

**Food Industry Customer Service Survey
Survey Procedures**

Brad Monson

UGPTI Staff Paper No. 124

November 1994

**FOOD INDUSTRY
CUSTOMER SERVICE SURVEY**

Survey Procedures

By

**Brad Monson
Graduate Research Assistant**

**Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute
North Dakota State University
P.O. Box 5074
Fargo, North Dakota 58105**

November 1994

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	1
Procedure	3
Internal Inquiry	3
Informal Customer Visitation	3
Develop Survey Questionnaire	4
Format	5
Pre-Test the Survey	5
Conduct Mail Survey	6
Tabulate the Results of the Survey	6
 Appendix A	
 Appendix B	

INTRODUCTION

The Food Industry Customer Service Survey was conducted in conjunction with Food Services of America (FSA). The individuals/businesses/organizations surveyed were selected from FSA's customer list. The customers were segmented into classes A through F based on bi-annual dollar sales figures with Class A being the highest level of sales and Class F being the lowest.

The objectives of the survey were two-fold:

1. Assess customer requirements and expectations in the food service industry.
2. Determine customer satisfaction regarding Food Services of America.

There were 463 surveys mailed to a sample of businesses and organizations from the assembled list of Food Services of America customers. The survey distribution is represented in Table 1.

TABLE 1				
	No. of Customers	% of Total Customers	No. of Surveys Sent	% of Customers Surveyed
Class A	73	2.9	69	14.9
Class B	84	3.4	84	18.1
Class C	135	5.4	20	4.3
Class D	256	10.3	38	8.2
Class E	473	19.0	70	15.1
Class F	1,464	58.9	182	39.3
TOTAL	2,485	100.0	463	100.0

Several of the Class F customers had a sales figure of \$0.00. Therefore, a greater number of surveys (33%) were sent to Class A and Class B customers (69 and 84 surveys respectively) to improve the response rate. The response by class results are represented in Table 2. Most of the respondents were from the retail/fine dining and hospital/nursing home business categories (see Appendix A, Question 2).

TABLE 2			
	No. of Responses	% Response Rate of Class	% of Total Responses
Class A	19	27.5	23.2
Class B	18	21.4	22.0
Class C	3	15.0	3.7
Class D	13	34.2	15.9
Class E	5	7.14	6.1
Class F	24	13.2	29.3
TOTAL	82		100.0

The questionnaire used consisted of 31 questions and was completed and returned by 82¹ individuals for a response rate of 17.7 percent. Because of time limitations for the completion of the project, approximately two weeks were allowed for completion and return of the surveys. This could account for a lower than anticipated response rate.

¹Number of surveys returned at time of tabulation. The actual number may be higher due to surveys received at a later date.

PROCEDURE

The procedure for this survey was:

1. An internal inquiry - to determine the objectives of the survey.
2. An informal customer visitation - to aid in the development of questions for the questionnaire.
3. To develop a survey questionnaire.
4. To pre-test the survey.
5. To conduct a mail survey.
6. To tabulate results of the survey.

Internal Inquiry

The internal inquiry consisted of discussions with the company's general manager, sales manager, and operations manager to determine the nature of information obtainable from a survey and the usefulness of such information. That is to say, what kind of information will the customers be willing to give us and how do we use it?

The objectives of the survey stated in the introduction were developed and the format of the survey was determined. The format will be discussed in a later section.

Informal Customer Visitation

Informal customer visitation involved meeting with customers to discuss food industry issues to obtain ideas for possible survey questions. The visits were made in conjunction with sales calls with two Food Services of America sales associates and occurred over a period of three days. The visitation was conducted with sales associates for two reasons: (1) to gain an understanding of sales associates' sales techniques and job responsibilities; and (2) to learn

important information from discussions between sales associates and customers, e.g., information (complaints, concerns) that customers give to sales associates during the course of regular business that they may not think of when asked directly.

Develop Survey Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire was developed using the information gained from the internal inquiry and informal customer visitation. The questions were designed to ask about specific service characteristics while still allowing for the customer to express his/her personal judgement. The question styles were a mixture of scale rating,

Example: In the food service industry, how important is:

	Very Unimportant			Very Important	
<i>Professionalism:</i>	1	2	3	4	5

ranking in order of importance,

Example: Considering your suppliers' delivery service, please rank the following service characteristics in order of importance. (1 being most important)

- _____ a. On time delivery
- _____ b. Consistent delivery times week after week
- _____ c. Order integrity (order is 100 percent complete, accurate, all items in stock and shipped at the same time)
- _____ d. Communication (notification of late deliveries, etc.)
- _____ e. Convenience (deliveries made at a convenient time)

and opinion essay.

