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"William Hann and his team at Free Pint consistently go that 'extra mile'
Better Business

Editorial

As you know from my recent Editorials, we've been attending a lot of conferences and meetings recently, and like most organisations thinking a lot about our strategy for the future. I found joining Factiva's Advisory Board meeting last week particularly enjoyable, London being a very handy venue for me after New York last year.

From talking to many other companies in the information arena, there seem to have emerged two distinct camps. One is the 'real' companies (those with print publications, conferences, etc.) who are trying to encourage more use of their fledgling digital offerings. At the same time there are companies, like Free Pint, who are already well established online, but would like to reassert their brand by providing something tangible to their members offline.

A common way for 'real' publishers to test the online waters is to give access to some of their print publication articles for free on their Web site. Many publishers have been reluctant to do this, but there's a common acceptance that it's a good way for potential subscribers to evaluate the usefulness of a publication before signing up for a paid annual subscription.

This means there are now a large number of good quality sites where you can access free in-depth articles about information research, online strategy, content management, eCommerce, etc. It was for this reason that we started producing the "Free Pint Pub Crawl".

Every day we monitor the Web sites of over 180 publications looking for interesting full text articles that are accessible for free. We then summarise the articles and publish them in a weekly round-up called the "Pub Crawl", which is sent by email. We've been doing this now without fail every week for a year and a half.

We've decided to offer, for the first time, a free four-week trial to the Pub Crawl. A paid subscription is only 50 pounds a year (about US\$70 or 80 euro), but as I mentioned above I think it's good to be able to evaluate something properly before becoming a full subscriber.

So, if you'd like to find out more about the publications we're monitoring, read some of the testimonials from current subscribers, sign up for a free trial, or

take out a paid subscription, then please visit
<http://www.freepint.com/pubcrawl>.

As you can probably tell, we're very proud of the Pub Crawl. It's an invaluable source of current awareness which supports all the work we do here at Free Pint. I'm sure you'll also find it useful to rely on us to highlight articles of interest in a range of publications.

In today's newsletter we look at how to prepare yourself online for doing business in China, how to measure customer satisfaction for an information service, and review another book in the Super Searcher series. Don't forget there is a fully-formatted version of this newsletter online at
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/180402.htm>.

Please support Free Pint by telling others about us, and do sign up for the weekly Pub Crawl at
<http://www.freepint.com/pubcrawl>.

Best regards
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About Free Pint

Free Pint is an online community of information researchers. Members receive this free newsletter every two weeks packed with tips on finding quality and reliable business information on the Internet.

Joining is free at
<http://www.freepint.com/> and provides access to the substantial archive of articles, book reviews, jobs, industry news & events, with answers to your research questions and networking at the Free Pint Bar. Free Pint Regulars (paid-up members) also receive a weekly current awareness newsletter, discounts and publicity.

Please circulate this newsletter which is best read when printed out. To receive the Adobe Acrobat version as an attachment or a brief notification it's online, visit
<http://www.freepint.com/member>.

My Favourite Tipples from Belinda Weaver

- Governments on the WWW <<http://www.gksoft.com/govt/en/>> - A one stop shop for governments. You also get related country information - languages, flag, human rights issues, tourist info, election results, political parties, regional and local government and multi-governmental institutions.
- Arts & Letters Daily <<http://www.aldaily.com/>> - My culture fix - a page of article snippets that link to the full text of articles. Also useful for finding current news and magazines, and book review archives.
- BBC News <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/>> - The best news site around - interesting story angles, in depth specials, and news by topic.
- Xrefer <<http://w2.xrefer.com/>> - Good quotation help is hard to find and xrefer does the job brilliantly. Also handy for checking a range of encyclopaedias, dictionaries and thesauri.
- CIA World Factbook <<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>> - Who better than the CIA at digging up information? A terrific, current country data site with maps, statistics, economic and demographic data, geography, land use, government information and transnational issues.

Belinda Weaver maintains two web sites - Internet information sources for Australian journalists <<http://www.sjc.uq.edu.au/ozguide/>> and Globalisation <<http://www.sjc.uq.edu.au/global/>> - and the OZCAR mailing list <<http://www.sjc.uq.edu.au/ozguide/new.html>>.

