An Exploratory Study of Customer Services Focusing on Customer Engagement - an Irish Perspective

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An Exploratory Study of Customer Services Focusing on Customer Engagement - an Irish Perspective

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Masters in Business Studies
CORK INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
2015
An Exploratory Study of Customer Services
Focusing on Customer Engagement
- an Irish Perspective

William Ryan

This dissertation is submitted in fulfilment of the
Requirements of the Degree of:

Masters in Business Studies

Department of Organisation & Professional Development
Cork Institute of Technology

Research Supervisor: Dr. Angela Wright

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Contents:

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Declaration:

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Masters in Business Studies (MBS) is entirely my own work, and has not been submitted for assessment for any academic purposes other than in partial fulfilment for that stated above.

Signed: [Redacted]
Date: 1st Sept 2015
Dedication:

This thesis is dedicated to my sister Fiona, who will always be an inspiration to me, and my ‘Guardian Angel’.
Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank my research supervisor Dr. Angela Wright for her advice, support, her patience, and time, especially with all the questions I asked her.

I would like to thank my family especially my wife Sinead, daughter Ciara, and son Cian for all the support, and encouragement that they gave me throughout the MBS program, and particularly in completing this thesis. Without you all, and the sacrifices you made, I would never have come this far.

I would like to thank my sister Dolores for her help in transcribing some of the interview recordings, and for proof reading the final draft of this thesis. I would like to thank my wife Sinead and my brother Trevor for their advice in completing this thesis, and for performing some proof reading duties.

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Abstract:

This research study is an exploratory examination of customer services, which traces its developments to the modern day, evaluates its impact on corporate strategy, and analyses its effect on organisations' performance. This study also investigates customer engagement to ascertain if technological changes have impacted on it, causing it to evolve, and the effect if any, these changes have had on customer services. The research explores the loyalty status of a customer, the availability of best practice models to aid organisation employing these concepts, and to evaluate if components are transferrable from large organisations to small to medium enterprises.

A qualitative research approach was undertaken in this study using semi-structured interview methods to capture the experiences, beliefs, and opinions of senior people working in executive or consultative roles within customer services. A ‘grounded theory’ of qualitative analysis was utilized to identify patterns, trends, and facts which enabled the researcher to produce the findings that this research is based on. This research is exploratory, and inductive, and was aided by the diverse nature, and skill-set of the interviewees which allowed for a real-time, and practical overview of the concepts.

The main findings from this study are that customer services is having a significant impact on the corporate strategies of companies in today’s business environment, and can be the difference between an organisation been successful or having a bleak future. Customer engagement has been impacted in a positive way with technological changes resulting in the concept evolving to the point where it is now ‘the tool’ to facilitate organisations getting closer to their customers. This research has identified a direct correlation between the success of a customer services strategy, and the implementation of an effective customer engagement program. A significant finding has been the absence of a holistic customer engagement best practice model to assist organisations in implementing a customer engagement strategy. This study has subsequently developed a model to fill this gap in academic literature, and provide organisations with a model that is built in stages, allowing them to progress to ‘best in class’ status. Other notable findings include the identification of transferrable components to small to medium enterprises, and recommendations for future research.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

The motivation for this topic came from the researcher’s attendance at two speeches from prominent Business Leaders, Kenny Jacob, Chief Marketing Officer at Ryanair, and Anne O’Leary, Chief Executive Officer at Vodafone Ireland. Both delivered inspirational speeches describing their company’s customer services strategy transformation with both companies embracing a “customer centric” approach, and both using modern customer engagement techniques to drive this change. The Ryanair story was particularly interesting, and fascinating as it was a complete change of strategic direction for this company. Ryanair had built the organisation to become Europe’s Largest Airline through a cost leadership model, but realised that this model could not be sustained into the future. The focus now shifted from customer acquisition to the retention of their one hundred million passengers. The key to this change would be the customer engagement techniques that they would employ. Vodafone were comparable to Ryanair altering their customer services strategy to protect their two point four million consumers, and their 55% market share of the corporate enterprise market. Their plan like Ryanair was to provide an excellent customer experience that would result in repeat purchasing, and higher retention.

These two speeches stimulated the mind of the researcher, and resulted in him wondering about the changes that were taking place in the marketplace within the world of customer services. Both Ryanair, and Vodafone were now using customer’s services to differentiate themselves from their competitors, and create a competitive advantage. The vehicle to achieve this change was customer engagement but what had changed in this space, to allow this concept to have such a powerful impact. The researcher was intrigued with the idea that a company could build their corporate strategy totally around customer services, and be successful. The fact that a company like Ryanair were forced to embrace customer services or risk the long term sustainability of their business. The researcher believed that this change was worthy of further investigation, and research. The researcher felt vindicated with this decision, when Kenny Jacobs displayed the first PowerPoint slide of his presentation which read, “Customer Engagement – The Revolution".
1.1: Background to the Study:

Customer Services has since its conception in the 1960’s changed with each decade. This evolution has been aided by globalization, by technology, by new communications channels, and by a desire from the customer for interaction.

For over twenty years academic writers, and researchers have indicated that a change in direction was needed in customer services. The common theme through these contributions is a stronger focus on people components of customer service.


Traditionally, customer services was very “mechanistic” but with the development of customer engagement, a transformation occurred, where companies recognized the need to interact with their customers, and customers desired interaction. This interaction allowed organisations to understand their customers, learn more about their needs, and what was required to satisfy them. The process was performed with the aim of achieving increased loyalty. The result is now more organisations are engaging with their customers in a timely fashion, and this change has been facilitated by some major changes in technology, the advancement of the internet, social media, and the arrival of so many new mobile communications channels. A modern reality is that internet usage is continuing to explode both in a world, and national context.

According to the World Bank (2015), global internet usage has increased from 29.2% in 2010 to 40.7% in 2014, while usage in Ireland has increased from 69.9% in 2010 to 79.7% in 2014. This change is also being replicated by the usage of mobile phones.

Around three-quarters of the world’s inhabitants now have access to a mobile phone. The mobile communications story is moving to a new level, which is not so much about the phone but how it is used. The number of mobile subscriptions in use worldwide, both pre-paid and post-paid, has grown from fewer than 1 billion in 2000 to over 6 billion now, of which nearly 5 billion in developing countries. Ownership of multiple subscriptions is becoming increasingly common, suggesting that their number will soon exceed that of the human population. (The World Bank, 2012).

These figures are proof that the customer landscape has been altered but with this change comes huge opportunity. Organisations are now embracing these changes, and having effective, and timely two-way relationships that were not possible in the past. These new interactions are
delivering immense benefits to their companies in terms of customer loyalty, product development, and increased sales opportunities.

On a more cautious note, these advancements also come with new risks, and new challenges for organisations in the form of negative word of mouth. Customers now have the power to highlight poor performance or poor quality to a mass audience through social media, blogs, and forums. Customers are now becoming more empowered, and are putting the basics of traditional business under pressure. Earnest and Young explain how all organisations are now having to adapt to these new changes, and challenges, including large “Brands” that would have excelled in this area, in the past:

Brands are facing a loss in the information monopoly, and a shift towards two-way communication, and conversation. It is vital that brands embrace the shift in consumer power, and find ways to make it work for mutual advantage,

(Earnest and Young, 2011:6).

The current changes in customer services, and an organisation's ability to successfully employ customer engagement going forward will determine if a company is successful or not. The researcher believes that there was never a better time to study this topic. An in-depth exploratory research study would allow the author to discover, and document what the successful companies are doing in terms of obtaining increased customer loyalty, how they use modern metrics where traditional ones failed to capture the whole story, what techniques they are using for customer engagement, and finally identify if there is a framework to guide a company starting out on a customer-centric strategy.

1.2 Justification for this Study:

From a personal perspective the researcher believes that the biggest question a post-grad student faces when enrolling for a Masters of Business Program is, what topic will they choose for their thesis. This question is so important for a number of reasons but particularly because it will occupy so much of their time, it will shape the course for them as a student, and if chosen correctly it may open a door for them to a future career. The advice from our Thesis Supervisor Dr. Angela Wright was that students should choose wisely, and should choose a topic they are very interested in or that they feel may help them in their future careers. When enrolling for the MBS the researcher decided to choose a topic that would be career oriented. The
researcher’s ideology was that he could achieve a master level in this particular field by the end of the thesis. The researcher worked in the Services Industry, and therefore selected customer services. This topic was chosen because (1) it was an area that impacted on him daily within his job role, (2) was an area that he wanted to grow in knowledge, and (3) the researcher believed that new academic knowledge may be unearthed. The researcher also believed that in the future this increased knowledge, and understanding of this topic, may open doors to widen his career.

While the choice of the topic was decided, the angle to be perused, and the concept to be researched, failed to materialize easily. The researcher invested lots of time in the ‘literature review’ trying to establish an angle, and subsequently a gap in knowledge. The “Eureka” moment came with the inspiring speeches of Kenny Jacob of Ryanair, and Anne O’Leary of Vodafone. Both of these speeches showed the researcher that customer services was a viable topic, that it was a modern topic, and that as companies invested in it, career opportunities would materialize. The angle, and concept to be researched within this topic also came to light, with customer engagement being highlighted by both speakers, and the literature review identifying that an evolution was currently taking place. What became clear from the literature review was that industry had surpassed the academic world in the development of customer engagement techniques, and this was being driven by competition in the marketplace. This led the researcher to believe that there were new methods, and processes active in the marketplace that were not documented in academic literature, and also that the pace of change was not uniform between organisations. The researcher further believed that by performing qualitative research, and interviewing experts in this field, exciting insights would be discovered, and new academic knowledge could be produced. The researcher decided with the guidance of the thesis supervisor to perform an exploratory study of the subject. The title of the thesis will therefore be:

[An Exploratory Study of Customer Services focusing on Customer Engagement—an Irish Perspective]
1.3 Aims and Objectives of this Study:

The Aims and Objectives of this study are set-out in the following ‘terms of reference’:

1. To deliver a structured, and informed overview of the topic of customer services detailing its origins, developments, and modern status in corporate terms, and ascertain if customer services can impact on an organisations performance, either positively or negatively.

2. To comprehensively investigate, and document the developments of customer engagement, it’s transformation due to technology, and evaluating its impact on customer services, while assessing how it allows for the use of analytics to measure performance or non-performance.

3. Establish what components, and methods make an organisation successful at customer services, and customer engagement taking into account both the positives, and negatives associated with these concepts.

4. To introduce the concept of customer engagement behaviours (C.E.B’s), evaluate the difference between customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty, and to identify industry approved methods to measure loyalty.

5. To identify, introduce, and improve best practice models for the implementation of a customer engagement strategy, that would guide an organisation which has decided to implement such a strategy in search of a competitive advantage.

6. To ascertain if any of the skills, and methods utilized by the larger organisations are transferrable to ‘small to medium’ companies.

7. To make recommendations for future areas of research.

1.4 Research Focus of this Study:

This research study is presented in a five chapter design, each with a specific focus, undertaken, and presented in a methodical fashion, to provide the answers to the research questions outlined in the research study aims, and objectives section of this chapter. Each chapter has a specific function in building the required knowledge, and understanding of the topic, to allow the researcher fuse the results collectively, and develop an expert level of the topic. The specific focus of each Chapter is described below:
1.4.1 Chapter 1- Introduction:

This current chapter provides the initial introduction to the subject matter of this current research, and delivers a complete background to the chosen thesis topic. The chapter is primarily designed to establish the rationale for undertaking this current study, and to show how the researcher intends to use the knowledge collected, and presented, to benefit him in the future.

1.4.2 Chapter 2- Literature Review:

Chapter two provides the background research around the current study giving it context, and relevance. It reviews the existing literature, and previous studies in a number of subject areas relating to customer services, and the evolution of customer engagement, so that this research can be a contribution to the existing knowledge. The review of the literature will also confirm the existence of a question for the purpose of this study, and if required the research question will be altered in accordance with the present literature.

The literature covered in this chapter looks at the history, developments, impact on customer services, and then comprehensively evaluates the impact that customer engagement has had on customer services. This chapter also covers the emergence of mobile technology, social media, analytics, and assess their effect on the concepts. Finally this chapter explores customer engagement behaviours, looks at the impact on senior management, and identifies some examples of companies embracing the concepts which were discovered through this research.

1.4.3 Chapter 3- Methodology:

Chapter 3 explains the rationale for choosing the research philosophy, and the methods used in this study to carry-out the primary research element, which has as its aim to find answers. This chapter gives credence to the importance of the literature review, and outlines the principle methods of both primary, and secondary research that will be utilized. The project design is established, and the model to be utilized is selected. This model provides a structured methodological approach to the research, and ensures that all areas such as ethical issues, reliability, and validity are addressed.
A descriptive evaluation is performed, and justification is delivered for the selection of a qualitative method over a quantitative. The chapter then explains in detail how the qualitative method will be delivered by the use of semi-structured interviews, and details are given of how interviewees will be selected, the carrying out of the interviews as well as collecting the data. The chosen method to analyse the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews is then discussed. Finally the researcher will detail his personal journey in producing, and completing this thesis.

1.4.4 Chapter 4- Research Findings and Analysis:

Chapter 4 focuses exclusively on the findings of the primary qualitative research which was accumulated following the ten semi-structured interviews with industry leaders in the field of customer services. This chapter highlights the extensive results of the interview process which have been presented by the researcher under common subject themes. Each interviewee's feedback is listed under the common subject theme which is applicable. This orientation will facilitate the researcher in obtaining, and identifying common findings among the respondents, and these points will be supported by actual quotations from the interviewees, which were recorded during the interviews. This format will assist the researcher in moving onto the next stage of coding, and analysis. The information abstracted from chapter four will form the basis for the main findings, recommendations, and conclusions that will appear in chapter five.

1.4.5 Chapter 5- Main Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion:

Chapter 5 discusses the main findings, and themes identified in chapter four, following the coding, and analysis exercise. The discussion is supported by relevant quotes from the interviewees that participated in the study, and also compares themes with the literature that was uncovered.