Example: Have you encountered any specific problems with your suppliers' delivery service?

Opinion essay questions were included to provide customers the opportunity to give opinions/suggestions that are not covered by the scale rating or ranking questions or that are specific to that customer.

Format

The survey was divided into two parts. Part I asked the respondents to assess the performance of the food service industry as a whole. This section is intended to determine the general customer requirements about the food service industry. Part II asked the respondents to assess the performance of Food Services of America only. The sequence of the two sections is intended to get the customers thinking about the performance of all of their suppliers then assess Food Services of America's performance in comparison to the rest of the industry.

The rough draft was then reviewed by the sales managers, customer service manager, and the operations manager. Each question was critiqued as to relevance and use and/or value of the information that was to be gained. A final discussion was held regarding the length of the survey and the managers' perceptions as to the willingness of the customers to answer the survey.

Pre-Test the Survey

The pre-test is used to locate ambiguous and/or non-relevant questions and to determine the estimated time required to complete the survey. The survey was pre-tested with five customers selected during informal customer visitation based on size (dollar amount of sales), type of business (e.g., non-profit organization, restaurant, etc.), location (urban or rural), and willingness to complete the survey in the presence of the researcher. Pre-testing was conducted during a personal visit to the five customers to allow customers to ask questions and make suggestions on survey questions, content and format. The survey was then edited and reviewed

once again to complete its final form.

Conduct Mail Survey

The final version of the survey was sent out to customers with a cover letter from the sales manager of FSA explaining the reasons for the survey and the uses of its results. The survey was sent in an Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute envelope with a return envelope addressed to the UGPTI. This mailing method was used to notify the respondents that the survey was in fact from Food Services of America but also to instill confidence that the responses would be confidential and tabulated by a third party.

Tabulate the Results of the Survey

The numerical survey results were tabulated using SAS statistical software. The response frequency for each question was reported in the final report (see Appendix B for SAS program). The written responses were reported by question number and sorted by customer class and survey section.

The survey responses were presented in two parts. Part I, Section A are the responses to the food service industry numeric ranking section of the survey. Part I, Section B are the responses to the Food Services of America numeric ranking section. Part II, Section A are the customer comments relating to the food service industry as a whole. Part II, Section B are the customer comments relating to Food Service of America.

APPENDIX A

Food Industry Customer Service Survey



INSTRUCTIONS

Section 1 of the survey pertains to the food service industry as a whole. Please consider all of your food suppliers when answering the questions in this section.

Section 2 of the survey pertains to Food Services of America. Please consider Food Services of America ONLY when answering the questions in this section.

Please mail the completed survey in the return envelope provided. Your cooperation in completing and mailing the survey on or before Wednesday, August 17, 1994 would be greatly appreciated.

ALL RESPONSES AND COMMENTS ARE CONFIDENTIAL

If you have any questions regarding the survey please contact:

**Brad Monson
North Dakota State University
Dept. of Agricultural Economics
PO Box 5636
Fargo, ND 58105-5636
Phone: (701) 237-7441 or (701) 237-7767**

Background Questions

Respondent's title: _____

1. In your position, do you interact with:

a.	Sales Associates or Representatives	Yes	No
b.	Delivery Drivers	Yes	No
c.	Customer Service Representatives	Yes	No
d.	Sales Managers	Yes	No
e.	Other, please specify: _____		

2. The business is:

- a. Retail Store
- b. Restaurant/Fine Dining
- c. Fast Food Restaurant
- d. Hospital/Nursing Home
- e. School
- f. College or University
- g. Bar and/or Tavern
- h. Other, please specify: _____

3. How many food suppliers currently serve you? _____

4. The location of the business is:

- a. Urban (population > 2,500)
- b. Rural (population < 2,500)

Sales Associates or Representatives

Please consider all of your food suppliers' sales associates or representatives when answering these questions.