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Free Pint Gold

This time last year there was a rant about the difficulties of getting a broadband connection in the country. As if to rub it in, the feature article then covered a range of broadband Web sites for those lucky enough to enjoy such a connection.

- Free Pint No.85, 12th April 2001. "Getting Connected in a Rural Area" and "Streaming Media and Broadband Sites" <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/120401.htm>>

Two years ago, we also managed to run two articles following opposing trends. Whilst marriage seems to be increasingly out of fashion, we covered a range of resources in the tips article. By contrast, Knowledge Management still seems to be gaining momentum and that was the topic of the feature.

- Free Pint No.60, 13th April 2000. "Wedding Sources on the Web" and "Knowledge Management" <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/130400.htm>>

A topic which has gone quiet is the 'Dublin Core' which was discussed in 1999. However, like our last edition two weeks back, three years ago we also looked at chemistry sites.

- Free Pint No.36, 15th April 1999. "Cataloging the Internet: The Dublin Core" and "Idiots' guide to chemistry

information resources on the Web" <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/150499.htm>>

Four years ago, things were speeding up on the Web with new standards for 56k modems. Broadband seems to have overshadowed modem development somewhat. We also had a resource-packed article about science sites aimed at the populace. Well worth a look, even four years on.

- Free Pint No.12, 16th April 1998. "The Duffers Guide to 56K Modems" and "Sources of information on science policy and popular science topics" <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/160498.htm>>

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Free Pint Bar
In Association with Factiva
a Dow Jones & Reuters Company
Reviewed by Simon Coltery

<<http://www.freepint.com/issues/180402.htm#bar>>

Free Pint Bar <<http://www.freepint.com/bar>>

[Note: To read a posting enter the message number in place of XXXXX in the address

<<http://www.freepint.com/go/bXXXXX>>]

Ah, the manifold evils of the Internet! OK, I exaggerate. Like anything else in the way of media or technology, it has its drawbacks. Among those are pop-up ads (17073), spam (16986) and insulting Usenet postings (17072). Thankfully there are solutions to these problems, but if you don't ask, you'll never find out what they are.

And, on the other hand, there are the advantages of the Internet too. In the last couple of weeks I reviewed the Microsoft's Most Valued Professional site, where you can go if you have any technical queries relating to MS's products (17010). I also looked at some excellent resources that hold Shakespeare's works and related secondary material (17128). Other fine resources recommended include the UK Merchant Navy site (16909), some Esperanto sites (16919) and the wonderful Internet Resources Newsletter (16908).

Business researchers have been using the Internet to find historical sales figures for European companies (16963), youth employment levels in blue chip companies (17029), the UK injection moulding market (17102), historical figures for Barclays base rate (16927) and a list of retailers that are quoted on the German stock exchange (16999).

Quantitative data has been sought covering the largest enterprises in areas other than the EU and the US, in terms of number of employees, turnover, etc. (16905), the demographic breakdown of UK drivers (16950), digital TV subscription figures (17041), the different types of library in the UK (17055), the top fifty UK software companies (17125) and production figures for the Triumph TR8 Convertible (17095).

Some of the research questions people have raised have not received any response yet. These are about a proposed toxicology information forum (17048), templates for levels of confidentiality for information sharing (16964), the Profound classification system (16992), help with drawing up a style guide for producing elearning materials (17093) and details of any research that's been done into the effect of a computer screen's size on a worker's productivity (17130).

Free Pinters have also been looking into ebook pricing models and attitudes to ebooks (17006), training courses for doing research into people (17047), an advisory panel in the Scottish National Health Service (17141), switching from using a PC to using a Mac (16996) and finding freelance economic research work (17025).

A few of the more technical questions have not been answered yet. These are about evaluations of Slangsoft translation software (16989), getting Internet Explorer to synchronise a Web site so it's available offline (16997), a persistent parse error (17100) and sorting out ads that slow down people's surfing (16967).

Other techie questions have been concerned with Google's date field (16907), bookmarking and anchoring code in HTML (17133), creating computer assisted assessment forms (17009), transferring an archive onto a database (16922), getting links in Word to open in Explorer (17051) and saving

Information Vacancies
in Free Pint Jobs

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<<http://www.freepint.com/jobs>>

favourites without visiting the relevant Web site (16962).