The researcher discovered a number of findings from this study, that were explained using themes in conjunction with aims, and objectives identified in chapter one. These findings formed the basis for the development of a new customer engagement model to assist companies, and organisations of all sizes, employing a customer engagement implementation strategy. It was clear from the research that no such holistic model existed, and the production
of such a model would aid many organisations. As part of this study a new model has being innovatively developed, and explained in detail.

Based on the study findings, the researcher has also proposed recommendations for future research, which will again lead to an increase in knowledge in the area of customer service, and customer engagement going forward.

Finally, chapter five concludes with an overall summary. It examines if the aims and objectives outlined in chapter one were addressed comprehensively. As this study was an exploratory study to bring the researcher up to a master's level in the area of customer services, it also reflects on the subject matter learned by the researcher.

The researcher believes that this study will be of interest, and benefit to the following groups: (1) Customer Services professionals (2) senior management of all organisations (3) business consultants (4) implementation teams for the new customer engagement model (5) small to medium enterprise owners, and their advisory groups (6) future researchers, and fellow academics.

1.5 Summary:

This concludes chapter 1- The introduction to this Research Study. The following chapter will review the current literature surrounding customer services, and the impact of customer engagement on a global, and national level.
Chapter 2. Literature Review:

2.0 Introduction:

This chapter will outline the relevant literature in relation to the development of customer service and the evolution of customer engagement.

2.1 Customer Service Defined:

Donaldson (1986) believes that customer service is the essence of the marketing concept in practice, and therefore, a source of differentiation, and competitive advantage. Domegan (1992) agrees, and states that customer service is viewed as a differentiating tool that cannot be easily duplicated, and so will allow a company to gain an advantage over its competitors. Donaldson (1986) argues that customer service is a vital ingredient in the success of marketing but yet, there is confusion over what customer service is, how it is measured, and hence how to manage it. McGuinn (2009) offers a definition for customer service:

Customer service is a philosophy that permeates all practices of an organization to serve the needs of customers in a manner that is mutually beneficial to all stakeholders and involves the facilitation of customer satisfaction, loyalty and goodwill,

(McGuinn, 2009: 58).

2.1.1 Customer Services- The Evolution:

McGuinn, (2009) believes that customer service has, since its conception in the 1960’s, been a focal point for many theorists, and experts who have offered diverse theories, and various antecedents, and consequences on the subject. Verhoef et al., (2010) state that customer service has seen a conceptual shift from a product-centric to a customer-centric focus, and that customer service has now evolved into the concept of ‘customer management’. Verhoef et al., (2010) purport that this has had a significant impact on the marketing discipline, a view previously shared by Haven (2007), who believed that marketers no longer dictate the path that people take, nor, do they lead the dialogue.
According to Kumar (2007), the evolution of customer service has been driven by technology while Verhoef et al., (2010) highlight developments in channels, media, and society. Cambra-Fierro et al (2013) concur, and outline other factors such as economic globalization, growing competitive pressure, and companies striving for a better understanding of customer needs, and expectations while searching for greater customer satisfaction.

McGuinn (2009) argues that the historic development of customer service has led to a mechanistic interpretation, which had allowed a devaluation of the basic function ‘to serve’. McGuinn (2009) also believes that the direction of development in customer service should be away from this mechanistic approach to a humanistic view. Bowden (2009), acknowledges the past mechanistic structure of customer service but points to a humanistic solution with the concept of ‘customer engagement’. Bowden (2009), provides a model which moves beyond merely satisfying the customer to engaging customer segments at a deeper, rationally based level. Cambra-Fierro et al., (2013) concur describing the process to be a marketing capability which represents an evolution in relationship marketing, and a new approach to client portfolio management.

2.2.0 Historical Evolution of Customer Service: - The 1960’s- 80’s:

McGuinn (2009), believes that customer service originated in the beginning of the 1960s with the ‘pre-emergent stage’, when the origins of the concept was found. McGuinn (2009) further notes that the 1970’s was the decade of the emergence of the concept, followed by the 1980’s which witnessed the rise in academic attention but with little direct focus. McGuinn (2009), contends that early promoters of customer service in the field of industrial marketing relate the concept of customer service to ‘demand’ factors’. Oxenfeldt, previously stated, that customers sought added value beyond the product itself, and looked for companies to incorporate the following in to their products availability, reliability, risk reduction, performance enhancement, convenience and status, (in Donaldson, 1986). McGuinn (2009), outlines that in the 1980’s, attention focused on practical area’s including customer care, customer charters, service guarantees, internal marketing, and quality management, but highlight that the most significant development was the ‘internal customer’ concept which for the first time in the history of customer service meant there was an internal focus on the customer. “At this point a key evolutionary change began to occur with the application of customer service to the inside of an organization”, (McGuinn, 2009:59).
Donaldson (1986), previously stated that the customer service focus of the eighties, was re-directed due to the harsh realities of economic recession which caused enterprises to put attention on basic functions in getting, and keeping customers within their cost constraints, and therefore, growth strategies had to be tempered by more pressing priorities namely, sourcing, processing and satisfying individual orders.

2.2.1 Historical Evolution of Customer Service: - The 90’s:

The 1990’s, saw a substantial assimilation of technologies in service, an increase in the availability of internal marketing literature, and a re-examination of customer loyalty, notes (McGuinn, 2009). Domegan et al., (1992) previously outlined, and highlighted that the 1990’s, was a time where society experienced three waves of change with technology, with the first wave, being in the agricultural revolution, the second, was the rise of industrial civilization, and the third, was the wave of change in information.

*The ‘information revolution’ will significantly impact society and the way in which economic activity is conducted, (Domegan et al., 1992:203).*

Domegan et al., (1992:203) claim that customer service, and information technology were now widely accepted as valuable resources in gaining competitive advantage. McGuinn (2009), outlines that due to the blurring between mass customization, and customer loyalty, the period of the 1990’s led to the questioning of the true meaning of ‘customer loyalty’. Similarly, Daffy (1999), argued that service alone may not trigger long-term customer loyalty, and that to achieve enduring loyalty, companies needed more. Daffy (1999), outlined a solution to this problem with the ‘loyalty equation’.

*\[ \text{Loyalty} = \text{Affinity} \times \text{Satisfaction} \times \text{Involvement}, \]

(Daffy, 1999:40).

Daffy (1999) supported the loyalty equation by stating that true loyalty is the most difficult loyalty to develop with your customers but further noted that it was the most difficult to compete with.
True loyalty, is where a customer will be loyal to your company or product or service or brand even when you have lots of competitors who make it easy to switch to them, and perhaps even offer incentives, or, advantageous prices to do so.

(Daffy, 1999:39).

McGuinn (2009), believes that the loyalty development was very important, as loyalty was now seen as evolving from customer satisfaction to include affinity, and involvement. Similarly, Bowden (2009), outlines that the process of engagement traces its development from loyalty, mapping the relationships between commitment, involvement, and trust.

2.2.2 Historical Evolution of Customer Service: - The 2000’s:

McGuinn (2009), believes that since 2000, no major direct development has occurred that represents a fundamental breakthrough in customer service. Verhoef et al., (2010) contradicts McGuinn (2009), and argues that since 2000, Customer Management has evolved, and has had a serious impact on the marketing discipline. Verhoef et al., (2010) further states that this significant impact has occurred due to the increasingly networked society where customers can easily interact with other customers, and firms through social networks, and other media. Verhoef et al., (2010) proposes that the most important development in customer management is customer engagement. McGuinn (2009), contends that in the 2000’s, some advances have occurred including cause-related marketing, and social responsibility. Winner (2001), believes that one of the key developments in marketing, and management practice has been the growth of customer value management (CVM) stating that many firms have invested in large customer databases to understand, monitor, and influence customer behaviour. The world wide web allows companies to build better relationships with customers than had previously been possible in the offline world, and a revolution in customer relationship management was occurring where companies ‘tone of conversation’ had changed from customer acquisition to customer retention, (Verhoef, 2010; Winner, 2001).

Winner (2001), stated that as the number of customer contact points continued to increase, it became more critical than ever to measure the customer’s reaction to these contacts, and develop immediate responses to negative experiences. Gergoire et al., concurred, and believed that previous very satisfied customers who had a bad experience might engage in strong negative word of mouth, and become a company’s ‘worst enemy’, (in Van Doorn, 2010). Van
Doorn et al. (2010) purport that in contrast a series of delightful experiences may motivate a customer to set up a brand community or engage in positive word of mouth. Cambra-Fierro et al. (2013), believe that in the 2000’s, customer ‘needs’ and ‘expectations’ must be fully understood if effective interaction tools are to be developed, and drawn on, to boost customer satisfaction. Cambra-Fierro et al. (2013), further believe that the solution is customer engagement, a view shared by (Kumar et al., 2010; Van Doorn et al., 2010; and Verhoef et al., 2010).

2.3.0 Customer Engagement:

Kumar (2010), states that the concept of customer engagement is novel, in developmental phase, and is still been conceptualized, a view, previously shared by Haven (2007). Haven (2007) believes, that once customer engagement takes hold of marketing, marketing messages will become conversations, and dollars will shift from media buying to customer understanding. Kumar (2010), further states that the concept of customer engagement will change how companies view their most valuable customer, as value will not just be the customer spend, but what added business they can bring through word of mouth, and referrals. Van Doorn (2010), ascertains that customer engagement will alter how Chief Executive Officers (CEO’s), and Chief Marketing Officers (CMO’s) view Marketing.

2.3.1 Customer Engagement Defined:

Customer engagement as a concept, emerged in the marketing literature as an evolution of the relationship paradigm advocating on-going company-customer interaction, (Haven, 2007; Bowden, 2009). Customer engagement derives from the literature on relationship marketing but also believes it encompasses organizational behaviour, and cognitive psychology, (Bowden, 2009). The customer engagement evolution, has been aided by advances in innovation, and information technology where social media, mobile technology, and smart phones now enable two-way communication, and ultimately engagement, (Verhoef, 2010; Cambra-Fierro et al., 2013). According to Bowden (2009), it is this two way process that allows the development of loyalty by mapping the relationships between the constructs of calculative commitment, affective commitment, involvement, and trust. Cambra-Fierro et al., (2013: 326) concur, and call customer engagement, ‘the non-technical innovation process’ which leads to
a new approach in client management boosting customer satisfaction, and loyalty, and ultimately, leading to the spreading of positive word of mouth.

Van Doorn et al., (2010) highlight the importance of customer engagement behaviour, or, the psychological effect, which is present in the process. Customer engagement behaviour goes beyond transactions, and may be specifically defined as a customer’s behavioural manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers, (Van Doorn et al., 2010). Cambra-Fierro et al (2013), concur, and convey customer engagement as a set of customer behaviours between the customer, and the firm- both transactional (loyalty, repurchase intention), and non-transactional (commitment, word of mouth, referrals, blogging etc.) in nature- which guarantee future sales volumes, generate positive publicity and bolster brand reputation. Bowden (2009) concur, and defines customer engagement as follows:

*The term customer engagement is conceptualized as a psychological process that models the underlying mechanisms by which customer loyalty forms for the new customers of a service brand, as well as the mechanisms by which loyalty may be maintained for repeat purchase customers of a service brand, (Bowden, 2009:65).*

2.3.2 The Establishment of Customer Engagement: - Academic Research:

It has been observed that academic scholarship on customer engagement has lagged practice, while its theoretical foundation is relatively underdeveloped, therefore a better understanding of the customer engagement concept is essential to develop future strategies, (Sashi, 2012; Cabiddu et al., 2013). Sashi (2012) believes that despite the acknowledged importance of customer engagement, the understanding of its phenomenon is limited, and new theories can help shed further light on its unique features. Ashley et al., (2010) previously outlined that firms now have a heightened interest in factors that affect customer engagement in relationship marketing efforts but argue that often, consumers will actively avoid relational devices. As a result, an understanding will need to be established showing the factors that affect a customer’s willingness to engage in relationship marketing programs. Ashley et al., (2010) further stress that due to the challenges associated with reaching consumers using traditional marketing approaches, firms will increasingly need to rely on relational marketing tactics to increase customer patronage with their firm.
Sashi (2012), highlight the availability of relevant research material even though academics have lagged behind practice in terms of the emergence of customer engagement. The great interest from managers, and consultants in industries, and companies worldwide, has meant the production of a large number of white papers, blogs, discussion forums, commentaries, seminars, and symposia on the topic.

2.3.3 Customer Engagement: -The Effect of Technology and Innovation.

The advent of the internet, and in particular the interactive features of Web 2.0 have led to an explosion of interest in customer engagement. (Sashi, 2012:253).

Verhoef, (2010) notes that customer engagement as a new perspective was required due to the increased networked society that developed in the 2000’s where customers could easily interact with other customers, and firms through social networks, and other new media. Sashi (2012), notes that the opportunities presented by social media has allowed for the build-up of close relationships between businesses, and their customers, and that this evolution has excited practitioners in a wide variety of industries worldwide. The customer engagement evolution has been aided by advances in innovation, and information technology where social media, mobile technology, and smart phones now enable two-way communication and thereby engagement, (Verhoef, 2010; Cambra-Fierro et al., 2013).

2.4.0 Customer Engagement: -The Effect of Mobile Technology.

Kim et al., (2013) highlight the growth of mobile technology, and the input it has had on mobile user engagement. Kim et al., (2013) further believe that mobile user’s engagement motivations do influence perceived value, satisfaction, and mobile engagement intention. Lea (2012) outlines that in the past, company, and customer interaction happened in siloed, closed-off settings where customers had to make a phone call or write an e-mail but now, in an ‘always on’ world, ruled by mobile experience, customers are using mobile apps 10 times a day for customer service purposes, or, to buy a product. Kim et al., (2013) states that smartphone’s allow users to control when, where, and how they engage in selected activities that serve their needs, for example, saving time, completing a task, entertain them or connect with others. Lea (2012) believes that if you are not engaging your customer ‘on-the-go’ in the context of their
daily lives, you are missing an opportunity to provide them with a better, more immediate service but also to gain loyalty, and stay in the forefront of their minds.

