with those who don't agree with our product, position, or perspective. This is rarely easy and always takes great character and intention. You may very well find that those you choose to understand will help you to see more holistically than you thought possible.

“Opposition can be your friend. Opposition can be the fire that tempers the better sword, as well as the ice that cools a fiery temper.

Don't ever run from it; learn from it!”

— Jack R. Rose, The Cedar Post

7. Listen to the Individual Person

In Ryan Levesque's book “Ask”, he reveals the most ignored component to an organization's connection with their customers - they simply don't ask the right questions. Taking the time to actually speak with a person, one on one, is far more effective than robocalls or spam surveys.

“If you don't talk TO your customers, how will you know HOW TO talk to your customers?”

- Will Evans, Design Thinker @ NYU Stern

These are seven techniques you can use to listen to your audience more effectively and intimately. If you engage your customers with this level of intention, you'll be far more equipped to stay relevant and successful for many years to come.



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About Angus Nelson:



I Help Businesses Market, Manage, and Monetize Their Brand

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Angus is a consultant and strategist, helping creative entrepreneurs build impacting systems for marketing, messaging, and mindset. He's worked with Fortune 1000 brands around the topics of innovation and collaboration; spoken at corporate headquarters for Walmart, BMW, Coca-Cola, Hallmark, and others; and hosts an Inc.com top 20 business podcast called, Up In Your Business. Lastly, he and his wife run BizBuild, an event company providing business tools and learning for creative entrepreneurs - turning expensive hobbies into businesses.

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