As well as a rash of queries about Latin (16906, 17015, 17090, 17118), there were also several about music (17049), especially music appearing in ads (17074, 17103, 17140). There were further miscellaneous postings about a speaker for a customer relationship management conference (16948), old Argos catalogues (17088), getting published (17101), UK post codes (17146), a town occupied by the Germans in WW2 (17108) and the provenance of a poem about librarians (17066).

So the Internet is not that evil after all. I think I could even get to like it!

[Note: To read a Bar posting enter the message number in place of XXXXX in the address

<<http://www.freepint.com/go/bXXXXX>>]

Free Pint Student Bar

<<http://www.freepint.com/student>>

[Note: To read a posting enter the message number in place of XXXX in the address

<<http://www.freepint.com/go/sXXXX>>]

Students have been enquiring about information work for the police (2456), English teaching work with the British Council (2462), Latin phrase translation (2445), UK government policy on announcing layoffs (2464) and historical maps that represent population, housing and urban development changes effected by the introduction of railways (2451).

[Note: To read a Student Bar posting enter the message number in place of XXXX in the address

<<http://www.freepint.com/go/sXXXX>>]

Simon Coltery, Content Developer
<simon@freepint.com>

If you have a tricky research question or can help other Free Pinters then do post a message at the Bar <<http://www.freepint.com/bar>> or the Student Bar <<http://www.freepint.com/student>>.

To have the latest Bar postings sent to you every other day, log in to your account online at <<http://www.freepint.com/member>>.

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http://factiva.com/collateral/files/whitepaper_feevfree_032002.pdf

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Free Pint Jobs

<<http://www.freepint.com/jobs>>

As well as the details below, you might also like to check out the new weekly Bar posting which lists the latest additions to Free Pint Jobs. This week's can be found at <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b17134>> and last week's at <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b17027>>.

Here are some of the latest featured jobs:

Intranet Project Advisor

<<http://www.freepint.com/go/j1687>>

Participate at all project levels to help provide a managed gateway to a wide range of external and internal information resources
Recruiter: Environment Agency

Researcher

<<http://www.freepint.com/go/j1706>>

A Business Researcher to join a small and dedicated team in the Information centre of a Professional Services Firm.
Recruiter: Glen Recruitment

Information Officer, P/T

<<http://www.freepint.com/go/j1712>>

A 3 day-a-week role for someone with a year's experience in business research, using effective online and customer service skills.
Recruiter: Sue Hill Recruitment

[The above jobs are paid listings]

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Events

<<http://www.freepint.com/events>>

April has been a busy month for conferences, and May provides no let up in the choice of information-related events to attend.

In the UK, the Aslib Electronics Group have their "Update 2002" which is covering a range of hot topics <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e107>>. Aslib in London have a one-day participative conference entitled "Mobilising Knowledge for Business Performance" <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e104>>. Staying in London, Learned Information's "Online Information for the City" is "... designed for information professionals and knowledge managers from the banking, finance, insurance and legal sectors" <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e118>>.

Stateside, the "Competia International Symposium" aims to "... create an exceptional forum for Competitive Intelligence and Strategic Planning professionals to meet, debate, and learn" in Massachusetts <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e102>>. Meanwhile, Information Today's "InfoToday 2002" brings together three conferences under one umbrella in New York <<http://www.freepint.com/go/e113>>.

Details of these and many other conferences in the information industry can be found on the Free Pint Events page <<http://www.freepint.com/events>>.

Submit details of your event for free promotion, and keep us informed about any changes to current listings.

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**"Super Searchers Cover the World:
The Online Secrets of International
Business Researchers"
Written by Mary Ellen Bates,
Reva Basch (Editor)
Reviewed by Arthur Weiss**

As an international business researcher I'm always on the lookout for tips and ideas that can improve my own searching. This was my first foray into the Super Searcher series of books. Knowing that the series has been highly successful, I'd hoped that the book would not just spark curiosity sitting on a bookshelf but would spend most of its life, well thumbed and located prominently on my desk. Alas not! The book is full of tips for better international searching but by lacking a summary or final conclusion, the format does not allow it to become a guidebook to better searching.