2.4.1 Customer Engagement: Mobile Technology- Global, and Ireland Figures.

The next web (2015), outline the true growth in mobile technology in their global snapshot of the world's key digital statistical indicators showing that in a worldwide total population of 7.210 billion, over 3.649 billion are now unique mobile phone users, a penetration rate of 51%. According to the commission for communications regulation in Ireland (2014), mobile phone usage in Ireland continues to rise, with 5,626,484 mobile phone subscriptions at the end of June 2014, a mobile penetration rate of 122.0%. The commission for communications regulation in Ireland (2014), further states that 59.0% of all mobile voice subscriptions are smartphone's, an increase of 14.7% over the previous 12 months, while mobile traffic increased by 2.4% compared to the previous quarter.

2.5.0 Customer Engagement: The Effect of Social Media.

Customer engagement has benefitted from social media because of the interactive nature of social media with its ability to establish conversations among individuals, and firms in communities of sellers, and customers, and involve customers in content generation, and value creation, (Sashi, 2012).

Sashi (2012), believes that the concept of customer engagement has prospered due to the parallel evolution of the internet, the emergence of new digital technologies, and tools dubbed Web 2.0, especially, social media like wikis, blogs, micro blogging sites like ‘Twitter’, video sites like ‘Myspace’, and ‘Linkedln’. Cabiddu et al., (2014), also acknowledge the importance of social media for customer engagement, highlighting social media, browser, or mobile based applications that allow users to easily link to content or to other individuals.

Sashi (2012), purports that customer engagement has benefitted from social media because of the interactive nature of social media with its ability to establish conversations among individuals, firms in communities of sellers, and customers, and involve customers in content generation, and value creation. Ashley et al., (2010), previously explained the result of the
customers desire to engage with a company, and exchange information, which can be registering for the companies mailing list, signing up for loyalty cards, applying for a company credit card, and sending in rebate offers.

2.5.1 Customer Engagement: Social Media – Global, and Ireland Figures.

According to Statista (2015), the leading social networks in a worldwide context while ranking them by active accounts are, Facebook 1.3 billion, WhatsApp 600 million, Skype 300 million, Instagram 300 million, and Twitter 284 million. The next web (2015) highlight that 2.078 billion people in the world now have active social media accounts, a penetration rate of 29%. The second quarter 2014 ComReg issues market report in Ireland found that broadband subscriptions (fixed and mobile) stood at 1.7 million at the end of June 2014, while the estimated household (Fixed and Mobile) broadband penetration rate was 67%, (Commission for communications in Ireland, 2014).

2.5.2 Customer Engagement: Social Media- Providing Insights.

Sashi (2012), notes that by using social media, organizations can forge relationships with existing as well as new customers, and form communities that interact collaboratively, but acknowledge, that these interactions change the traditional roles of both the seller, and customer in the exchange relationship. Ashley et al., (2010) previously stated that the understanding of the factors that affect a customer’s willingness to engage is vital for organizations, particularly, before an organization makes a major investment in relationship building efforts. Haven (2007) previously highlighted that qualitative metrics for example, like feelings, affinity, and sentiment are difficult to track but social media makes it easier for customers to offer up their opinion, with the result that data is waiting to be mined, and analysed. Verhoef et al., (2012) outlines the positive potential of customer engagement, and states that by fostering processes, firms will gain insights, and suggestions, that if made available to the right person within the firm, and used appropriately, can generate new product ideas.
2.6.0 Customer Engagement: - Big Data and Analytics:

Kumar (2007), maintains that the technology for managing customer relationships has gotten sophisticated, and that companies can now draw on data bases that tell them how much each customer has purchased, and how often, allowing them to now supplement with detailed demographic profiles. Important developments in information, and communication technology has enabled firms to build large customer databases with real time access at customer touch points, and the development of strong software packages for analysing this data., (Verhoef et al., 2010).

By using analytically powered customer engagement cloud software, businesses can quickly turn their big data into insights, and their insights into highly targeted campaigns that enable them to engage with customers on a massive scale, (PR Newswire, 2013). Hall (2013) suggests that the key assumption behind big data is that more information, and knowledge about our customers will translate into greater customer engagement, stronger relationships, and increased sales, but this may not be true.

2.7.0 Customer Engagement: The Emergence of the Prosumer.

Earnest and Young (2011), note that today’s consumers trust each other more than they trust corporations or brands, with 78% of consumers trusting peer recommendations versus 14% who trust advertisements. The result is that customers advise each other, and heed each other’s advice. PWC (2012) believe that when it comes to harnessing digital technology for customer outreach, the goal is to get access to ever-greater insights on customer’s preferences, and behaviours so that companies can tailor customer experience to specific individuals. Earnest and Young (2011), highlight that the millions of on-line conversations have now produced a new consumer called the ‘Prosumer’, and stress that companies must beware of this new consumer, and be prepared to engage them.

Earnest and Young (2011) offer the following definition for a Prosumer:

*A term used for a consumer who is usually interested in products/services of a brand. Prosumers will dedicate their spare time to upload reviews, and comments, and respond to other reviews, and comments about the product. Some prosumers will record*
You Tube Videos to help other users with technical service issues of a particular product. These individuals, can be very useful sources of product development ideas, or a low cost provider of technical service to other consumers, (Earnest and Young, 2011).

2.8.0 Customer Engagement Behaviour (CEB) Defined.

According to Van Doorn (2010), customer engagement behaviour (CEB's) includes a vast array of behaviours including word of mouth activity, recommendations, helping other customers, blogging, writing reviews, and even engaging in legal action. Bowden (2009), previously argued that traditional measures of customer satisfaction had been criticized for failing to capture the depth of customer responses to service performance. Companies should redirect satisfaction appraisal to encompass an understanding of the role of commitment, involvement, and trust in the creation of engaged, and loyal customers, (Boden, 2009). Verhoef et al., (2012) further believe that the key challenge for firms is to identify the different participants, places, and content of customer engagement behaviours, and understand their potential effects. The reality is, that some customer engagement behaviours are visible to the firm, and others are not. Bijmolt et al., argue that firms who do not take non-transactional behaviours into account can trigger the loss of 40% of real customer value, and lead to serious errors when it comes to analysing customer portfolio's, (in Cambra-Fierro et al., 2013).

Van Doorn et al., (2010), define customer engagement behaviour as follows:

*Customer engagement behaviours go beyond transactions, and specifically reflect customer's behavioural manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers,* (Van Doorn et al., 2010: 254).

2.8.1 Customer Engagement Behaviour (CEB) - Antecedents and Consequences.

Van Doorn et al., (2010) stress that firms must understand the potential strong negative consequences of non-transactional behaviour, and must manage this properly. Haven (2007), argues that marketeers must beware that one unhappy online customer can cost them millions of dollars. Verhoef et al., (2012) believe that there are positives in customer engagement behaviour, while Van Doorn et al., (2010) ascertain that customer behaviour engagement
cannot be overlooked, and are consequential for the firm because they impact on two levels, financial consequences, and reputational consequences. Van Doorn et al., (2010) further believes that many customer engagement behaviours such as referral behaviours, word of mouth behaviours, and actions aimed at generating, and disseminating information for example, blogging, can affect purchase behaviour. Kumar (2007), previously stated that when we created segments of our customers, according to their lifetime values, and referral values, it is easy to see which customers needed to be encouraged to buy more, and which should be nudged to make more recommendations. Engaged customers can also contribute to the long-term reputation, and recognition of the brand, as is evidenced by participating in brand communities and supporting events related to the brand, (Van Doorn et al., 2010). Consumers of Coke, for example, who go to the Coke Museum to get married contribute to the brand recognition, and reputation of Coke among their friends, and family, (Van Doorn et al., 2010:259).

2.8.2 Customer Engagement Behaviour (CEB) - Competitive Advantage:

Kumar (2007), outlines that managers of firms need to ensure that they not only focus their efforts on increasing purchases, but also make it easier for customers to communicate positive information about their firm’s products, and services to others. Cambra-Fierro et al., (2013), further outline that the intangible nature of customer engagement, and customer engagement behaviour facilitates it becoming a source of competitive advantage with incalculable potential. Verhoef et al., (2010), previously stated that when firms adopt a customer centric approach, and are willing to invest in customer intelligence, they can achieve a strong competitive advantage resulting in stronger market performance. Firms will only out-perform competition when they implement customer centric strategies, they then understand how to motivate customer engagement, monitor, and manage customer engagement behaviour, and finally, analyse, manage, and influence customer networks, (Verhoef et al., 2010).

2.9.0 Customer Engagement: - Measurement Techniques:

Haven (2007) believes that a person who contributes content, such as a product review or a video of the product in use, may be far more valuable than the average purchaser so, as a result, your idea of who you consider a good customer should become more robust. Kumar (2010) supports Haven (2007), and highlight that customers can interact with, or, create value for firms
in a variety of ways, so a firm assessing the value of customers based solely upon transactions may not be sufficient, they must correctly value the customers total engagement with the company. Holm et al., (2011) suggests that marketing accountability is growing in importance as marketing managers are increasingly expected to demonstrate the financial consequences of marketing activities. Holm et al., (2011) further highlight that the ability to predict, and measure marketing activities impact on cash flows, and thus, ultimately on firm value, but this outcome has been acknowledged as an opportunity for marketers to achieve more influence in boardrooms.

2.9.1 Customer Engagement: Measurement Techniques - Customer Engagement Value (CEV):

Kumar (2007) suggests a solution to the measurement of customer engagement using ‘customer engagement value’ (CEV), and identifies its four components, the first component is ‘customer lifetime value’ (CLV) (the customers purchase behaviour), the second is ‘customer referral value’ (CRV) (as it relates to incentivized referral of new customers), the third is ‘customer influencer value’ (CIV) (which includes the word of mouth of existing customers as well as prospects), the fourth is ‘customer knowledge value’ (CKV) (the value added to the firm by feedback from the customer). Kumar (2007) further argues that the ‘customer engagement value’ framework, can ultimately lead to firm’s having more customer centric strategies that enable higher long-term contribution from the customer. Verhoef et al., (2010) supports Kumar (2007), stating that ‘customer engagement value’ (CEV) is an overarching new customer value metric that includes both value from transactions, an example being, ‘customer lifetime value’ (CLV), and value from non-transactional behaviour. Customer engagement value (CEV) distinguishes between three non-transactional values: ‘customer referral value’ (CRV), ‘customer influencer value’ (CIV) and ‘customer knowledge value’ (CKV), (Verhoef et al., 2010).

2.9.2 Customer Engagement: Measurement Techniques - Customer Value Management:

Verhoef et al., (2012) suggest that ‘customer value management’ (CVM), is an alternative model to ‘customer engagement value’ (CEV), as it is based on customer centric management systems which is achievable now due to new technologies, channels, and strong analytics. Crosby (2013) purports that at the risk of oversimplification, customer engagement would be
categorized in the customer-centricity bucket while Verhoef et al. (2012), suggested that the overarching theme with ‘customer value management’ (CVM) is that firms can only outperform competition when they implement customer-centric strategies. Verhoef et al. (2012) highlight that successful implementation of ‘customer value management’ (CVM) will result in 6 successful outcomes, (1) greatly improved business performance (2) ensures that the company is more customer driven than information technology driven (3) forces companies to adopt ‘customer life time value’ (CLV) as a core metric (4) forces companies to invest in strong analytical capabilities, which will be critical over the next decade (5) assists companies in understanding the key drivers of customer acquisition, customer retention, and customer expansion and (6) focuses companies on multichannel management to create customer value.

Haven (2007) emphasises that marketing complexity means that traditional metrics fail to capture the whole story, so the measurement, must assess the engagement of an individual, and capture the sentiment, opinion, and affinity a person has towards a brand, as manifested in ratings, comments in blogs, discussion forums, or recommendations to friends. Verhoef et al. (2012) believes that ‘customer value management’ (CVM) is the future, and can see the concept develop in the areas of (1) managing customer networks (2) managing customer engagement (3) managing customer experience.

2.9.3 Customer Engagement: Measurement Techniques- ‘Customer Lifetime Value’ (CLV) and ‘Customer Profitability Analysis’ (CPA):

Holm et al. (2011) report that two distinct measurement approaches have emerged in the marketing literature; ‘Customer Lifetime Value’ (CLV) and ‘Customer Profitability Analysis’ (CPA). Holm et al. (2011) discuss the concepts stating that they are two fundamental different approaches to measuring the financial value of customer relationships. Pfeifer et al. (2005) previously demonstrated that, ‘Customer Lifetime Value’ (CLV) deploys a ‘prospective’ perspective on customer profitability predicting future customer behaviour, and discounting derived lifetime cash flows while ‘Customer Profitability Analysis’ (CPA) deploys a ‘retrospective’ profitability perspective, measuring costs, and revenues per customer in a specific accounting period in the past. Holm et al. (2011) ascertains that both approaches share a common purpose of identifying the most valuable customers for resource allocation decision making.
2.10.0 Customer Engagement: - Current Examples in the Business World:

Verhoef et al., (2012) believes that developments in technology, database knowledge, and analytics have accelerated interest in the application of ‘customer value management’ (CVM), and states that companies such as Capital One, Harrah’s Entertainment, IBM, Retailer Tesco, and the Dutch mobile phone operator KPN have as a consequence, invested heavily in customer management. Cambra-Fierro et al., (2013) concur, and highlight other companies such as Starbucks, and Lays who have pioneered the application of ‘engagement’, by effectively engaging significant numbers of customers both in product development, and in a range of different communication acts, thus achieving a more reinforced company –customer relationship. Innovative methods include Starbucks – mystarbucksidea.com, and Lays Crisps new product idea- where they invite their customers to develop a new flavour in a contest with the winner receiving 1% of the turnover of the resulting new product, (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2013). Guardian (2014) highlight a local example, and explain how new Ryanair chief marketing officer Kenny Jacobs will use a strategy of in-depth digital media use, and customer engagement to convince the public that the Irish airline’s customer service has changed.

