

# Guest Advocacy Will Help Casino Marketing Departments Achieve Goal of Increasing New and Repeat Business

By Martin R. Baird

Casino marketing directors are under increasing pressure to drive new guests to their property and increase the frequency of existing guests' visits. They can meet this challenge by working in concert with other departments to focus on creation of guest advocates.

An emphasis on guest advocacy will help the marketing department cut its costs because guest advocates are an advertising army that drives the casino's message to advocates' friends and family. At the same time, guest advocates create repeat and new business. Advocacy research reduces data noise that comes from volumes of customer data casinos produce but few people within the organization pay attention to. For example, the casino can stop doing customer satisfaction research.

In short, guest advocacy can help a marketing department meet its goals while reducing certain costs and eliminating work to redirect resources to a more productive endeavor.

Let's start with customer satisfaction.

I have something radical to suggest. Stop wringing your hands over customer satisfaction. Gather those customer satisfaction surveys and comment cards and throw them in the trash. Tracking customer satisfaction is a waste of time, energy and money.

Many businesses today struggle with collecting meaningful feedback from their customers. You can't walk into a business without being handed some sort of research tool. You're asked to fill out a card or a survey. You're encouraged to call a phone number on the receipt and answer some questions.

But these efforts generate useless information. The Harvard Business Review published an article that outlines 10 years of customer satisfaction research in more than a dozen industries. Thousands of customers were interviewed. The upshot of the research is this – customer satisfaction has zero correlation to the future growth of any business. That’s right, none!

How can this be? Let’s focus on casinos and the concept of satisfaction. Casino guests are incredibly fickle. They can be satisfied on Saturday because they’re winning and dissatisfied on Sunday because their luck turned. They can be satisfied on Tuesday because their favorite food was on the buffet and dissatisfied Friday because it wasn’t. So are they satisfied or not? A comment card can’t answer that question because it’s just a snapshot in time. And because satisfaction is nearly impossible to pin down, it doesn’t relate at all to the bottom line and a casino’s future growth.

So what does matter? There is a category of customers at every casino that is critically important. These are customers who are far beyond satisfied. They are advocates. They are so pleased with their gaming experience that, of their own free will, they tell friends, colleagues and relatives about the great casino where they play. These customers return to play again and again (repeat business) and the positive word they spread can cause other people to give the casino a try (new business). New guests who also are wowed by the casino can become advocates themselves and start spreading the word. Advocates risk their personal reputation by encouraging others to play at their favorite casino. A guest who fills out a comment card risks nothing.

You’re probably wondering what you do now. The first step is to measure the degree to which you have guest advocates. Express that as an index, or score, and you

have a powerful tool for managing the future growth of your casino. Research has shown that in some industries, the advocate score has as high as a 98 percent correlation to future growth. That's why customer advocacy has become so important at such leading corporations as Intuit, Harley Davidson, Dell, Enterprise Rent-A-Car and Symantec.

Knowing the advocate score is great but what you do with that data is even more important. Casinos should want to create as many guest advocates as possible and that means making an effort to drive the advocate score ever higher. The higher the number, the more successful your casino will be.

Generating the advocate score is the first step. Implementing a turnkey system of internal improvement to raise the score is the next step. This system will put the data into action, make people accountable for leveraging it and keep the process rolling forward smoothly. Seven best business practices should be the foundation of the system. Those business practices are as follows.

**Leadership.** Management must act as leaders to create a culture that clearly demonstrates how important guest advocates are.

**Program Management.** A formal program must be in place and it must be monitored.

**Goals and Metrics.** Goals must be set and met.

**Incentives.** Employees are critical to providing the kind of customer service that turns guests into advocates. Incentive, reward and recognition programs will be needed to spur them on.

**Action Planning.** Progress will occur only with an action plan.

**Improvement.** Internal improvements will be required to create more advocates. Those improvements must be identified and implemented.

**Closure.** Guests should be asked how the casino can be a better place to play. Give guests closure by letting them know how their input was used.

So there you have it, a formula for success. Get out of the customer satisfaction rut, embrace the concept of advocacy, measure your advocates and roll out a turnkey system for improvement that creates even more advocates.

*Martin R. Baird is author of “Advocate Index™: An Operational Tool” and chief executive officer of Robinson & Associates, Inc., a customer service consulting firm for the gaming industry. Robinson & Associates helps casinos determine their Advocate Index, a number that indicates the extent to which properties have guests who are willing to be advocates, and then implements its Advocate Development System to help casinos create more guest advocates. The Advocate Development System uses the proven methodology of Advocate Index in combination with best business practices to chart a course for growth and profitability. More information about the Advocate Development System and Robinson and Associates is available at the company’s Web sites at [www.advocatedevelopmentsystem.com](http://www.advocatedevelopmentsystem.com) and [www.casinocustomerservice.com](http://www.casinocustomerservice.com). A copy of “Advocate Index: An Operational Tool” may be obtained by calling 206-774-8856. Robinson & Associates may be reached by phone at 480-991-6420 or by e-mail at [mbaird@casinocustomerservice.com](mailto:mbaird@casinocustomerservice.com). Based in Annapolis, Maryland, Robinson & Associates is a member of the Casino Management Association and an associate member of the National Indian Gaming Association.*