"Super Searchers Cover the World" consists of a series of interviews with a number of international researchers. Unfortunately, most seemed to have a US bias even when they were stressing that it is important not to assume that what is true for one region or country will also be true for others. (A particularly jarring example was a comment about European unification saying that Europe is "still not a single entity" and that there are "differences between Germany and Spain, for example!"). This is a major failing in the book, for non-US readers, as almost half the researchers are based in the US, looking outside. Thus key sources that many European based researchers know were missed (for example - CAROL <<http://www.carol.co.uk>>, and the European Business Register portal <<http://www.ebr.org>> are not mentioned). Searching for information on France, Germany, Spain, Scandinavia and Eastern Europe is hardly mentioned. Reading the book I'd think that nobody wanted to find information from Russia, India, South Africa or Australasia and that hardly anyone was interested in the Middle

East. So, in fact the super searchers selected cover only a few countries or regions: Latin America, parts of Western Europe and the Pacific Rim are the main focus.

So far, this review has been negative. This perhaps reflects my expectations rather than what the book does offer. The searchers featured give sound advice, emphasising that searching does not just involve bringing up a search engine and assuming that what came up was all there was. There is a strong emphasis on thinking laterally, and gaining familiarity with different sources: CD-ROM products, dial-up hosts, and especially offline sources such as the telephone and direct contact, reference books and directories and so on. There are also some excellent tips on judging reliability and when to stop searching. Other worthwhile tips cover keeping up-to-date, the importance of managing client expectations and translation / cultural issues.

In summary, if you want to learn how other people approach international search projects then this book is for you. However if you are looking to deepen your own knowledge of international search resources and techniques then you are likely to be disappointed.

Arthur Weiss is a UK based management consultant specialising in competitive intelligence and strategy. He has worked in the information industry for over 15 years and has spent time searching for information from many countries around the globe. Arthur has written and presented on competitive intelligence, marketing and Internet related topics in the UK, Europe and elsewhere. Arthur is the managing partner of AWARE, a CI consultancy offering clients CI research, analysis and training. He can be contacted through AWARE's web-site at <<http://www.competitive-intelligence.co.uk>>.

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Tips Article

<<http://www.freepint.com/issues/180402.htm#tips>>

" A World of Resources Awaits You in China "
By Laurel J. Delaney

China is already an important and growing market for American businesses. The number of small businesses exporting to China increased 141 percent between 1992 and 1997. Currently, small businesses account for 35 percent of all U.S. exports to China, making it the 10th-largest export market for them. Who wouldn't want to sell to 1.3 billion hungry customers?

In the course of my dealings, I have found five things to be true in conducting business in China. You must:

- 1) Know the market
- 2) Use Hong Kong as your base to enter China.
- 3) Learn about Chinese culture.
- 4) Leverage an existing relationship.
- 5) Assist your family of companies.

Clearly, learning all you can about the Chinese business environment and how to build relationships in the area will be effort well spent. You must build as many connections as possible and not forget to take care of the people who give you those connections. Maybe someday you will help them out. The Chinese are not as straightforward as Americans are -- no doesn't mean definitely no. Two Chinese can carry on the insisting and refusing game for a long time before one party gives up. Remember also that most rules can be bent for special situations for special people. If one is persistent and patient, one is more likely to affect the outcome.

Meetings with potential partners over lunch and dinner, which are usually longer than what foreigners are accustomed to, are also occasions to recognize the slower pace of Chinese business. Be patient and flexible. The time spent with people is a worthwhile investment that will pay off in the future. Also, courtesy and discretion are paramount. No Chinese would be eager to deal with people -- whether online or offline -- who do not respect their way of living and conducting business. Also, be careful with your opinions on politics and government. The Chinese may not want to share with you what they really think about the government policies unless they are very close friends of yours.