2.11.0 Customer Engagement: - Effect of Customer Engagement on the Chief Executive Officer (CEO):

Van Doorn (2010) outlines how two important events have influenced how chief executive officer’s (CEO’s) view the process of customer engagement, (1) chief executive officers are becoming wary of value creating antics of financial managers who rely on techniques such as leveraging, and financial restructuring, and (2) a realization has developed that companies must now go beyond product quality, and value as a driver of a firm’s performance, focusing on customer-based metrics for measuring organizational performance. Anderson et al., concur and highlight that chief executive officer’s (CEO’s) must understand that long-term sustainable competitive advantage is tied to a firm’s ability to retain, sustain and nurture its customer base, (in Van Doorn, 2010). PWC (2010) suggest that although the chief marketing officer (CMO) is often responsible for private companies customer engagement programs, nearly one-quarter of private company chief executive officer’s (CEO’s) are personally overseeing those efforts. Hall (2013) contends that fully engaged customers represent an average 23 percent ‘premium’ in terms of share of wallet, profitability, revenue, and relationship growth over the average
customers, a reason why customer engagement remains the number one issue keeping chief executive officer's up at night.

2.12.0 Literature Review Conclusion:

This chapter provides a critical review of the literature available on the topic from various theorists, and appropriate sources. These sources explore the background to the research in view of the themes that have been identified. The objective of these sources is to provide, credence, credibility, and validation in reaching research outcomes.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology:

3.0 Introduction:

This chapter provides a theoretical framework of the research methods, and data collection methods adopted by the researcher in conducting this research. According to Kumar (2005), research is more than a set of skills. Research is a way of thinking, examining critically the various aspects of your day to day professional work, understanding and formulating guiding principles that govern a particular procedure, and developing, and testing new theories for the enhancement of your practice, (Kumar, 2005). Walliman (2005) believes that it is important, that a student or practice embarking on a program of academic or practical research has a clear idea of what the word ‘research’ really means, and clears away any misconceptions, which might exist owing to its common use in the other fields.

3.1 Research Defined:

Research is one of the ways to find answers to your questions. (Kumar, 2005:6).

Wisker (2008) believes that research is about (1) asking, and answering questions, (2) seeking knowledge, (3) seeking understanding of the world, and its processes, (4) testing assumptions, and beliefs. Kumar (2005) suggest that when research is undertaken to find out answers to a question, you are implying that the process is being undertaken within a framework of a set of philosophies, procedures, methods, and techniques, that have been tested for; validity, reliability, and is designed to be non-biased and objective. Only when you have adherence to these three criteria, can you call the process ‘research’, (Kumar, 2005). Walliman (2005) suggest some of the ways in which the term ‘research’ is wrongly used, (1) as a mere gathering of facts, and information, (2) moving facts from one situation to another, (3) as an esoteric activity far removed from practical life, (4) as a word to get your product noticed.

Walliman (2005) highlights the Oxford Encyclopaedic English dictionary definition of ‘research’:

The systematic investigation into the study of materials, sources etc, in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions while endeavouring to discover new or
3.2.0 Research Process:

The basic process of research is based on inquisitiveness, where the cycle can start with experience or a problem; a theory or hypothesis; a question; a fascination with trying to see how, why, if, why not, what if, (Wisker, 2008). Walliman states that the research process involves, “defining some kind of a research problem, working out how this problem can be investigated, doing the investigation work, coming to conclusions on the basis of what one has found out, and then reporting the out-come in some form or other, to inform others of the work done”, (2005: 24).

The researcher invested time in selecting ‘a research process’ that would provide a systematic planned approach to this thesis, to ensure that all required stages were completed, and all the information discovered was valid, reliable and correctly documented. The researcher reviewed a number of research processes which were produced by various research theorists, but selected the following research process for this study, as illustrated in Figure 3.1.
The remaining of this chapter outlines, and explains each of the above stages in the context of the work undertaken by the author for the purpose of this study.
3.2.1 Research Process- Personal Journey:

The researcher found in the course of his research, and reviewing of past thesis, that the use of a structured model for the methodology was a successful tactic. The use of a model, resulted in the researcher following a structured focused path, while covering all the topics required within the methodology. The researcher’s fear was that by piecing the methodology together without a model, vital topics could be excluded, which could compromise or undermine the final outcome. A number of different models were studied for the best suitability, but the model developed by Saunders et al, (2007) was selected. This model allowed the methodology to be built in structured ‘stages’, each stage connected with the next and always working towards a final goal. The chosen model did have certain topics in stages where other models did not. An example would be ethical issues, validity and reliability, which were covered in stage 5, whereas other theorists, had chosen to cover these at a much later stage. This concern was discussed with my thesis supervisor but the feedback was that the location was acceptable, as the main objective was to have this section covered. Having now completed the thesis, the researcher is delighted with the decision to use a structured model.

The initial idea was that by following this process, it would result in a more focused approach, gradually building correct content but always working towards the desired end goal, and this was the case. The researcher like others, suffered from a work-life balance conflict during the thesis research, which resulted in the balancing of work, the thesis research and, a family including a Communion, a Confirmation, a family wedding and a close relative with a heart by-pass. The result was that ‘time’ became an issue, but this model allowed the researcher to remain focused. Small chunks of time were utilized effectively, while working constructively, in accordance with the stages. As the weeks went by, the researcher discovered that collectively all the small sections of time, combined, to allow achievement of the end goal. The researcher would recommend this strategy to future thesis researchers.

3.3.0 Stage 1- Formulate and Clarify your Research Topic:

This stage of the process involves the researcher selecting a topic, which will form the purpose of the study, and will be the basis for advancement through the research process. According to Wisker (2009), some students will choose research topics that will enable them to pursue
cultural, intellectual, emotional, and personal fascinations, while others will select research projects that they know they can manage, some deliberately stretch themselves, into new skills, new topics, and new areas.

3.3.1 Stage 1- Formulate and Clarify your Research Topic- Personal Journey:

The journey involved in the selection of the final topic could only be described as a marathon and one that involved the loss of sleep. The researcher had as his aim, to select a topic that would be relevant to his career, and this was echoed by the thesis supervisor, who recommended, that the final selection be one that will really interest the researcher, or be relevant to their career. By using these criteria, it was felt that the researcher would remain motivated, and interested throughout the thesis journey, from start to finish. From a personal level, this researcher could see merit from a career perspective, in becoming extremely knowledgeable on the topic of customer services, and in the developments of customer engagement. The problem lay in finding the angle or the gap for the study. Through dialogue with the thesis supervisor the angle was decided. As the researcher sought a holistic understanding of the topic, then an ‘explanatory study’ would be most suited, and would allow the researcher to achieve this objective.

3.4 Stage 2- Critically Review the literature:

Reviewing the literature critically will provide the foundation on which your research is built. (Saunders et al., 2007:57).

The researcher spent considerable time reading, and researching the chosen topic to: (1) show an awareness of what knowledge is available, and what it comprises of (2) identify what are the various debates, agreements, and disagreements (3) identify who the key theorists are in the field and what are their underpinning ideas (4) identify the critical practitioners or people, who have utilized the underpinning ideas of theorists, and engaged it in their own research.

The researcher has now concluded and has documented the new information and knowledge, in a ‘literature review’, which forms Chapter 2 of the Thesis. The journey to complete the Literature Review was long, time consuming and intensive, but was critical to ensure a successful and focused research. This chapter allowed the researcher to obtain an in-depth knowledge of the subject chosen, but from a different perspective and that is the huge advantage
of this chapter. The researcher having worked in customer services in a Small to Medium Business for a number of years, had a particular mind-set on how customer services worked. The literature review has changed his perspective, and given him new knowledge, that was used in the qualitative research, while performing the interviews. This new knowledge allowed the researcher to use semi-structured interviews so that the feelings, beliefs and opinions of the interviewees could be ascertained.

If the researcher was to be honest, it did take time to comprehend the purpose of the literature review. The initial two submissions of literature review for on-going assessment, during previous semesters, was produced to obtain marks as opposed to understand the subject and identify a gap in knowledge. This mind-set was initially continued when the researcher started the full thesis research and for a time, could not get focussed. A re-visiting of research notes from class, a discussion with the thesis supervisor and a discovery of the research handbook from Wisker (2008), changed this outlook. Now the researcher, researched to understand the topic, identifying the key theorists, and the critical practitioners, while identifying themes. By the end of the process the researcher had an understanding of the history, the theories, an insight into some of the methods that companies were using and a direction for the thesis, a long way had been travelled.

3.5 Stage 3- Understand your Philosophy and Approach-

The research philosophy chosen, will contain important assumptions, about the way in which you view the world, and these assumptions, will underpin your research strategy, and the methods you chose as part of that strategy. (Saunders et al., 2007:101).

The researcher has decided following review of a number of research theorists, that the study to be undertaken will involve an ‘inductive testing theory’ approach, as the collection of data will involve human interaction, so therefore obtaining an understanding of meanings, beliefs and experiences. Saunders et al., (2007) highlight that the inductive approach is associated with the collection of ‘qualitative data’. According to Bryman et al., (2003), the ‘process of induction’, involves drawing generalizable inferences, out of observations, with the final result of ‘theory’. Saunders et al., (2007) concur, stating that the inductive approach involves, collecting data and developing theory, as a result of your data analysis. The research philosophy selected by the researcher, will be an ‘interpretivism’ philosophy. According to Saunders et al., (2007) it is useful to attach the research approaches to the different research
philosophies, so, deduction owes more to ‘positivism’, and induction to ‘interpretivism’. Having researched the interpretivism philosophy, the researcher believes that it is most relevant, as it acknowledges human interaction, and employs an ‘idealism’ philosophical basis of the world, which recognise, that people view it in different ways. By adopting this philosophy, and approach, the researcher feels that he will obtain peoples true meanings, beliefs, and experiences, and therefore gather new knowledge, allowing the development of new theory, to add to the existing academic theory.

3.6.0 Stage 4- Formulate your Research Design- Overview:

To obtain a successful result at the conclusion of this study, it is critical that an effective research design is selected, and implemented. According to Walliman (2005) important facts, need to be considered, when designing the project, and these are; available time, financial resources, facilities, availability of data, possible methods of analysis, and your own developing skills as a researcher. Saunders et al., (2007) highlight that there must be a clear distinction between design and tactics; ‘design’ been concerned with the overall plan, for the research, while ‘tactics’ being the finer detail, of data collection and analysis.

3.6.1 Formulate your Research Design- Exploratory Study:

The research design to be chosen will be an ‘exploratory’ study, as the researcher deems this to be, the most appropriate form of research to use in this study. According to Wisker (2009),

*Exploratory research is commonly used when new knowledge is sought, or, certain behaviour, and the causes for the presentation of symptoms, actions or events need discovering.*  
(Wisker, 2009: 72).

Saunders et al., (2007) highlight three principle ways of conducting exploratory research; (1) a search of literature (2) interviewing ‘experts’ in the subject, and (3) conducting focus group interviews. The researcher for this study will use, the search of literature, and qualitative data collection through the interviewing of experts, to obtain relevant knowledge, to assist in the development of a conclusion to the study, so this decision endorses the decision to select an exploratory study.
3.6.2 Formulate your Research Design- Grounded Theory:

Denscombe (2007), believes that grounded theory is an approach that emphasizes the importance of empirical field work, and the need to link any explanation very closely to what happens in practical situations in the real world. Concepts and theories are developed out of the data through a persistent process of comparing the ideas with existing data, and improving the emerging concepts and the theories by checking them against new data collected specifically for the purpose, (Denscombe, 2007). Saunders et al., (2007) highlight that grounded theory was developed to build an explanation, or, to generate a theory around the core, or, central theme that emerges from your data. Denscombe (2007), states that when adopting the grounded theory approach, the researcher should undertake data collection in the field not only at the starting point of the research, but throughout the course of the research as well.

The research has decided to perform an explanatory study of customer service and customer engagement, which will involve data collection from the field, comparing it with existing and new literature, all with the goal of producing theory, concepts and theories around the chosen topic. For this reason the researcher believes that the grounded theory is best suited to this study.

3.7.0 Stage 5- Address Ethical Issues- Overview:

For the purpose of this research, the researcher has decided that exploratory research, is the best model, for obtaining qualitative data, as it will provide insights, and an understanding of the research problem, while taking the human factors of opinions, beliefs, and experiences, into account. To obtain the human factor knowledge, the researcher will interview ten people working directly for large companies, and organisations, who have direct relevant knowledge of customer services, and customer engagement. In order for the researcher to arrive at a fair, and true conclusion to the research, ethics, reliability, and validity, will need to be considered, and taken into account.

3.7.1 Ethical Issues:

Damyon et al., (2011), believe that when collecting data though human interaction, it is important to pay close attention to ethical issues, because there are inherent challenges related to the inductive, and holistic nature of qualitative research, and the fact that it involves trust-
based relationships between researcher, and participants. Flick (2009) concur, and outlines that questions of how to protect the interests, of those who take part in a study, have repeatedly drawn research ethics to the foreground. As a researcher, your obligation towards your participants, concerns the need to interact with them in a humane, non-exploitative way, (Daymon et al., 2011). To adhere to correct ethics, the researcher will engage the ‘code of ethics’ identified by Flick (2009), which require “that the research should be based on informed consent, that the researcher should avoid harming the participants, including invading their privacy, and not deceiving them about the research’s aim”. The interviewee will also be able to opt out, if they want, at any stage of the interview.

3.7.2 Reliability and Validity:

Reliability and validity are fundamental concerns in qualitative research. Kumar (2005) believes that “it is important for you to establish the quality of your results, for as a researcher, you can also be asked by others, to establish the validity of the procedures you adopted, for finding answers to your research questions”. Damyon et al., (2011) state that the concept of validity is more salient than reliability. Kumar (2005) outlines two perspectives that the researcher must consider, on validity; (1) is the research investigation providing answers to the research questions for which it was undertaken, and (2) if so, is it providing these answers using appropriate methods, and procedures. Daymon et al., (2011) believe that in qualitative research, reliability is rarely used, because of the subjective nature of qualitative research, but must still be considered. It is therefore critical, that the researcher acknowledges both reliability, and validity, throughout the research process so that the work produced is original, current, and can stand-up to external evaluation and scrutiny.