5. In the food service industry, how important is:

		Very Unimportant			Very Important
Professionalism:					
a.	Courtesy	1	2	3	4 5
b.	Attitude	1	2	3	4 5
c.	Honesty	1	2	3	4 5
d.	Appearance	1	2	3	4 5
Knowledge of:					
e.	Product lines	1	2	3	4 5
f.	Availability and condition of products	1	2	3	4 5
g.	Preparation and use of products	1	2	3	4 5
Communication Skills:					
h.	Communication skills	1	2	3	4 5
Experience:					
i.	Knowledge of business	1	2	3	4 5
j.	Understanding customer needs (for example, knowledge of your menu)	1	2	3	4 5

6. Are there any specific problems with sales associates that you have encountered?

7. In your opinion, what is the key characteristic(s) of an outstanding sales associate or representative?

Delivery Service

Please consider all of your food suppliers' delivery service when answering these questions.

8. How frequently do you receive delivery service (shipments) from your suppliers?

- a. Daily
- b. Three times a week
- c. Two times a week
- d. Once a week
- e. Other, please specify: _____

9. Considering your suppliers' delivery service, please rank the following service characteristics in order of importance. (1 being most important)

- a. _____ On time delivery
- b. _____ Consistent delivery times week after week
- c. _____ Order integrity (order is 100% complete, accurate, all items in stock and shipped at the same time)
- d. _____ Communication (notification of late deliveries, etc.)
- e. _____ Convenience (deliveries made at a convenient time)

Example:

- a. 1
- b. 2
- c. 5
- d. 3
- e. 4

10. In this industry, how important is:

		Very Unimportant			Very Important	
		1	2	3	4	5
a.	Low instance of damaged goods	1	2	3	4	5
b.	Driver professionalism (courtesy, appearance, attitude)	1	2	3	4	5
c.	Special deliveries (willingness to make them, and speed of delivery)	1	2	3	4	5
d.	Emergency orders (willingness to make them, and speed of delivery)	1	2	3	4	5

11. Have you encountered any specific problems with your suppliers' delivery service?

Customer Service Representatives

Please consider all of your food suppliers' customer service representatives when answering these questions.

12. How often do you contact the customer service representatives from your suppliers?

- a. Very frequently (at least once a week)
- b. Frequently (2 or 3 times a month)
- c. Occasionally (once every 2 or 3 months)
- d. Other, please specify: _____

13. What is the nature of this contact? (circle all that apply)

- a. Submit complaints
- b. Order status information
- c. Submit an order
- d. Correct or change an order
- e. Check on credits and/or invoices (corrections)
- f. Other, please specify: _____

14. In dealing with customer service representatives, please rank the following in order of importance when considering suppliers' performance. (1 being most important)

- a. _____ Courtesy
- b. _____ Understanding the problem
- c. _____ Ability to give immediate answers
- d. _____ Authority to make a decision (correct the problem right away)
- e. _____ Offering information (giving all related information even if the questions are not asked)

Product Lines

15. In this industry, how important is:

		Very Unimportant			Very Important	
		1	2	3	4	5
a.	Wide variety of available products and services	1	2	3	4	5
b.	Availability of new products	1	2	3	4	5
c.	Frequency of new product introductions	1	2	3	4	5
d.	Availability and accuracy of product information	1	2	3	4	5
e.	Product samples	1	2	3	4	5
f.	Product demonstrations	1	2	3	4	5
g.	Product price	1	2	3	4	5
h.	Product rebates	1	2	3	4	5

16. Do you consistently take advantage of product manufacturer rebates?

- a. Yes
- b. No

17. If you would, please give your opinion on the method and/or procedure of product manufacturer rebates:

18. Does "rebate tracking" by a supplier(s) influence your purchase decisions?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Complaints

19. How often do you submit a complaint to a supplier? (circle one)
- a. Very frequently (at least once a week)
 - b. Frequently (2 or 3 times a month)
 - c. Occasionally (once every 2 or 3 months)
 - d. Very infrequently (once or twice a year)
 - e. Other, please specify: _____
20. In dealing with complaints, please rank the following in order of importance when considering suppliers' performance. (1 being most important)
- a. _____ Accountability (acceptance of responsibility for mistakes)
 - b. _____ Responsiveness in correcting mistakes
 - c. _____ Low number of repeat mistakes
 - d. _____ Timeliness of delivery of corrected orders
 - e. _____ Courtesy (willingness to help)
21. Have you encountered any specific problems with your suppliers' performance in dealing with complaints?



22. We would like to know your opinion of the quality of service you receive from Food Services of America. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. Circle the appropriate number using the scale below.

