

What can Healthcare Learn about Patient Experience Tools from Travel and eCommerce?



Trip Advisor celebrates it's 16th birthday next month and Amazon sold their very first book almost 21 years ago.

Mark Sadler, founder of Hootvox, considers how customer feedback has evolved and asks what are the implications for healthcare?

Most feedback that you read on the internet is collected via an 'open' system for anyone who wants to leave feedback about a product, service or business. This system is also 'open' to non-customers leaving reviews for the wrong reasons. In the case of hotels, the reviews you read could have been left by a disgruntled ex-member of staff, the manager of the hotel next door, or the helpful friends and family of the hotel owner themselves.

The LA Times reported that up to 40% of all online hotel reviews are fake and that around 15% have been paid for by the hotels themselves in attempts to manipulate their online reputations. In November 2015, Amazon famously issued legal proceedings against 1,114 people who advertised their services as 'writing 'fake' Amazon reviews'.

Lots of small businesses have been unfairly damaged by malicious fake reviews. Equally, fake reviews can lead consumers into making choices or purchases that they otherwise would not have made.

The way in which feedback is collected has a dramatic effect on it's quality. Open review sites are just the tip of the iceberg; some businesses offer incentives for positive feedback, some hand out 'feedback cards' to selected customers only, and as Amazon and Trip Advisor discovered, others will simply pay companies to write fake positive reviews.

It's increasingly common to be asked for your feedback by a member of staff who stands over you while you complete the survey on an iPad, or to be phoned up and asked to complete a telephone survey. Feedback collected in person can often be 20% more positive than feedback collected remotely, and feedback collected by telephone is said to be in the region of 30% more positive.

Some businesses are working hard to try to improve online review collection. They ask customers to register with a site before they can leave feedback, and some companies print a unique number on their receipts which customers need in order to leave a review on their website. However even if the customers are verified and the feedback collected off-site, an open review system is still open to significant bias.

When compared to customer surveys businesses listed on an open review site have 3 times more negative reviews and 35% fewer positive reviews. A likely cause of this bias is that in general, only people with extremes of opinion, Mr Angry or Mrs Extremely Happy will actively seek out a place to leave their feedback. The vast majority of customers who are quite happy with the service would be more than happy to provide feedback if asked, but do not go looking online for a place to do this.

Closed Review Systems

From hotels to online retailers, the future of customer reviews is being led by software providers who use 'closed feedback' software to survey every customer of a business by email or text message. This type of proactive review collection can involve a little more administration but is clearly the next step away from the passive systems of open review sites. Even TripAdvisor is encouraging hotels to adopt it's own version of a closed review system.

The feedback cannot be filtered by businesses but they do have the ability to respond to reviews, to say thank you or to apologise and offer to put things right. The interactions between the customer and the trader are often made public for all to see, so that potential customers can see how a trader conducts themselves when a problem occurs. If a business has strong customer service, this is a great place to showcase it.

Because every customer is surveyed, they still get the extremes of opinion, but they also get lots of other feedback too with the average response rate across eCommerce sites being above 15%. Where the purchase is considered or the price tag high the response rates can be much higher, and because all feedback is collected off-site there is even less opportunity for bias in the results.

Reports show that if the public sees feedback that shows a balance of opinion including both positive and negative feedback, they are more inclined to trust it because of the added authenticity.

In a recent survey:

62% of people said they leave feedback because it gets companies to listen.
74% said that they like to help companies to make improvements.
90% said they like to help other people to make good decisions.

We also know that when people use customer reviews to help them make their purchasing decisions, they are much more likely to leave their own feedback if asked.

The Future for Feedback in Healthcare

The last 20 years has brought us to a point where we know what works and what doesn't. In April 2011, the OFT wrote a paper titled 'Empowering Consumers of Public Services through Choice Tools'. Of all the feedback collection methods and companies studied, they concluded that a closed review system would be by far the most effective solution for both health and social care.

To date DoH, NHS Choices and NHS England have engaged with only open systems and the majority of feedback is collected on-site. There has been a slow adoption of technology, most likely due to a concern that not all patients have the internet or a smartphone. However, as this changes, closed systems become viable and a valuable source of feedback. NHS Wales has recently started to use closed review software to gather feedback from confirmed patients off-site.

Patient feedback is most valuable when used to improve the patient experience.

In eCommerce, customer feedback is used by responsible traders to tailor their offering to meet the needs of the customer.

In healthcare, high volumes of bias-free feedback provides actionable insight that can stimulate and drive continuous improvement programmes, firmly placing the patients and their feedback at the centre of all that we do.

Good feedback software allows us to create bespoke surveys helping us to capture valuable insight on what's most important to each ward. Powerful reporting tools can track trends in the ratings and make comparisons with similar wards in other parts of the hospital or other hospitals. Beyond hospitals, CCGs can use patient feedback to understand outcomes and commission services more effectively, collecting patient feedback from medical centres and surgeries, dentists, clinics, drop in centres and care homes. The possibilities are endless.

We have a lot to thank TripAdvisor and Amazon for, and whilst we need a 'TripAdvisor for Care' to provide the public, social services, CCGs and other bodies with effective feedback, we must be sure to learn from the mistakes that they have made and be sure not to repeat them.

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