3.7. Ethical Issues- Personal Journey:

To ensure that the findings, and the conclusions of this research study were true, and fair the researcher embraced ethics, reliability, and validity. When dealing with the perspective, and actual interviewees the researcher was totally honest in his approach, explaining in full the aims of the study, ensuring privacy, and where required agreeing not to name interviewees. The representative from BOC Gases who participated in the pilot interview requested not to be named, and the researcher honoured this request. During each of the interviews the participants
were asked about recording of the interview, and they all agreed. The interviewees were all given the option to opt out of the interviews at any time but they all fully participated.

3.8.0 Stage 6- Qualitative and Quantitative Research- Overview:

Wisker (2008) believes that the choice of methodology, and the methods chosen for the research, follows on naturally from the person’s worldview, philosophy, the definition of the title, and of the research questions that underpin the research. Bryman et al., (2003) previously highlighted that methodology is divided into two approaches, qualitative, and quantitative research. On analysis, there would seem to be little to the quantitative- qualitative distinction, other that the fact, that quantitative researchers employ measurement, and qualitative researchers do not, but for many writers quantitative, and qualitative research differ, with respect to their epistemological foundations, and in other respects too, (Bryman et al., 2003). Kumar (2005) highlight that both qualitative and quantitative approaches have their strengths, weaknesses, advantages, and disadvantages, with neither one being markedly superior to the other, in all respects, but, the deciding factor is which information is required for the research study, and what is the purpose of the study. Damyon et al., (2011) agree, and outline that every research project, is guided by what the researcher wants to achieve, what the researcher believes is good research, and what particular priorities and orientations, are part of the research project. To some extent, it is relatively easy to choose which set of qualitative or quantitative methods, will provide the most effective investigatory tool, (Damyon et al., 2011).

3.8.1 Quantitative Research:

According to Wisker (2008), quantitative research is applicable, when the researcher believes that the world, in particular human behaviour is definable, fixable, provable, can be discovered, and described in a rigid manner, with unchanging facts. This testing is deductive, positivistic research, (Wisker, 2008). The researcher evaluated this approach, but feels, that the research to be undertaken is not a test, but an exploratory study, which will involve interacting with people, and obtaining knowledge, beliefs and experiences. The researcher therefore feels, that this method is not suitable for this research. Daymon et al., (2011) concur with the researcher, stating that when using quantitative research, the researcher is a detached investigator standing at a distance from their research.
3.8.2 Qualitative Research:

Walliman, (2005) outlines that qualitative research is achieved, by the researcher immersing in the data obtained, and then searching out patterns, surprising phenomena and inconsistencies, which can generate new concepts, theories or, uncover further instances of those already in existence. Wisker (2008) agrees and states that qualitative research should be used when, the researcher believes that; (1) we can ask questions but, never gain absolutely final answers, (2) that all data collected needs to be interpreted in context, (3) that we make meaning rather than discover it as a fixed entity, (4) that we understand making links and interpreting contexts, and (5) that our understanding of the meanings we determine, from the findings produced by our research, could be differently interpreted in different times, and places by different people. The qualitative research is more likely to be inductive, as it makes theory, and contributes to meaning rather than testing theory and meaning, (Wisker, 2008).

The researcher suggests that ‘qualitative’ mode of inquiry is more suitable for this research, as due to the exploratory nature of the study, the researcher will gain more knowledge and insights, because of the semi-structured interviews, and experiences of the people that will be interviewed. Daymon et al., (2011) claim that certain research questions lend themselves to a quantitative orientation, whereas other questions are more suitable for qualitative research. The researcher agrees, and outlines that qualitative research is the most suitable method for this study, as the research question could not easily translate into numbers.

3.9.0 Stage 7- Design the Sample and Collect the Data:

Flick (2009) highlights that the researcher will encounter the issue of sampling at different stages in the research process, but in an interview study, it is connected to the decision about which persons you will interview, and from which groups these should come from. The researcher has identified ten senior people, who will be interviewed. These people are working directly for large companies, or operate in a consultancy role, but all have direct relevant knowledge of customer services, and customer engagement, so will offer valuable insights, and some perspective on the research topic. A list of the interviewees, their company name, and their job titles are contained in Appendix A.

The researcher also identified 11 key questions that would allow expansion on the body of knowledge obtained, and to fill in the gaps which the researcher found in the literature review.
(See Appendix B). The proposed questions on completion were submitted to the Thesis Supervisor for review, and comment. A pilot interview was planned with the Commercial Manager for BOC Gases in Ireland. The purpose of pilot interview is to ensure that the questions presented generate the insights required to produce findings, from the interviewees.

3.9.1 Collect the Data:

The researcher has decided to employ both primary and secondary sources for the gathering of information, as shown in Figure 2:

Figure 2: Methods of Data Collection:

(Kumar, 2009:118).

According to Kumar (2009) the choice of sources and methods of research depends upon the purpose of the study, the resources available and the skills of the researcher. The researcher will use all available methods of secondary research to compile the literature review and become familiar with the relevant theorists and current academic knowledge available on the study topic. For primary research, the researcher has decided that ten in-depth, one-to-one, semi-structured interviews were the best collection method, as it allows the researcher to probe, and elicit detailed answers to questions, and gain valuable insights. Saunders et al., (2007) believes that an interview is a purposeful discussion between two or more people, and the use
of interviews can help you to gather valid, and reliable data, that is relevant to your research question, and objectives.

3.9.2 The Interviews Process:

According to Bryman et al., (2003) some basic elements in the preparation of your interview are; (1) make sure you are familiar with the setting of the location, and that it is a quiet environment (2) create a system where questions flow reasonably, but also be prepared to alter the order of questions, during the interview (3) formulate questions on topics that will allow you to answer your research question (4) use language that is comprehensible (5) do not ask leading questions. (6) have a good tape recorder, and record the interview. Daymon et al., (2011) highlight that researchers are now turning to digital audio recorders, for the clarity of recording, and because interviews can be transferred easily to a computer, for storage, and playback, as well as listened to on an MP3 player or iPod.

3.9.3.0 The Pilot Interview:

According to Wisker (2008), the researcher should perform a pilot interview, and pilot the question schedule asking the following questions: (1) Do the questions seem to flow more smoothly in a different order? (2) Have you been able to overcome the problems associated with those sensitive questions? (3) Are you missing some of the sensitive questions? (4) What can you do to make them more accessible?

3.9.3.1 The Pilot Interview- Personal Journey:

The researcher found that organizing the pilot interview was more complex than he had envisaged. The person to be interviewed, when approached, expressed concerns in regards to sensitivity of the information to be discussed as it included references to the customer services strategies, and philosophies of the company he worked for. The interviewee requested a copy of the questions so that he could discuss the interview with his Senior Manager. The researcher contacted the thesis supervisor to ask if this was allowed, and was told, he could proceed. The interviewee was granted permission to participate in the interview but with one stipulation, that interviewee was not to be named. Strangely, the company name could be used. These terms were agreed, and the pilot interviewed proceeded. The researcher learned a lot from the pilot
interview. The interview was held in the home of the interviewee. This environment was very conducive with the interview process, as it was quiet, un-interrupted, and allowed for a focused approach from both the interviewee, and the interviewer. This was something that the researcher noted, and should be factored in when organizing other future interviews. The questions were very relevant, focused, and allowed the interview to flow. The interviewee gave a very good insight into the customer services, and customer engagement strategies in BOC Gases, as well as his own personal beliefs, opinions, and experiences. The researcher used two recording devices to record the interview so that if one failed for any reason, a second copy remained. The recording was clear, and very audible, and so allowed for easy transcribing. The quality of the recording was again the result of the interview location, and the existence of no background noise.

The researcher did review his own performance, from an objective perspective, to see if lessons could be learned, as this was the first time that the researcher had conducted such an interview. The researcher also sought feedback from the interviewee. The lessons learned were: (1) If the interviewee went on a tangent, to offer a prompt, to bring them back on track (2) If the interviewee mentioned key information but did not elaborate, record this, and then when suitable, return, and drill deeper. (3) The interviewer must be aware of the time on each question, and must move the interview along in a controlled manner, so that all questions are covered. (4) The two recording devices used, both entered sleep mode while recording, so the interviewer had to randomly enter a passcode to check the time on each question, the interviewee found this a distraction (5) The interviewer while transcribing found that question six, had not being asked. This was an omission, and a plan would need to be developed to prevent this in future interviews. On reflection the pilot study had been a brilliant, and worthwhile experience that had delivered real lessons, and would definitely result in a more professional approach to the future interviews, that were to be performed.

3.9.4.0 Semi Structured Interviews:

The researcher has decided to use non-standardised, semi-structured, one to one interviews. Damyon et al., (2011) outlines that unstructured interviewing does not follow rigid procedures, as interviews of this type are highly flexible, allowing you to follow the interests of informants, as they relate to their own thought process. The researcher believes that this flexibility will allow better engagement with the interviewees, to obtain greater insights in terms of opinions,
beliefs and experiences. Damyon et al., (2011) believe that unstructured interviews generate the richest data, and often uncover surprising evidence, but argues that they can be extremely time consuming. As the study being performed is an exploratory study, the researcher feels that the semi-structured interviews are the most suitable, as they enable ‘why’ questions to be answered. Saunders et al., (2007) concur, and outline that semi-structured interviews are very helpful for exploratory studies, as data produced is likely to be used not only to reveal and understand ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions, but also to place more emphasis on exploring ‘why’.

3.9.4.1 Semi Structured Interviews- Personal Journey:

With the pilot interview complete, and lessons learned, the researcher set about performing the additional nine interviews. The first week proved to be a very productive week. The researcher organised two interviews with Sean O’Keeffe, Customer Services Director with Trend Micro, and Bobby Kennedy, Senior International Account Manager with Logitech. Both interviews were held in meeting rooms, within the work environments of the interviewees, and produced excellent content in terms of the interviewee’s opinions, and experiences. The researcher employed the lessons learned from the pilot interview, and was very happy on reflection, that the interviews had been executed in a professional, and non-bias manner. The interviews were held on Tuesday, and Thursday.

Throughout the research process, the researcher has been open to constructive feedback from academics, and past students of the MBS program. The ability to seize an opportunity, and be assertive, has been mentioned on numerous occasions, especially when recruiting people for the interview stage. On Wednesday the researcher utilized this advice, and seized an opportunity, when a visitor to his workplace was judged to be an ideal candidate, for an interview. The person Richard Paine, Product Marketing Manager with Notifier by Honeywell, was visiting to perform a customer engagement exercise, to obtain customer feedback for the manufacture of a new fire panel. The researcher ceased the opportunity, and got commitment from Mr Paine, to participate in an interview. The location, and time agreed was the public bar in the Cork Airport Hotel at 18.30. This was the researchers first time interviewing in a public setting, and he found it brought new challenges in terms of background noise and disruption. The researcher found that despite the new challenges, the interview was a success. From a personal level, the researcher was proud of his performance, and how he had been so assertive in ceasing the opportunity. This week also resulted in another landmark occasion for the
researcher as he performed his first ‘guest lecture’ in the Cork College of Technology, to a class of first year Master of Business Students. The task was to give an understanding of the ‘Marketing Module’ for Year 2. The researcher prepared a power point presentation, and utilized all the presentation skills developed during the MBS program, to deliver a very informative presentation, which was well received by the audience.

Having completed four interviews the researcher evaluated where he was, and the content he had received from the interviewees so far. The result was that the type of candidate was so important to the thesis outcome, and therefore needed to be carefully selected so that they were knowledgeable on the topic, came from diverse backgrounds, and that they would agree to participate. The researcher used all avenues available to come up with a “wish list”. The researcher then went about trying to organise these people. The researcher had originally identified Apple European Operations, and Amazon, as two organizations that he would like to be targets for interview opportunities, due to their customer-centric reputations. The approaches were made through individuals that the researcher knew, but the offers were declined, due to the fact that both organizations, do not allow their employees to participate. Other possible candidates were contacted through e-mail, telephone or LinkedIn, but failed to correspond back while other colleagues made promises, and then did not deliver. The researcher immediately removed these organisations or people from his list, and moved on.

The researcher spent a lot of unforeseen time communicating with people or organisations, trying to organise interviews, and this time allocation was not factored in at the start. This is something future researchers should be vigilant of, and should allow time for it.

The next interview with John Goulding, Chief Executive Officer of Core HR was held on the phone while he was on route to Dublin. A previous commitment could not be honoured due to work commitments so the researcher learned to capture any opportunity. The phone interview worked well, and the recording was of good quality. This interview exposed so much relevant content that it ranked in the researcher’s three best interviews. The next interview was with Mel Galloway, Enterprise Ireland Consultant who gave a varied interview because of her exposure to different industries, and companies in her consulting role. This interview was held in the Radisson Hotel in Little Island. The researcher used the lessons learned from the interview with Richard Paine, and choose an early morning time before the lunch rush started. This decision resulted in a quiet bar which was perfect for interviewing, and recording. The interview with Enda Lynch was held in his office in Munster Rugby, and was the perfect
setting. This interview was hard to tie down because of Munster Rugby's involvement in the Guinness Pro semi-final, and final but when it took place, I was glad I had waited. The eight interview was with Helen Murphy of Brainsell. Helen had spoken to the MBS class in a Guest Lecturer capacity, and the researcher had been impressed with her background, and so felt that her experience, and knowledge would be beneficial to the findings of the thesis. Helen also had the advantage that she was a business owner, and consultant with Enterprise Ireland. As a past MBS graduate, Helen was very accommodating in arranging, and participating in the interview. This was a trait that the researcher found in all past MBS Graduates. The interview was held in the Garryvoe Hotel, and involved a number of re-shuffles to obtain a suitable location. The final result was a good recording, and excellent content.

In selecting the topic for this thesis I was inspired by two senior executives, and they were top of my wish list for interviewees. They were Anne O' Leary, Chief Executive Officer of Vodafone, and Kenny Jacobs, Chief Marketing Officer, of Ryanair. The researcher honestly did not know if these interviews would be possible but decided to follow this route. The researcher used all leverages available to him, sent numerous e-mails, made numerous telephone calls, and amazingly arranged both interviews. Anne O' Leary rang the researcher at an agreed time, and day, which meant the researcher interviewing Anne by telephone while on holidays in Lanzarote. Kenny again selected the time, and day, and the interview was carried out by phone. The researcher was delighted with the final results from both interviewees, and felt that all the effort was worthwhile. The content received from both was exceptional, they both spoke openly, and were totally forthcoming with information. The interviewer was delighted that he had waited until last to interview these people as he had built up huge confidence, and interview skill from the previous interviews. The interviewer was able to converse with confidence, and probe areas of interest thereby getting a more holistic interview. The interviewer was intrigued at how accommodating these two people were despite their busy schedules. The interviews were now complete.

