



Stratton Lloyd, Vice President of Customer Satisfaction and Medical Market Development, EBSCO Publishing

# Rewriting the Book on Service

EBSCO Publishing's Stratton Lloyd explains how a close read of customer challenges enabled the firm to increase loyalty and sustain its rapid growth.

As told to Eric Krell

Customer service and continuous improvement have represented core values of EBSCO throughout our 60-plus years of serving the library industry. We launched an effort to renew our customer strategy two years ago after a decade of growth in which our database products increased from a handful to 300 unique offerings.

The mission of our ongoing "Customer Success Initiative" is to assist, promote, and celebrate the successes of our corporate, medical, academic, public, and government library customers. Although our execution of that mission often results in enhancements to our products and services, more frequently our efforts are focused on helping our customers address their most challenging business issues. We believe by doing so we are increasing their satisfaction and loyalty and fostering longer-term relationships with them.

Before we began the initiative, our sales and support teams sensed that our customers were dealing with wholesale change. We sought to gain a thorough understanding of the nature of the library industry's most formidable challenges through a formal survey of our 80,000 customers in 100-plus countries.

The research confirmed that libraries were in the throes of a major technological transformation, which was dramatically changing how their end users expected to access information from

libraries (in an increasingly electronic manner and often remotely) and how their programs integrated with curricula in academic institutions. The research also revealed that our customers needed help educating their end users on the value of using our database product offerings, collaborating with other libraries to share effective practices, fundraising, integrating new technology into their existing offerings, conducting community outreach, and engaging in outcome planning and evaluation.

We used that information to guide improvements to our products, services, and internal systems and processes. We made several product

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and product-support adjustments, including moving from a single *EBSCOhost search* interface for all of our different database products to 15 different interfaces, each of which is customized to meet the unique needs of our different customer segments. A medical-school librarian plumbs our medical-information databases by using field codes and complex subject headings. A corporate librarian typically wants information arranged by industry or region, while a high-school student prefers a portal experience similar to Internet search engines. The look and feel of our interfaces now accommodate those differing needs and expectations.

Our new Customer Success Center represents the most dramatic feature of our customer success initiative. The online site contains free tools and services specifically targeted to the business pain points our research identified. For example, customers can access funding guides and marketing tools.



The center also contains a repository of customer success stories—few of which focus on our products. These case studies feature illustrations of how specific libraries have achieved successes in community outreach, fundraising, technology implementation, and other challenging areas (again, directly related to the pain points our research identified).

We measure the success of our initiative and our performance on the whole through customer satisfaction and loyalty metrics. We gauge customer satisfaction every six to 12 months, through surveys that contain 30 to 40 variables, such as professionalism, expertise, response time, product functionality, product reliability, and overall perception—all measured on a five-point scale.

Our loyalty measurement is based on a methodology developed by loyalty expert Frederick Reichheld. It tracks the likelihood of our customers recommending the use and the purchase of our product to others inside and outside their organization.

We have been very happy with the results of our customer satisfaction and loyalty scores since we began tracking them in that fashion two years ago. Currently 96 percent of our customers are highly satisfied with their overall relationship with EBSCO Publishing. This confirms that our customers appreciate that not only do we focus on the products we sell them, but that we also take time to get a read on their most pressing challenges and then help them clear those hurdles. ☺

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## How EBSCO Delivers Customer Success

- Gathering feedback to understand customers' most pressing business challenges.
- Adjusting product offerings and functionality to address those challenges.
- Developing free online tools and services to foster the sharing of best practices among customers.
- Tracking and internally reporting customer satisfaction and customer loyalty metrics.