

## MARKET INTELLIGENCE FOR DECISION MAKERS

### Case Study: The VIF Program

#### Background

The VIF Program's mission is to foster cultural exchange by taking teachers who wish to teach abroad and placing them in schools in the United States and the United Kingdom. VIF establishes relationships with school systems and recruits participating teachers from over two-dozen countries worldwide. The schools get high caliber international teachers to fill open positions and the participants (teachers) get the opportunity to spend 1-3 years in a foreign country.

#### Problem

To increase revenue by reducing the turnover of participating teachers.

#### Solution

SMI developed and implemented a customer satisfaction program to get at the heart of the issue. The first step in any "satisfaction" research is to identify what attributes factor into a customer's overall level of satisfaction. In this case, VIF had previously conducted some research from which we could draw. The key to any good research project is to make sure the survey instrument or questionnaire used will yield the data you need. The best analysis in the world won't help you if the right data is not collected (garbage in = garbage out). One of the keys to successful customer satisfaction research is to measure not only how satisfied customers are with each attribute but also how important the attributes are.

*For example, if attribute A received a satisfaction score of 8.3 out of a possible 10, attribute B received a score of 6.2 and attribute C received a score of 5.6, then at first glance it would seem that the company should focus its resources on fixing the problems associated with C, as it had the lowest score. However, what if the importance of these attributes is also collected and it turns out that attribute B is much more important to the customers than C is? The combination of the importance and satisfaction scores then leads to a new conclusion; B is in most need of attention as it is an area of high importance and low satisfaction.*

Teacher satisfaction and attribute importance was measured at the end of the school year. SMI went one step further and conducted a brief survey of teachers at the beginning of the school year to gauge their expectations of the upcoming year. Now armed with the appropriate data, SMI could detail to VIF what the teachers were expecting at the beginning of the school year, how important each attribute was and how satisfied they ultimately were with each attribute; a complete picture. SMI identified expectations as an important variable because, like most other companies, VIF has limited resources and understanding expectation and importance gives them two options to improve customer satisfaction: (1) VIF can improve the program attributes which were tagged as being of high importance and low satisfaction by redirecting or supplementing resources and/or (2) During their orientation sessions, VIF can provide a more realistic view of what past teachers have expected and what they have eventually experienced. This information serves to realistically set the teacher's expectations, leading to less disappointment at the end of the year. Through realistic expectation setting, VIF can experience higher satisfaction scores at no cost.

Once the analysis was completed and presented, VIF could easily identify which attributes they should focus their resources on. Armed with these findings, VIF had the confidence to know which attributes have the most affect on teacher satisfaction and have since strategically re-prioritized their annual budget to account for this new market intelligence.

As a testament to the SMI process and results, the following is an unsolicited internal email message from the Controller of VIF to their Director of Marketing:

***"I would like to say that this is the most professional and understandable survey, in terms of relevance, I have seen. Excellent work. I am reviewing this to help revise our budget."***