In conclusion, the researcher would like to share two observations with future researchers. The first observation is the researcher would stress the need for two recording devices for each of the interviews. If for any reason only one is available then the researcher should take detailed notes in conjunction with the only recording. The researcher experienced the failure of a recording device, and found his written notes, and speedy response to be so important. The second observation that the researcher would like to share is the reality that the organization of
the interviews is a logistical nightmare. This part of the thesis really tested his planning, and organizational skills, as well as his patience. People were hard to tie down, and on each approach, different issues were identified. The researcher took the view that these people were giving up their time, to accommodate his research, so he would have to be as flexible as possible, and that was the approach. The researcher found that the most accommodating people were those, who had in the past completed a qualitative thesis, as they had empathy with the researcher. A future researcher may take note of this fact, and incorporate it into their selection criteria, for interviewee applicants. From a personal perspective the researcher found the interview stage of the thesis to be so exciting, rewarding, and empowering. During the process the researcher found himself interviewing some of the most influential individuals in Irish business, and yet having total confidence in his own ability to be able to question, probe, and relate to these senior executives. The researcher felt this was a vindication of how far his confidence had grown since participating in the MBS program, and also proved that he could communicate at this level. The researcher continues to express a ‘proud smile’ when he thinks back at this stage of the thesis.

3.9.5 Transcripts:

After gathering the data, the researcher will transcribe the interviews to enable analysis. Bryman et al., (2003) suggests advantages for the transcribing of the information; (1) it helps the natural limitations of our memories (2) it allows for more thorough examination of what people say (3) it permits repeated examination of interviewee’s answers (4) it opens up data to public scrutiny (5) it helps to counter accusations that an analysis might have been influenced by a researchers values or biases (6) it allows the data to be reused.

3.9.5 Transcripts- Personal Journey:

The researcher found the transcribing of the interviews to be very time consuming, and a very slow process. The researcher did find a benefit in personally transcribing the interviews, as it allowed you to identify, and mark themes within the data as they were arising, but it did take time to transcribe each interview. The researcher therefore accepted an offer from his sister, Dolores to transcribe a number of the interviews, and subsequently accepted. This acceptance meant the researcher could devote the time to other areas of his thesis, and it was so beneficial
to the final outcome. The researcher would advise this approach to other future thesis researchers. To transcribe the interviews the researcher played the recording on an Apple iPad, and typed the text into a new word document on his laptop. This method also proved very effective when compiling chapter 4 with the copy, and paste function. With all ten interviews completed, and transcribed it was time to analyse the data, and to address coding.

3.10.0 Coding:
According to Saunders et al., (2007) coding involves the procedure of constantly comparing the data being collected with the concepts, and categories being used, so as to aid the process of developing an emerging theory that will be thoroughly grounded in the data. The data that you will collect will be disaggregated into conceptual units, and provided with a label, so as to derive meaning from the subjects, and settings being studied, (Saunders et al., 2007).

3.10.1 Coding- Personal Journey:
When performing the coding exercise the researcher focused on, and incorporated the aims, and objectives for this thesis. This helped to establish the labels or themes so that when the analysis was being performed, the overall findings would be in-line with the aims, and objectives. The researcher throughout this process was very methodical in his approach, and was also aware that the data may contain something which was completely new to academic literature, so would be a notable find.

As it transpired the theme names came very easy to the author. When transcribing the interviews, key points were noted from each interviewee, and when these were re-visited at analysis stage, it showed the presence of relationships or common themes. This noting exercise had proved for beneficial, and meant the structured establishment of the themes. The researcher was now able to identify findings in conjunction with the aims, and objectives, and therefore able to compile findings for chapter five.

The researcher also noted that an overall trend was starting to materialize, whereby all the organisations interviewed seemed to be at different stages or levels with customer engagement. From the data collected, and the coding performed, the author could see the best in class who appeared to be using all techniques available, and the worst, who was at a basic level. The coding also produced a tiered system of progression, which the researcher modified into “a
customer engagement implementation model”. Further research proved that a constructive comprehensive implementation model which would guide organisations who had decided to employ customer engagement, was not available. The researcher’s model would guide a company starting from basic level, and help them achieve the top level, where they would be utilizing all modern techniques discovered in this research. This development would be a new addition to the academic literature.

3.11.0 Limitations to the Study:

Getting, and organising interviews was very difficult. In some instances an interview took over two months to transpire while in other instances the company you wanted may have declined to participate. The interviewer would have liked to interview a senior representative from Apple or Amazon because of their exceptional record with customer services, but overall the researcher was extremely excited with the ten interviews he obtained. They all had in-depth knowledge which they were prepared to share, and help shape a modern picture of the subject. The author was particularly proud that he obtained interviews with Kenny Jacobs, Anne O’Leary, and John Goulding. These three interviews took huge effort, and time to organise but the researcher felt that they helped create a picture of companies that were doing it at the top level. These organisations were the benchmark, and therefore the companies that other organisations would aspire to imitate. If these interviews had not taken place, the author feels this would have resulted in a less descriptive, and knowledgeable result in the thesis, as these companies helped create the top tier of his model.

The biggest limitation was the availability of time, which to be fair was pointed out by the thesis supervisor at the start of the process. The balancing of a busy work schedule, a family, and the thesis was very challenging but the researcher utilized every hour available, and was fortunate with the flexibility of his family.

3.12.0 Research Methodology Conclusion:

This concludes chapter three. The following chapter four presents the research findings obtained from the interview data, and transcripts that were produced in the primary research.
Chapter 4: Research Findings and Analysis

4:0 Introduction:

This chapter presents the empirical findings from the data collected from the qualitative interviews that the researcher conducted. The qualitative research process performed involved semi-structured interviews with ten senior people who were experts on customer services, and customer engagement in their chosen fields. These leaders all operate in roles that have direct customer services interaction, and hold positions that have an influence over the strategy for customer services in their organizations. The interview technique employed allowed each interviewee to express their opinions, beliefs, and experiences, and at all times to speak freely. Full transcripts of the interviews are available from the researcher.

The chapter is broken down into the following themes:

4:1 Company Philosophy on Customer Services:

The current research has found that companies are driven by various philosophies in terms of their customer services approach. The final strategy that a company chooses will be decided by the criteria set by that organization, but in making this decision, it would be prudent to be aware of what other organizations are doing. The first participant outlined their philosophy as follows:

*Our philosophy regarding customer services within our company would be recognising the customer's voice, to truly understand each customer, and know what their needs are. In order to recognise the customer's voice, we would have a 'real time' customer feedback program that would give customers advice, and in return they would give us their experiences. We would build on that finding, and identify their likes, and dislikes. We would take action on this in order to improve the actual customer service. In a nutshell, our philosophy is the 'voice of the customer'.*

(Mr X, Commercial Manager, BOC Gases).

The next participant highlighted their philosophy, explaining that he was recruited by Trend Micro to roll-out their new customer services strategy:
The philosophy in customer services in Trend Micro is changing, that is why I was employed. They are trying to focus on customers much more, than they would have before, and enter the “enterprise space”. Trend would have traditionally be seen as a “consumer type” company, which is why their attitude, and approach to customer support, is very much consumer or small to medium sized driven. For an enterprise customer, it is often in a situation where there is a data centre, and it is more important because if the customer is down, it is imperative that they get an appropriate response. There is a different level of focus, and mind set, involved with enterprise customers, as it is about responding quickly, making sure you are reacting properly to a customer, that is having a critical situation. So enterprise support changes your philosophy on how you should support your customer.

(Mr Sean O’ Keeffe, Director of Customer Services, Trend Micro).

The next willing interviewee suggested that the philosophy of Honeywell was to understand their customer, meet these needs better than their competitor, and make customers lives easier:

I think customer services means different things to different people but for Honeywell the customers are the centre point of our focus, so everything revolves around understanding the customer, and solving their problems better than the next best alternative, which would be our competitors. If we can do that, then ultimately, we make their lives easier, and it’s a pleasure to do business with us. That’s how we operate, so we have to understand our customer’s needs, and make sure that we meet them.

(Richard Paine, Product Marketing Manager, Notifier by Honeywell).

The fourth contributor articulated the philosophy of his organisation but also highlighted that it was driven from the top:

We have a new CEO in the business, and he has been with the company now a little over two years. When he came in, one of the first things he did was articulate values, that we were supposed to live our lives by within the business, and there are five different values. Even if you go, and look at a job description for Logitech, these five values will be listed at the top. These five values are move fast, speak up, decide alone, drive change, and the last one is exceed customer needs so I suppose the philosophy towards customer service is we need to exceed our customer needs,

(Bobby Kennedy, International Senior Sales Account Manager, Logitech Ireland).

The next participant highlighted a philosophy from a consultant perspective, so this philosophy was taken from a general point of view as opposed to from within one organisation, which added a different dimension, to the research.

In general what kind of philosophies am I seeing regarding customer services? Some companies are very proactive, they engage consistently with their customers, they understand them, they get regular customer information back, they interpret this information, and apply it. Others would be a little bit more reactive, so if there’s a customer complaint, if there is a support issue, or, if a customer takes it upon
themselves to proactively give some feedback into the company, then they will respond
to that. Other companies are I would have to say, maybe a little bit ‘lethargic’, where
they are more watching the selling, than the actual customer scenario. Therefore once
it’s sold, they are looking back out externally again. So I am seeing a mix but in general
I would say I am seeing a move towards better customer service, and understanding
that the sale is part of the entire process.

Secondly, I am seeing companies focusing on whether they are product focused, or, are
they customer focused? The customer focused companies tend to be the most successful.
You can have a superb product but, if you’re not engaging with the customer, if you
don’t understand them, if you are not offering them the right value proposition, your
product really isn’t going to generate the levels of success, which it should, even if it is
a premium product.

(Mel Galloway, Enterprise Ireland Business Consultant).

The next contributor explained that their philosophy involved providing the customer with the
engagement channels they required, and making the customer experience the best, and easiest
as possible,

Our philosophy is all about looking after our customers. It is about creating an
environment where they have an excellent customer experience with us, and the
experience is the easiest it can be, no matter which touch point they choose. Our aim is
that our customers recommend us to their friends, and family, and become loyal to us.
We do not just take this for granted, as we invest a lot in data analytics, and are using
the Net Promoter Score to identify what our customers are saying, and thinking. We
are active on all the different channels, again to make the interaction the easiest it can
be. Customers of all age profiles can therefore interact on a channel that suits them
whether it be Facebook, e-mail, twitter, snap chat, my Vodafone account, our website,
by web chat or simply with our customer services team on the phone,

(Anne O’ Leary, CEO, Vodafone Ireland).

The next interviewee explained that their philosophy is basically the customer is always right,
because of the complexity of the product they are selling- a Munster Rugby Ticket. This is an
emotional purchase involving a team that plays in two different cities, so is a very unique
purchase:

Our philosophy is the customer is always right. I know people say this, but we actually
believe it. This is because the majority of our customers are repeat purchasers. They
buy into what looks from the outside as a very simple process, but it is not a simple
process, buying a ticket is not easy, buying a season ticket is not easy, buying a season
ticket across two grounds is not easy. This is a season ticket across two grounds, across
two competitions, with a team that can perform well, or badly from week to week. They
go through a lot to extract value for what they have paid us for, so therefore the
customer is always right. Most of our customers are repeat customers, and they will
know when there is something wrong, when there is something wrong with what is going
on around you, when there is something wrong with the service, and when there is
something wrong with the team, and everything transpires from that.
Now, when a person buys a washing machine, they do this every five years. They may go for Bendix, where they will go for price, and for brand. They may go to Tesco, and buy their grocery shopping every week, which is about one hundred, and twenty different brands, of which sixty are regular purchases. Our customers are buying one product from us, they might be buying one ticket, but ultimately we want the person who buys one ticket from us to feel the same as a person who buys ten games per year. You also want to build this customer up from buying one ticket for a match, to become a season ticket holder. So ultimately what they say as feedback counts as feedback in terms of what the season ticket holder experiences, and how we should build the season pack at the end of the day. We have one product that we use all the time. If you think about other products that you use throughout the year, very few of them are emotion based. This is because there is only a single product that they are buying which is based on emotion, and so you have to react when you get feedback from them. It is a bit complex. When a customer makes a decision based on emotion, you can challenge their decision, you can challenge their emotion, you are not right.

(Enda Lynch, Marketing and Commercial Manager, Munster Rugby).

The next respondent explained that their philosophy involved simplifying their processes so that it is as effortless as possible for the customer to deal with his organisation. This was a common theme throughout the research:

Our focus is all about the customer. One of the things we found over the last while is that it is important to have the essentials right, so how quick we respond, how quickly we fix their problem when they contact us, and overall, how easy it is for the customer to interact with us. Do we make it easy for them to open a call with us, do we make it easy for them to give their details, and is it an effortless experience for them. That would be our philosophy-to make it as effortless as possible.

(John Goulding, Chief Executive Officer, Core HR).

The next respondent stressed the importance of agreed criteria with the client so that the customer services delivered can be evaluated using pre-agreed measures:

What I do is strategic development with customers. I start off with a need score. First of all we discuss what their needs might be, then I create a document called a “hymn sheet”, it’s basically so that we are singing from the same sheet. I have five key questions, and from these I can understand what they need as project engagement from me. We agree that up front, then from that it becomes a project brief. We then develop the project brief, and then we can start agreeing what the services are going to be.

(Helen Murphy, Owner, Brainsell, Ex Brand Manager, Waterford Crystal).