Preparing Yourself To Do Business in China

You can start by surfing the Net and linking to China Search Engines and Directories <<http://www.net-promo.net/china.htm>>. Then, move on to a sampling of the many other sites offering a world of news to China:

- United States of America China Chamber of Commerce <<http://www.usccc.org>>
- The U.S. & Foreign Commercial Service People's Republic of China <<http://www.usembassy-china.org.cn/english/commercial/index.html>>
- MOFTEC, Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation, PRC <http://www.moftec.gov.cn/moftec_en>
- South China Morning Post -- Asia's Leading English News Channel <<http://www.scmp.com>>
- China Daily <<http://www.chinadaily.com.cn>>

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- China Internet Network Information Center <<http://www.cnnic.net.cn/e-index.shtml>>
- The China Business Review <<http://www.chinabusinessreview.com>>
- ScoutAsia <<http://www.scoutasia.com>>

For the more scholarly type, there are several places to visit for useful information on China. Try the European Case Clearing House at <<http://www.ecch.cranfield.ac.uk>> (search "China" under the Colis case search area). This site offers cases written for or by The University of Hong Kong School of Business that deal with doing business in China.

Harvard also has several cases dealing with marketing in China (use the keyword search "China") including <<http://www.hbsp.harvard.edu>>.

Additional sites that will guide you to doing business in China:

- Sina.com <<http://www.sina.com>>
- chinadotcom <<http://www.china.com>>
- Click2Asia.com <<http://www.click2asia.com>>

If you are interested in reducing procurement costs and sourcing Asia online, try these:

- MeetWorldtrade.com <<http://www.meetworldtrade.com>>
- Chinamarket.com <<http://www.chinamarket.com>> -- locate and source China manufacturers, suppliers and customers.
- SinoSources.com <<http://www.sinosources.com>>

If you cannot read a word of Chinese, try these English-only speaking sites:

- Asia-Links -- links the world to Asia by providing high-tech content and services to all Asian countries, including China and U.S.A. <<http://www.asia-links.com>>
- ChinaOnline -- the information network for China. <<http://www.chinaonline.com>>

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Laurel Delaney runs a Chicago-based global marketing, consulting and web content providing company aimed toward entrepreneurs and small businesses. She is the author of Start & Run a Profitable Exporting Business, and teaches an MBA International Marketing course at Loyola University Chicago. Ms. Delaney is working on her next book, Women Entrepreneurs Take On The World -- Not For Women Only, to be published in 2002. She can be reached at <ldelaney@globetrade.com> or visit <<http://www.globetrade.com>>. Ms. Delaney is also the creator of "Borderbuster", a newsletter focussing on global marketing.

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Rex Cooke, Editor <rex@freepint.com>

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Feature Article

<http://www.freepint.com/issues/180402.htm#feature>

"Customer Satisfaction - do you know what they think of your information service?"

By Jacqueline Beattie

Why you need to know

It's quite a good idea to know what your customers (or users if you prefer) think of the service you're providing. It simply isn't enough to assume that you're doing fine. 'Nobody has complained' is something I have heard said before - that sounds dangerously like apathy to me - probably on both sides! It is often stated that the customer rarely complains - they just don't come back for more.

Sometimes it is really obvious what people think - I once had a four-hole paper punch thrown at me for not allowing an irate engineer to photocopy a British Standard - luckily I ducked in time! The customer resolution came in the form of purchasing standards on CDs, a timely questionnaire would probably have avoided this episode ...

Some reasons for wanting to know

- Can validate the service you're providing
- Gather metrics for reporting
- Placing a value on information
- Assists planning
- Helps you make decisions about content/services
- Are the customer training sessions working?
- Usage
- Understand factors that drive your customers
- Issue/complaint resolution
- Know your competition (sometimes that word 'outsource' can trip off the tongues of management) so find out where else your customers could go for information - local information brokers, local libraries, etc.
- Benchmarking (see point above)
- Ensuring continuous improvement
- Customer loyalty
- Word of mouth marketing

How do you do it?

In our wired world, there are different ways of making use of technology to find out what your customers are thinking:

- Email surveys
- Text-based emails (if you have issues of compatibility)
- Web/HTML
- Intranet/Extranet
- Online focus groups - e.g. inviting a set number of people for a period of say, one hour, to a specialised chat room - you can view text, graphics, sounds, video, multimedia for evaluation (questions could be prepared and circulated before the meeting)

The size of the survey will depend on what you're trying to find out. If you want a big company-wide view there are specialist organisations which will take care of the whole process for you. This has the advantage of an independent view: people may be more willing to give their true impression of the service. If you are planning on a big exercise I would advise you to check it out with your Communications department - they may well have rules

about the number of surveys being carried out across the organisation at any one time. They might even be able to help with hints and tips for the type of questions, layout, etc. Another possibility is for your questions to be included in a company-wide employee satisfaction survey.

