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## E-Biz in Action

### Customer Input

*How Paramount Parks uses Web-based surveys to modify existing products and develop new ones*

by [Demir Barlas, Line56](#)  
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If you have a limited number of customers, keeping them happy might not be that big of a challenge. After all, it's easier to know a smaller customer base, tailor your offerings to them, and maintain a higher standard of customer service.

For Paramount Parks, though, it's a significant challenge. The company, whose parks see around 12 million visitors a year, is dealing with an age-old enterprise issue. "One bad experience and they might never come back again," says Mark Kupferman, director of corporate research at Paramount Parks, explaining the stakes.

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Naturally, Paramount Parks wants its patrons to keep coming back and to grow its net new customer base as well. One way to work towards that goal has been to survey the existing customer base. The company has harvested 800,000 customer e-mail addresses from website visits, park visits, and passholder application forms. Those addresses are segmented by age, gender, and location.

That's important for a number of reasons. "If we're reaching out to teens from Charlotte [NC], we can pull together a list," Kupferman says. "We can ask what they think of a new roller coaster -- we'll show pictures, give a description."

At the high level, running surveys (about not only existing parks and rides but also proposed ones) can mean the difference between satisfying customers and missing the mark. "Basing decisions on your gut is a real danger," Kupferman says. "We've had some surprises."

Case in point: Paramount Parks' water park in San Francisco. "We'd put more emphasis on the rides," explains Kupferman. "But the surveys showed that people wanted a more luxurious resort-type environment, so we based our remodeling on that fact."

Not every case is so cut-and-dried. However, even in more ambiguous instances, the surveys still have value. "If [opinion's divided], it gives us a sense of where to go," says Kupferman. There are also times when survey feedback can be out of touch with business realities. "If we did everything customers wanted, we'd be charging \$1.50 to get in and the roller coasters would be 3,000 feet tall," he quips.

Paramount Parks uses Web survey technology from specialty vendor **Inquisite**. Kupferman says the online approach is sounder and less expensive than trying to collect information on site. "No one wants to spend 25 minutes taking a survey in the park," he concludes. "But when they go home, they're willing to type many comments. One survey typically contains 1,000 pages of comments from 1,500 to 2,000 respondents."

This story is part of a series looking at real e-business implementation experiences. If you have a story you'd like to share, contact us at [PRinbox.1@line56.com](mailto:PRinbox.1@line56.com).

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