- 1 = I strongly disagree with this statement (SD)
- 2 = I disagree with this statement (D)
- 3 = I neither agree nor disagree with this statement (N)
- 4 = I agree with this statement (A)
- 5 = I strongly agree with this statement (SA)

The following questions refer to Food Services of America's **SALES ASSOCIATES**.

		SD	D	N	A	SA
a.	The FSA sales associate always conducts himself/ herself in a professional manner	1	2	3	4	5
b.	The FSA sales associate is knowledgeable of all the product lines and presents information about those products well	1	2	3	4	5
c.	The FSA sales associate is difficult to contact	1	2	3	4	5
d.	The FSA sales associate frequently provides samples of new products	1	2	3	4	5
e.	The FSA sales associate understands my business and shows concern for my business success	1	2	3	4	5
f.	I know when my FSA sales associate will show up so that I can prepare my order accordingly	1	2	3	4	5
g.	I receive a fair price from the FSA sales associate	1	2	3	4	5
h.	I always compare prices between FSA and my other suppliers	1	2	3	4	5
i.	The FSA sales associate fails to follow-up on my questions and/or service problem	1	2	3	4	5
j.	The FSA sales associate is a good source of new ideas for my business (menu ideas)	1	2	3	4	5

23. Please make any suggestions on how the Food Services of America sales associate can improve his/her service and/or business relationship with your company.

24. The following questions refer to Food Services of America's CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES.

	SD	D	N	A	SA
a. FSA's customer service representatives are courteous and professional	1	2	3	4	5
b. My invoice and/or credit problems are handled promptly	1	2	3	4	5
c. I wait too long to get a satisfactory answer to my questions.	1	2	3	4	5
d. I am satisfied with the speed in which action is taken on my problem/complaint	1	2	3	4	5
e. The telephone service at FSA is prompt and efficient (i.e. routing calls)	1	2	3	4	5

25. Please make any suggestions on how Food Services of America can improve its customer service.

26. The following questions refer to Food Services of America's DELIVERY SERVICE

		SD	D	N	A	SA
a.	If I could, I would change the time of day my order is delivered from FSA	1	2	3	4	5
b.	Returning goods and getting credit for damaged goods is a difficult process	1	2	3	4	5
c.	The delivery driver from FSA conducts himself/herself in a professional manner and is cooperative with me	1	2	3	4	5
d.	Unloading time for my order from FSA is too long	1	2	3	4	5
e.	The products that I order from FSA are always available for delivery	1	2	3	4	5
f.	I am never exactly sure when my delivery from FSA is going to show up	1	2	3	4	5
g.	The quality of goods from FSA is satisfactory	1	2	3	4	5

27. Please make any suggestions on how Food Services of America can improve its delivery service.

(continued on back) 

General Questions

28. If you could change 3 things to improve Food Services of America, what would they be?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

29. Are there any specific product quality problems you feel need to be addressed?

30. What percentage of your food service needs are met by Food Services of America (based on total dollar purchases)?

- a. 0 - 25 percent
- b. 26 - 50 percent
- c. 51 - 70 percent
- d. More than 70 percent

31. If you wish to be identified, please feel free to give your name and/or the name of your business/organization.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

SAS PROGRAM

```
OPTIONS NOCENTER;  
DATA SURVEY;  
INFILE 'SURVEY DATA *';  
INPUT CLASS $ Q1A $ Q1B $ Q1C $ Q1D $ Q1E $ Q2 $ Q3 Q4 $ Q5A Q5B  
Q5C Q5D Q5E Q5F Q5G Q5H Q5I Q5J Q8 $ Q9A Q9B Q9C Q9D Q9E Q10A  
Q10B Q10C Q10D Q12 $ Q13A $ Q13B $ Q13C $ Q13D $ Q13E $ Q13F $  
Q14A Q14B Q14C Q14D Q14E Q15A Q15B Q15C Q15D Q15E Q15F Q15G  
Q15H Q16 $ Q18 $ Q19 $ Q20A Q20B Q20C Q20D Q20E Q22A Q22B Q22C  
Q22D Q22E Q22F Q22G Q22H Q22I Q22J Q24A Q24B Q24C Q24D Q24E Q26A  
Q26B Q26C Q26D Q26E Q26F Q26G Q30 $;  
PROC SORT; BY CLASS;  
PROC FREQ;
```