The final participant detailed how his organisation had changed their customer services strategy over the last two years, and how contrary to the past, they are now listening to their customers:

Our philosophy on customer services is pretty straightforward. We put customers much closer to the centre of our business over the past two years, than we have done before. Ryanair is Europe’s largest Airline. We have always had a straightforward approach to customer service in our 30 years. In the last two years we have listened more to customers, and what customers are saying is taking a higher priority in our business, so I would say our philosophy on customer service is “the customer is a much more
important part of our business than say it was before’’. When it comes to the customer services element in particular, the customer services element of the customer, we take a fast, and functional approach to that. We basically are a very reliable airline. We have very few complaints when compared to Aer Lingus, and British Airways for example on a ‘per passenger’ basis. Whenever things do go wrong, we respond very quickly, and we fully comply with all the Legislation, be it Irish or European, on customer’s rights when it comes to air travel. I think we are good at customer service, and we have plans to get better. Is the customer at the centre of Ryanair? Yes, for the past 2 years they have been, and that is driven by the “always getting better” program. In the coming years the customer will play a much greater role in Ryanair in telling us what to do, and we will shape our offer, and the way we do business, much more around customers.

(Kenny Jacobs, Chief Marketing Officer, Ryanair).

4:2.1 Strategies used to Attract New Customers:

The findings of this study indicate that companies have conflicting approaches to attracting new customers. The offering of each company is unique, but in all cases the following are critical: - proper product research, competitor analysis, and the provision of tools for ease of buying.

The first interviewee indicated that their company approach to the attraction of new customers was as follows:

For new customers, we would have a number of products that we would be launching into the market place, but prior to that we would do research with customers from a global perspective. We do it from a global perspective because each customer is put into segments so we would have an industrial customer that would be the same as in Ireland, Germany and the U.K so forth. We would do the research into what products they require, and what our competition is doing. Next would be making it easier for customers to buy from us in terms of the internet so we have the “e-channel”. This is a forum, and a way of customers not only buying gases but safety products, and hard goods, through one portal. So instead of ringing up to buy gas or products using the website, they have it all in one portal.

(Mr X, Commercial Manager, BOC Gases).

The next contributor highlighted their strategy, which was being driven by an organisation champion:

It is mainly the selling motion/team that attracts new customers, so it is rare for a support function to attract new customers. What is interesting here in Trend is that the guy who is responsible is the Chief Operating Officer COO- Whyel Mehommad. It is fascinating, what I have already learned from him. The biggest issue for him, and for companies in general, is retaining existing customers or the cost of losing customers.
The next interviewee suggested a strategy that Honeywell used which relied heavily on a partnership arrangement:

*I think overall Honeywell is known for the quality of its products, it is not known for a cheap product in the marketplace, and as such it attracts a certain type of customer. I think in the part of the business that I work in, we rely heavily on our partners, our customers are our partners, and we run a limited distribution model that protects the end users. They need highly skilled trained individuals, to provide quality solutions, and we feel that's one of the best ways of doing business, so we work with our customers, and partner with them.*

(Richard Paine, Product Marketing Manager, Notifier by Honeywell).

The next contributor highlighted their strategy, which was in support of (Sean O' Keeffe, Trend Micro), that internal management will have an impact, on the strategies chosen by the organisation:

*Again with our new CEO, a guy called Bracken Darrell, he's very much about design, and he's very much about this emotional engagement with the customer. People buy our products, not because they need them, but because they want them. If you listen to our designers talking, they talk about designing, for emotional relevance, inspiring people, into wanting to have our products. So how do we attract new customers? We are really at the stage now, where we are moving away from being an engineering lead company, to being a design lead company. We are really attracting people, I suppose amongst other things, through product design, and instilling a want in them to buy our products.*

(Bobby Kennedy, International Senior Sales Account Manager, Logitech Ireland).

The next contributor highlighted their strategy from a consultant perspective, articulating, what they were witnessing, from a wider perspective:

*Again, it's a very wide answer for me, because I am seeing such a wide remit, but in terms of attracting new customers, a lot of it would be down to sales personnel, maybe there would be some sales promotions. The better companies would be going into that modular review process, that I spoke about, so the intelligence gathering. This would allow them to understand better their customers, the market, the trends, the drivers, and then, defining a very good value proposition, and this is really the hub of customer service. What is the measurable value of your product, from the perspective of the customer, and if you can get that right, a lot will ripple out from that in a positive way. So in terms of attracting new customers- it's very traditional selling methods, and lead generation, foot leather on the part of the sales person, and then you have your usual promotional things, advertising, PR etc.*

(Mel Galloway, Enterprise Ireland Business Consultant).
The next interviewee explained the importance of not risking your existing customers in search of new customers:

*With attracting new customers, we again run campaigns looking for customers to change service providers, but we do not risk our existing customers. We would never give a potential new customer a better deal on a bundle, which we have not offered to our existing customers. I do not believe in this, you must look after your existing customers, to retain them. This is why we reward them through “my Vodafone”, where they receive gifts for being loyal. We look to attract new customers from our competitors but we do not offer them better deals than our existing customers have.*

(Anne O’ Leary, CEO, Vodafone Ireland).

The next willing interviewee identified the importance of identifying new markets, building a strategy, and implementation plan to attract this market segment:

*There is some new customers out there, not a lot. Some of the customers we want to track are foreign nationals who have moved to Ireland to work in the technology sector around Cork. Fifteen thousand new PPS numbers have been issued in Cork in the last eighteen months. Why? They are coming in to work in places like EMC, and Apple. You go after them, and you get them through the Sports, and Social Groups, because that is the only avenue, that you can get them. We have set-up a really active group which goes after sports, and social clubs throughout Munster, particularly in Cork. Rugby is a great way to do something in Cork, when you move over to Ireland, for the first time. It is always about reaching out to an audience with a really engaging message, and not just saying to come, and buy a ticket. It is about using our digital channels, you need news, you need content, you need competitions etc to keep them engaged. That is what we do for new customers, and then for existing customers. It is about giving them better preference, and greater rewards for the loyalty that they have shown, and discounts for tickets.*

(Enda Lynch, Marketing and Commercial Manager, Munster Rugby).

The next willing respondent explained the importance of referrals to their organisation, and how they win the majority of their new work on the back of previous projects, and referrals from existing clients:

*Everything we do is based around references, so when we engage with a new client typically it is because they have heard that we have a good reputation. We do Information Technology Projects. We are a software company, we design, we build, we test our own products, and software so it is all about our own products. We put our own products in, and install them. You need to have a good track record of projects to gain a good reputation in the marketplace. For us it is all about our reputation, and how willing are our clients to recommend us, to put us forward or be good references for us. We have been lucky to win a lot of high profile marquee clients but we have done it on the back of the existing clients, clients speaking well of us, and informing new perspective clients that we are easy to deal with, that we have good products, and that we do what we say we are going to do. We approach all our projects like that because at the end of the project when we install our software, we look for the site to be a*
reference site, and we engage with them. When we are complete we ask the question how do we make this site a reference site, and we have done well with this approach, (John Goulding, Chief Executive Officer, Core HR).

The next willing interviewee outlines how her new business comes from her existing clients through referrals:

People say doctors do not take their own medicine, that’s me, so while I’m busy telling everyone how to market themselves my own marketing is very much a word of mouth orientated strategy. I think I’ve become famous from understanding strategic marketing from the customer’s point of view. I help people develop customer focused strategies. Then through my informal networking or strategic networking I gain business. People say you must go to Helen to get this bit done for your business as she has made this for me. My existing customers become almost my marketing team.

(Helen Murphy, Owner, Brainsell, Ex Brand Manager, Waterford Crystal).

The last respondent highlighted the three point plan Ryanair use to attract new customers:

Our strategy to attract new customers is simply about three things (1) having the lowest fares (2) flying to the right places more often than anyone else, and (3) giving customers a very good, and reliable flying experience. This is our strategy on how to attract new customers.

(Kenny Jacobs, Chief Marketing Officer, Ryanair).

4.2.2 Strategies used to Retain Existing Customers:

The finding of this study revealed that retention methods for customers were a priority for every company, especially, with the competitive marketplaces that exist, but every company had their own strategies and tools that they employed. Retention of existing customers also involved an understanding of customer engagement behaviour, where companies sought to obtain ‘customer loyalty’ from their customers, understand customer needs, use customer insights produce personal offerings, and engage new product development.

The first interviewee identified the company tools employed by his company, and how they sought customer loyalty, to retain existing customers:

To retain existing customers: - we all know it is a competitive market out there, so you need to retain your customers. We would have a number of tools that our sales guys would use. One of those tools is called the “Customer Characterization Tool”, and allows you to understand your customers while showing you what type of relationship, they will want with BOC Gases. You will unfortunately have only transactional customers, who are only interested in price. As long as you understand that, you can try, and develop that relationship, and maybe make them more aware of the other
aspects of your offering. For the existing customers, you have a number of existing employees who have a number of years in BOC, and would therefore understand their needs. Even though the managers or the employees within the customer organization may change, the process used would still be the same, so BOC would bring advice to that customer in terms of the process. Customers do appreciate this knowledge of the product, and the experience we can bring. So in terms of retaining the customer then definitely the account management side, is the key to that.

To improve customer loyalty, we would have customers who buy a certain volume of cylinders from us or a certain volume of product from us. They would be assigned an account manager, as long as they are over a certain level so that would mean “face to face” communication. By having face to face, you are getting in there straight away, you are meeting the customer, they have one point of contact, and that is key especially for our large customers but also for our medium customers. To the large customers that is something we would focus on with the face to face meetings, with the customer, and try to develop what their aspirations are with BOC.

(Mr X, Commercial Manager, BOC Gases).

The next contributor outlined their strategy, and also spoke about achieving loyalty:

Strategic customers know that they will have these down periods, as all products have issues, a lot with critical implications. It can be the product or a product defect, what is important is that you have a company that will work with you, to get you out of the problem, and a company, that does not lose the head. A company that is focused, and has processes in place, have the right people dealing with your issue, and in the end will get you out of it. This actually makes customers loyal when they experience that. They will buy again expressing their opinion on customer support, knowing that they are “in safe hands”. You actually can turn a negative customer, into a positive customer – a loyal customer, by providing good customer support like that.

(Mr Sean O’ Keeffe, Director of Customer Services, Trend Micro).

The next interviewee suggested a strategy that Honeywell uses, which rewards customers for the loyalty they show:

I think it’s a big part of what our network stands for, we have some very long standing, very loyal customers. We have done some interesting things in the past, that have caused them some pain, and they stuck with us, through thick, and thin. We also reward our customers. The best customers are rewarded with our gold partner scheme that rewards loyalty. The way the rewards scheme works is, ultimately, the more they spend, the more rewards they get.

(Richard Paine, Product Marketing Manager, Notifier by Honeywell).

The fourth contributor articulated a strategy that uses customer insight, to produce products that are sought, by its customers:

Again it would be based on the technology, the build quality, affordability, and everything else. It’s a combination of factors, and these people will come back to us, because they know Logitech. They have experienced Logitech. We have always been
good at what we do, we have been customer focused probably from an engineering perspective, and a quality perspective. As a company we do a lot of consumer insight. We maybe are not a company that produces products for the sake of producing products, we believe in producing products, which are driven by genuine consumer need. We sat with consumers, we have worked with them, and we have done all the ethnographic studies around that, and more. Now we are very much insight driven as a company.

(Bobby Kennedy, International Senior Sales Account Manager, Logitech Ireland).

The next interviewee who operates in a consultancy role, shows the lack of movement from SME’s towards retention, and that their focus remains on the securing of new sales. This is a conflicting approach to that of the multi-nationals:

*In terms of retention, in general I wouldn’t see as much activity. One of the recommendations that I would have made to a number of SME’s that I would have worked with recently, is to engage in regular systematic customer contact programmes. You would be doing that, to allow you to up sell, and to cross sell. It’s there to protect your reputation, to allow you to move with the market, to ensure that you still have a connection with your customer. It allows you to identify if there are long term commercial benefits, or if there are referral benefits, networking etc. but in general, I think I would see more activity on the selling than on the retention.*

(Mel Galloway, Enterprise Ireland Business Consultant).

The next contributor identified the importance of retaining your customers, offering them personalised offerings, and rewarding them for their loyalty:

*As a company, we are really trying to keep our existing customers, give them a customer experience that they all enjoy, and get them to become loyal to Vodafone. We currently have over 2.4 million consumer customers, and 54% of the Enterprise Market, which includes customers such as Apple, EMC, Google, and Microsoft. We are always working to make their experience better by giving personalised offerings to customers depending on their needs. We identify if they are on the correct bundle, if they need more data, and then put them on a bundle that suits them. We use all methods of marketing such as advertising, social media, outside advertising, media campaigns, and sponsorship. We do a lot of sponsorship. We track the effectiveness of all campaigns, and advertising. TV, and Radio have been good for us. Radio can be very effective depending on the market segment you are aiming at. We do not do a lot of direct marketing. When we run campaigns for new products, we track the response, and level of success of the campaign.*

(Anne O’ Leary, CEO, Vodafone Ireland).

The next contributor explained the importance of looking after your existing customers, and giving them something additional to differentiate their offering, and finally how they have employed a professional digital company to help them:

*How long is a piece of string! Pampers will talk about an emotional trigger to get you to change a functional decision, we do not have that luxury. We have to sell a game,*
winning or losing, cup or no cup. We have the supporters club, and we have the ten year ticket holders. Are we brilliant at retention - no, but we do have a very good program for the muster supporters club members, and the ten year ticket holders? Yes, we offer them a chance to purchase tickets to away games. There are other things that we give them that matters to them, access to tickets to away games, tickets to international games, a 10% discount with Lifestyle Sports, the giant draw, better seats in the stadium, those type of things. You pay your supporters fee, and you get access to all of them. You are a 10 year season ticket holder then you get access to some of them. Are we good at retention - no, are we getting better - yes. We just have a loyalty white paper that we signed off on, and we now have to implement it so that we do a better job retaining our existing customers. Do they all stay - no, are there factors outside of our control - yes, Friday night games in Thomond Park. No one in Cork wants to buy a ticket for a Friday night game in Thomond Park, because they are not going to make it. There is a bad road between Limerick, and Cork, plus no sign of a motorway, anytime soon. So Friday nights or the weather. What do we do for existing customers? It is a mixture of traditional engaging methods, advertising through our media partner Today FM because they have the perfect target audience - mid-twenties to late forties, who still aspire to a good day out every so often, and this is their big purchase. This gives us a national reach. We do a lot of local advertising, and that sort of stuff. We do hand to hand combat, we do outbound calls to people who have gone to games in the past but have not gone to a game for a year or two. We have their details so we contact them. We now use a company called “Blue State Digital” who are a company that President Obama used in his election. They are a digital agency who are now working with Hilary Clinton, and the Green Bay Packers. They are working with us now, and they are telling us how to engage better with our existing supporters. The more people that we can get onto our database in whatever means possible, the more we can speak to them outside of buying a ticket. Examples of good content are Thursday tips about your health, great competitions, and giving them an insight into the club.

