

Case Study

National
Laboratory
Service



The National Laboratory Service (NLS) is a commercial service of the Environment Agency providing high quality environmental testing and analysis to a wide range of external customers. In order to build on this strong external client base the NLS wished to implement a survey to understand more about the current and future needs of its customers and how well they were being met. This information would then be used as a major input into the planning of the service both in terms of the range of services offered and also the way in which they were being delivered.

4sight Approach

Following discussions with 4sight it was agreed that an on-line survey would be used as the primary means of data collection. Email was the normal method of correspondence with customers and this would provide the means of communicating with the customer base and inviting them to participate. It was also agreed that the incentive of a donation to a relevant charity (WaterAid) would be offered to encourage responses. Whilst the majority of data would be captured on-line it was also agreed that limited telephone research would be used as necessary to supplement the responses where particular segments of the customer-base were under-represented in what was in effect a self-selecting sample. The survey would be undertaken on a confidential basis and individual responses would only be passed on to the NLS when respondents had expressly given their permission for this to be done.

Implementation

At a meeting with the NLS the major areas for questioning were identified. The ways in which the data would be analysed was also discussed as this was an additional factor in the development of the questions. The objective was to gather all essential information, but also to avoid gathering unnecessary detail. 4sight then developed a draft questionnaire.

There were then a number of iterations of the questionnaire, taking on board feedback from the NLS whilst at the same time ensuring that the quantity and flow of the questions would minimise drop-outs.

Once agreed, 4sight implemented the survey on-line using techniques such as branching, which ensure that respondents are only asked questions relevant to their organisation, based upon

their response to previous questions. The survey was then put into test on the 4sight web-site. This involved NLS staff not involved in the development of the survey submitting responses and providing feedback on the flow of the questions and the time taken to complete. At this stage a few adjustments were made before the test responses were removed and the survey went live.

NLS emailed the customer-base to invite them to participate, using an invitation which 4sight produced for them. The invitation included a link to the 4sight web-site where the survey was hosted and this reinforced the confidential nature of the survey. Over a period of approximately 3 weeks, responses were received from around 15% of those invited to participate, providing a valuable pool of customer data.

The data was down-loaded by 4sight and detailed analysis undertaken.

Following initial analysis a briefing was held with the client to provide an over-view of the results. The full results were then required for a presentation to the board of NLS by Commercial Director, Ian Rippin. A slide pack was prepared by 4sight which provided Ian with all he required to deliver his board presentation. The outputs prepared by 4sight were not limited to an analysis of the survey results but also included a series of recommendations for the product and marketing strategy of the NLS based upon 4sight's experience and understanding of the market opportunity.

In addition, 4sight produced a summary of the survey results which was sent out to all those who had participated and provided their contact details (almost 50% of respondents).

Outputs

The survey provided the NLS with a much clearer understanding of their customer's current and future requirements and also of their perceptions of the NLS. The organisation now has a much clearer view of where it should focus its efforts and has already begun to implement changes in order to provide customers with the highest levels of service.

It is planned to repeat the survey on an annual basis in order that progress can be monitored and also to maintain awareness of changing customer requirements.

'The NLS has only a small internal marketing team but our partnership with 4sight provided exactly the skills and experience we needed to undertake our customer survey. They were able to take an external perspective and see things in a way which is hard when you are working within the business. They also kept the project on track throughout so that our dead-lines were met and I was able to go to the board confident in the outputs that 4sight had developed. I look forward to working with them on next year's survey.'

Ian Rippin, Commercial Director, National Laboratory Service