If using an external organisation is out of the question, then you've probably got people on your team capable of producing web-based formats or you can liaise with your organisation's specialist IT department (honestly, this can work!). You can use email functionality for simple surveying. Think about how you will collect the data - it will probably involve some sort of database which you can then manipulate to produce workable figures. Comments are always more cumbersome to capture, but it is likely that there will be some repetition allowing you to categorise some of the responses.

What do you need to know?

Obviously that is up to you. Take some time to think about the questions; it is important to get them right. You may want the survey to be an annual event, covering all aspects of the service you provide, so that you can establish your baseline to measure future improvements, etc. Or you can just ask a few questions around what the customer thinks of a single piece of work that the service has provided.

Whatever you decide, you are asking people to take time out of their busy day to provide you with feedback. In some organisations (certainly my experience at The Document Company, Xerox) people recognised the value of surveys to help understand and improve services and so they were happy to reply. In other places it will be harder to get responses. Increasingly, enquiries can be answered electronically, so a short survey attachment sent along with the results of the enquiry can have the desired effect. Bribing customers with goodies if they reply might also help!

Here are some examples of the questions you might want to ask customers about your Amazing Business Information Service (ABIS).

A single enquiry focus questionnaire could include the following questions:

ABIS Customer Satisfaction Survey

We are keen to ensure that we are delivering high quality information solutions to our customers. As the recipient of a completed ABIS enquiry, we would be delighted if you would take a few moments to reply to the following questions using the ratings as shown below:

Ratings = 5 = Very satisfied
4 = Satisfied
3 = Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
2 = Dissatisfied
1 = Very dissatisfied

- Responsiveness of the ABIS team to dealing with your request
- Value and relevance of the information provided
- Overall satisfaction with ABIS

Any additional comments:

For obvious reasons, I cannot include an example of a much more wide- ranging questionnaire, but here are a few ideas for questions:

How do you find the information you need to do your job?

a. ABIS b. Internet c. Purchased external services d. Other

On average, about how many hours do you spend at work each week finding and evaluating external information to help you do your job?

a. 1-3 b. 4-6 c. Other

What types of external information sources do you use?

a. Company information b. Product information c. Market research d. Standards e. Pricing f. Book purchasing

Have you accessed ABIS in the last 12 months to help you find the information you need to do your job?

If yes: How would you describe the benefits the service has brought to you?

a. Saved time b. Helped to generate revenue c. Saved money

If no: What prevented you from accessing the AIBS for information you need to do your job?

a. Don't know what ABIS provides b. Don't have enough time for searching and analysing information c. Don't know who to contact

What do you do with the results?

People who run organisations LOVE metrics, so gather your statistics to help produce a picture of how your service is doing. That takes care of the quantitative side of things but do not forget the qualitative side - take note of any positive feedback. This helps to illustrate how well the service is doing and can also be used to congratulate team members on their great performance. In several organisations I have used a prominent display board to post the monthly results and feedback so that everyone could see the story of the service.

ALWAYS respond if a negative comment requires it - you can establish your own rules. In one organisation I worked in, if the ratings were 3 or less we would call the customer to talk through the reasons. Don't be afraid of this; if customers can see that you are truly trying to improve the service, this will be viewed as positive.

After surveying customers, you will hopefully have information about how, why and when people access your service. This should help you to plan content purchases,

training programmes, ensure as easy access as possible to the service and so on.

Next Steps

Go for it! Find out what customers think of your service. Be ready to use the information you receive to re-appraise your service. You can also inform your working world just how much it needs you - being able to demonstrate it with numbers and good news stories.

Here are some sites showing the wide range of survey possibilities:

<<http://www.surveysite.com>>
<<http://www.hostedsurvey.com>>
<<http://www.infoquestcrm.co.uk>>
<<http://www.surveytracker.com>>
<<http://www.infosurv.com>>

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See you in two weeks!

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