

South West companies focus on customer experience to drive success in 2010.

Organisations preparing to emerge strong from this recent economic downturn are those who continue to listen to their customers and place them at the forefront of their business strategies and initiatives.

As the UK economy begins to emerge from the dark days of 2009, companies in the South West are gearing up for a successful and profitable 2010 with the assistance of market research and consultancy firm, iCustomerExperience, which provides a unique Indicator and accompanying Index designed to measure the strength of the company-customer relationship and facilitate performance benchmarking in this area.

Business advice and support service Business Link, which works with organisations from all sectors and has witnessed firsthand how the economic climate has affected UK businesses, is working with iCustomerExperience offering ten of its South West clients a trial of the company's customer relationship monitoring tools.

Companies have been selected from a range of sectors, and are currently in the planning phase with most surveys going out at the beginning of February and results available by the end of the quarter. Suzanne Hall-Gibbins, Head of Business Growth Services for Business Link, says: *"Despite the UK now being officially out of recession these are still very tough economic times and the relationships companies have with their existing – and potential – customer bases are crucial.*

"Anything that helps businesses to monitor and develop their customer relationships is extremely valuable and the feedback so far has been very positive with many of these businesses already putting in place strategies designed specifically to meet any areas for improvement identified in the surveys." She added: *"This clearly underlines the challenge for businesses to actively engage with their customers and to put in place systems to develop those relationships and attract new customers."*

Indeed the post recession landscape promises challenges for businesses everywhere. With business and consumer spending restricted for the foreseeable future, customer retention is paramount to

business success; and a company's install base offers significant and often untapped potential. Company resource is far more effectively deployed convincing an existing, valuable customer to stay loyal and increase their expenditure with you, than it is being used to acquire new customers. Companies need to be focusing on further developing and strengthening the relationships they have with their most valued customers.

A daunting task perhaps? Not necessarily. Understanding what customers **think** and how they **feel** about the relationship they have with you at present can provide solid steer and direction as to how to proceed and accomplish this. As Andrea Collins, Director at iCustomerExperience explains *"Companies can only improve what they measure! Customer satisfaction surveys have been around for a long time so the concept of polling customers' views is not new, however in-house surveys are often internalised and measure only what the company believes it can address. This is so unfortunate as the associated investment is often great and the results are disappointing in so much as they rarely represent an accurate and realistic view of service delivery through the eyes of the customer"*.

Suzanne Hall-Gibbins added: *"The ability for organisations to benchmark their performance against peer organisations is vital to companies wanting to further raise the bar on customer service excellence in order to remain competitive in the marketplace."*

Andrea Collins says: *"We are delighted with the companies' response to this initiative. They have clearly grasped how we are pushing the boundaries of traditional 'customer satisfaction surveys'; our domain expertise and the fact that we are independent and impartial also appears to assure them that we are measuring the correct criteria in order to provide them with the valuable insight they require."*

About Business Link South West

Business Link provides the impartial information, advice and support people need to start, run and grow a business.

The service is free and offers practical insights and independent solutions to its clients' particular business needs.

It understands the diverse needs of businesses and recognises the critical issues they face, providing insightful and affordable advice, access to other specialist services and access to third party providers.

Primarily funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) it is also supported by a number of other government agencies. Delivery and quality assurance of the Business Link Service is the responsibility of the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA).

To find out more about Business Link South West please visit

<http://www.businesslink.co.uk/southwest>

About iCustomerExperience

iCustomerExperience is a fully outsourced indicator and performance benchmarking service in the domain of customer experience.

The company surveys its clients' customers on their behalf, managing the entire process from survey planning and execution through to data analysis and reporting.

The iCustomerExperience Index provides unparalleled benchmarking capability enabling clients to rate their performance against that of peer companies and other organisations in the wider marketplace.

To find out more about iCustomerExperience please visit <http://www.iCustomerExperience.com>.