5 STEPS TO BREAKING DOWN YOUR BUSINESS SILOS
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INTRODUCTION

Uniting Your Company Around the Voice of the Customer

It’s hard to open your business press app (remember when this was in print?) without reading about companies “breaking down the business silos.” But what does that really mean…and is there substance beyond the hype?

In a word, absolutely. Breaking down silos allows you to move beyond the bureaucracies, policies, and inflexible processes that hinder collaboration and innovation. This paves the way for that special kind of magic that happens when everyone in an organization is in regular communication—the product team talks to the support team, so they understand the biggest pain points and feature requests; marketing talks to product, so they know how to accurately position the upcoming product launch; support talks to marketing, so content accurately reflects and addresses the biggest challenges that customers are facing…and everyone, company-wide, is on board with what the customers are saying and asking for. With the right systems in place, this communication happens organically, transparently, and constantly.

Breaking down the business silos to become a more collaborative, customer-centric organization takes intention and effort, but it’s not a mysterious process. There are five simple steps you can take to break down those silos once and for all:

1) Define Your Goals

Are you trying to better meet the needs of today’s social customers? Build a more collaborative company culture? Differentiate yourself amongst competitors? There are any number of reasons you might want to create a more open company structure, but unless you’re sure what they are, you won’t be able to articulate them, much less accomplish them.

It’s not enough just to know what your goals are. You also want to be explicit about how you’re going to define success. Breaking down business silos is not as concrete as increasing first-call resolution or generating more leads. Success metrics might be as simple as X number of customer ideas implemented, or X number of departments responding to questions in the customer community in any given week (indicating more multi-department cooperation). Understanding how you will define success and which metrics you need to track from the beginning will be crucial to achieving the results you’re after.
2) Obtain Stakeholder Buy-In

Some companies intuitively understand the benefits of building a more collaborative company culture. At others, it’s less clear. Identify the key stakeholders needed to put your plan into action—product, support, and marketing team leads, the person or team who will man the technology you select as the catalyst for the change (usually some mix of support, marketing, or customer experience), etc.

Plainly lay out the goals you defined in step 1 as well as expected benefits and metrics you’ll be measuring to define success. Some benefits you can reference:

- Serendipitous collaboration and innovation
- Creation of a Voice of the Customer culture—listening, acting, and closing the loop with customers become systematic
- The ability to serve your customers better by providing them access to the expertise of relevant employees from across your company (not just support)
- Stronger, more unified company culture
- The ability to identify, respond to, and fix issues more quickly
- Differentiation from competitors

3) Community to Unite the Company around the Voice of the Customer

In order to break down the business silos in your organization, you’re going to need a catalyst to spark the change you’re trying to create. Your customers are a great focal point that your company can rally around, and a customer community brings their voice front and center.

Communities have evolved from the forums of the 90’s. They are modern conversation platforms that help companies connect with their customers, resolve their issues, and capture their content for support, marketing, and feedback. Look for a platform that’s easy-to-use and friendly, so employees and customers feel comfortable getting involved.

Identify who will own the community, but make sure you provide training and incentives to bring others in to help with community management as well. Which brings us to our next step...
4) Employee Participation

You’re going to want to set your employees up for success with your new collaboration initiative. This means clearly communicating your expectations and goals and providing guidelines and training so they’re ready to interact with your customers in a way that’s effective and on brand.

Your support team is used to talking to customers all day, but your product team probably isn’t. Make sure they’ve been trained to have a friendly tone, know when and how you expect them to escalate situations, and are comfortable using your community.

It can be helpful to offer incentives to encourage employees to participate in your customer community and with one another. Here at Get Satisfaction, we offer coffee each week to the employee with the best responses to customers in our community.

Prezi, a cloud-based software company that’s making presentations more dynamic, requires that every employee (even the CEO!) gets in their community to interact with customers at least once. “Oh My God,” one Prezi Developer exclaimed after his day in the community. “I have to be much more careful with my work. I had no idea it had such an immediate effect!” That, my friends, is the power of breaking down your business silos.

5) Measure, Analyze, Optimize Results

You’ve already defined the metrics you need to measure for success, so this part should be easy. Make a dashboard that clearly displays your metrics over time (weekly or monthly is best). This will allow you to see the progress you’re making, and identify areas that could use some extra attention.

Bringing in members from different teams to analyze data and optimize results is another way to reinforce collaboration and break down silos. By having someone from each department you’re trying to shift represented, you have access to more information and different perspectives to help you make sense of the trends. A designer might interpret low participation as the result of too few entry points. A marketer might suggest a contest to create enthusiasm around the initiative. A support agent might hold a training session to make sure employees feel comfortable communicating across departments and with customers.
There is never just one way to solve a business problem. That is the beauty of breaking down the silos—it allows everyone in your company to collaborate around identifying and solving problems. This makes companies stronger, and allows them to create better products and service in the process. Customers can tell when they’re truly at the center of your business. In today’s social economy, they will reward you by telling their friends.

Interested in learning more about how a Get Satisfaction customer community can help you acquire more customers, drive product innovation, and deliver excellent, low-cost social support?

877-339-3997
to schedule a demo, or visit us at
https://getsatisfaction.com/corp/solutions/index