(Enda Lynch, Marketing and Commercial Manager, Munster Rugby).

The next respondent outlined their impressive record of retention, and highlighted the importance of retaining your existing customers to achieve overall growth:

We actually have an unbelievable retention rate. We typically do not lose clients. Our first clients that we won over 20 years ago, the vast, vast majority of them would still be with us. We recently done an analysis on our attrition rate versus turnover, and it is actually less than half a percent attrition rate per year. We are growing at 26% per annum for the last number of years, and we are not losing clients. Some of the clients we have lost have actually being outside of our control. Usually it has being a multi-national company, where the clients in Ireland are delighted with us but there is a corporate decision made in New York or California, that they are going to go global with a particular product. We end up losing that client. Thankfully that does not happen a lot to us so our retention would be at a very impressive, low number.

(John Goulding, Chief Executive Officer, Core HR).
The next contributor outlined the strategy she employed as Brand Manager for Waterford Crystal, where the product ambassadors, and shop locations were key to the success of the product:

*With the likes of Waterford Crystal, it’s what you become famous for. You become famous for delivering an excellent product with strong collateral marketing, and PR support, which then deliver sales. How do you do that? You do that by having world class sales rooms for instance like Brown Thomas, Harrods, and Selfridges, and developing those. This becomes a pull through, and you develop events around those which pull product through, not only for your own brands but secondly that increases turnover for the store. I tend to do this from a product point of view with world brands such as Waterford Crystal. I would engage key influencers to talk to my core target markets which are brand loyalists, and aspiring achievers. From a brand loyalist perspective we would be looking at getting key brand influencers to say, “I love this new product” because of X, Y, and Z. From an aspiring achievers perspective this would be probably getting on to wedding lists, and targeting newly married. It is about highlighting how gorgeous things, make gorgeous people.*

(Helen Murphy, Owner, Brainsell, Ex Brand Manager, Waterford Crystal).

The last respondent detailed how his organisation now focused on retaining customers, and were investing in this strategy to incentivize the customer, and enhance the digital experience. He finally stated that the aim of any business, whether you are Europe’s largest airline or a small company should be retaining your existing customers:

*In terms of retaining customers, we have a very different strategy than we had previously on retaining customers. Getting the same people to fly again, and again with Ryanair is very important to us. We are therefore investing in various technologies, digital technologies, and incentive programs that will give to customers who have flown with us. We will make it simpler for them to come back to us. We will have their details already registered, and we will give them specific targeted incentive’s so that they will travel again with us.*

Yes, whatever business you are in, whether you are running Europe’s biggest airline or whether you are running a shop in Cork City, everything is about getting the same people, to say that place is actually good, I am going to go back there. That is the same for us on an airline. A lot of businesses focus too much on acquisition of customers. Acquiring new customers costs you a lot of money, it makes much more economic sense in the long run, and in a business sense just to get the same people having a good experience, and coming back again, and again.

(Kenny Jacobs, Chief Marketing Officer, Ryanair).
4:3 Customer Engagement- What it Means?

The current research has found that customer engagement is now an intrinsic part of large companies customer services strategies, and is an everyday activity. Companies now realise that the engagement of their customers is critical for their business.

The first interviewee explained what customer engagement meant:

*Customer engagement within BOC is an everyday activity. In BOC from when the order is placed, the invoice is created through our credit control, to when the driver delivers the product, to when the account manager goes in to resolve issues or negotiate any agreements, customer engagement is utilized. Basically it is an everyday activity. We get feedback from all of those processes, so the order taker, a complaint through 'voice of the customer' or through verbal communication, then the account manager is notified. The account manager is the key person to know the customer, and the negatives of what that customer is portraying. The account manager when he goes back into the customer, is aware of what the customer has stated to BOC, and he can deal with that with the customer. In terms of the drivers that deliver the products, they all work for BOC so their reputation is important to them, the reputation of how we look, how we are perceived, and how we act in front of the customer. I suppose we don't have anybody third party so it's all internal, all that training, and investment goes into every employee in BOC gases.*

(Mr X, Commercial Manager, BOC Gases).

The next participant outlined his understanding of customer engagement:

*Customer engagement is how you engage the customer. In terms of customer satisfaction, people often forget that it is not just about the transactional customer surveys, it is about periodic ones as well. People forget that transactional surveys are based on a problem initiating a customer services survey, so it is a problem that is driving the survey. Periodical surveying without any issue occurring, allows you to engage the customer to see how their experience is. A second point on customer engagement is you should allow the customer to engage with you any way they chose. What is happening is the engagement models are changing.*

(Mr Sean O' Keeffe, Director of Customer Services, Trend Micro).

The third interviewee highlighted what customer engagement meant to him, and to his organization:

*I think customer engagement is all about understanding the needs, and the problems that our customers face. Its understanding the type of business that they are in, the supply chain that they are in, it varies depending on where they sit in that, and what operations they do. Ultimately we segment our customers, and for each different segment, we understand where they sit, and where their needs are. Some customers may not need the same thing solving. For each of those customers, they want something*
slightly different so customer engagement is all about understanding them, solving their problems, and providing them with the products, and solutions that they need.

(Richard Paine, Product Marketing Manager, Notifier by Honeywell).

The next contributor suggested what customer engagement meant to him, and to his organization:

*My understanding of customer engagement, is the conversation between us, and our consumers. It can be a distributor, or a reseller, but for me it’s much more about the consumer. It’s the people who go into the store, and buy our products. It’s how do we have a conversation with those people, and how do we touch those people. It is how do you tap into that at every touch point?*

(Bobby Kennedy, International Senior Sales Account Manager, Logitech Ireland).

The next participant outlined their understanding of customer engagement, from a consultant perspective:

*My understanding would be quite wide, so, it may not be as specific for what you’re looking for. To me it’s everything from the presales research, to understanding what does your customer segment look like. Identifying what are the trends, and drivers for them, what would be purchasing criteria for them, so a lot of work that would be done, before you actually engage with your customer. That work is really important, so for example, if I’m working with an SME, and they think that they should really be in with a large multinational, there is a lot of research to be done, before you would ever pick up the phone, or, before you would ever go in to meet with somebody. So, customer engagement begins at the research stage, defining that value proposition.*

(Mel Galloway, Enterprise Ireland Business Consultant).

The next contributor outlined that customer engagement is a 360 degree process, which should create the best customer experience possible:

*My understanding of customer engagement is how you engage or interact with your customer in the “easiest” way for them. It involves having a 360 degree view of the engagement, and making it the best customer experience you can for the customer. You must engage on a channel that is best for that particular customer segment, and you must measure the interaction to understand what the customer is feeling. My understanding is that customers who engage their customers are in a better situation to react to changes, and look after their customers, therefore they will see a better customer lifetime value, more sales, and profitability.*

(Anne O’ Leary, CEO, Vodafone Ireland).

The next interviewee suggested that customer engagement was about communication, listening to the customer, and then acting:
Constant communication. It is not shouting at them, it is talking, and listening. Engagement is discourse- it is two way. We are always doing research. After every game in Thomond Park this year, we done research. We took their details including their address. We knew then when they scanned their ticket in, and asked them what did you think of our food, our service, our products etc. We gave them a chance to win a competition, we took the feedback, we listened, and we implemented, and improved throughout the year........................................

We listened, we took it all in, and we talked back to them. That is what customer engagement is all about. It is not all about going, and giving 20% off or 50% off or get a free ticket, it is the small things. You said you did not know about park, and ride, well here is the details. You said you did not know about better ways of renewing your season ticket, so here is a better way of trying it. You got to talk, and listen. Do we do enough of it –No but we do a hell of a lot more than we used to. This is my understanding of customer engagement.

(Enda Lynch, Marketing and Commercial Manager, Munster Rugby).

The next respondent stated that customer engagement was in their opinion understanding the customer’s request, making the sale, and importantly having an on-going conversation, and relationship with the client:

How well we know the customer. How well we know what the customer is trying to achieve? For us it is all about when the client selects us for the sales process. We try to understand what they are trying to achieve, what business benefits they are trying to realise, what is the reason for picking us. Have they got strategic objectives as an organisation that they are trying to achieve? Where do they see us fitting in? Where do they see our products fitting in? We make sure we have an excellent understanding of that so when we are working with this client, we are working towards their objectives, to realise that objective, and make sure they are successful with it. Customer engagement, for us it is all about staying in contact with the client, understanding as their business changes –how we fit in. Understanding what we need to do, and how to react. What it is not is selling a product, and then disconnecting from the client afterwards. It is an on-going conversation with the client, and an on-going relationship with the client. For me that is Client Engagement.

(John Goulding, Chief Executive Officer, Core HR).

The next contributor suggested that customer engagement was about meaningful communication, and interaction with your customer:

My understanding of customer engagement from a brand perspective, is if you don’t have brand loyalists then you don’t have a business. If you don’t talk properly to your customer, and engage them properly in a meaningful way, you don’t have a business, and that’s my strong belief.

(Helen Murphy, Owner, Brainsell, Ex Brand Manager, Waterford Crystal).
The last participant outlined what he considered was a result for customer engagement, and detailed how you would go about achieving customer engagement:

My understanding of customer engagement is a customer who is engaged with the service end of a particular business, and the brand of that business. Something that they would choose as their first preference when it is available. That's what an engaged customer looks like.

My understanding then of customer engagement from a business point of view is the set of activities that a business has, probably led by its Marketing Department, and its Operations Department, to make sure that over the lifetime of a customer, that customer becomes more engaged with the business. The more engaged they are, the more business they put through that business.

(Kenny Jacobs, Chief Marketing Officer, Ryanair).

4:4: The Driving Force behind Customer Engagement in your Organization:

This current research has found that customer engagement is being driven in organisations by a number of different reasons that all affect the performance of the organisation. Reasons for using customer engagement include awareness of competition, fear of losing business, need to understand customers, and obtain insights in particular their choice of channels for complaining, and finally the aim of retaining your customers. Selling has now been surpassed with telling, and engaging.

The first interviewee explained the driving force behind customer engagement in their organization:

I'm with the company a long time now. In terms of when customer engagement first came to light? It has always been there but I think there is more focus now because of, where the world is gone, and the way competition is operating. In the last couple of years in terms of customer engagement, and customer services, we listen to the customer now a lot more in terms of what they want because if you don't, you are going to be left behind. You must be up with the competition. You must know what your competition is doing in terms of customer services-you need to stay ahead. The ability to understand our customers has been the key aspect for us over the last number of years, and I think we put key processes, and procedures in place in order to make that more streamlined. It is important to measure, and to make it easy to complain. I think before it was not easy to complain. If it is not easy to complain over the phone, you might want an e-mail, you might want a portal, you might want a text message. Your company must provide all of these mechanisms, and all elements of technology, to help the customer complain. This allows you to know about the customer's complaint straight away, and you can do something about it.

As you know the internet is a powerful source, and now word of mouth has spread more rapidly throughout the internet, and through local forums. We obviously want to nip negative words of mouth in the bud, do it straight away. If we are not aware that a
customer has a problem, you cannot do anything about it. We could be trading with them thinking everything is correct or we might think it is a small problem but in their eyes it is a huge problem, it is about knowing this. That's fair enough, because everyone's problems are different.

(Mr X, Commercial Manager, BOC Gases).

The second interviewee outlined that the driving force of customer engagement in their organization is an internal Champion:

_The customer's preference should be paramount when they are engaging. This has come to me from a previous boss, both in EMC, and Fire Eye, a guy called Tony Colish. He was quite a strategic thinker, and he got me in to thinking. Basically you should enable customers to choose which engagement model they want, or which channel they want, to come in on. That is how different engagement models, came to light for me._  

(Mr Sean O' Keeffe, Director of Customer Services, Trend Micro).

The next contributor suggests that customer engagement is an integral part of their culture, and that it has been responsible for the organisation achieving growth in the marketplace:

_I have been at Honeywell for four years, and as far as I can tell they have always been engaged with their customers. The culture is driving us to be more engaged with our customers, because it allows us to provide better products and services. I would point to Honeywell's track record. It's been engaged with its customers for almost its entire life cycle, given its staggering growth in the marketplace._  

(Richard Paine, Product Marketing Manager, Notifier by Honeywell).

The next interviewee highlighted what is driving customer engagement in their organization, and how it has led to a major desire to know more about the customer:

_I think the engagement is driven by understanding our customer needs. Firstly it is about going back to consumer research, obtaining all the insights, and all the understanding, showing us what their needs are. Then making sure that when they go through the journey of purchasing a product, that we are top of mind for them. Eventually, when they get to our retail store, and they are handing over their hard earned cash, that it's a Logitech product, that they are taking away._  

(Bobby Kennedy, International Senior Sales Account Manager, Logitech Ireland).

The fifth interviewee outlined how the driving force, may not be internal, but a reality check that you are losing business, and now, you have to respond:

_It would literally be people sitting around a table, saying guys we have just done figures, and we are haemorrhaging clients at the moment. This would have happened quite a lot during the recession. I worked with one company that lived off recurring revenue, and this was their business model. They realised that for every few clients that_
were fighting to get in the door, they were losing twenty or thirty clients. Even though they are small value clients, but when you look at the value of them over a year, it’s actually untenable. That would be one area, where I would have seen it come to light. (Mel Galloway, Enterprise Ireland Business Consultant).

The next contributor stated that customer engagement in their organisation has changed as technology has evolved:

_We have always had customer engagement in our organisation, but the methods of engagement are changing as technology evolves. The internet, and social media has created different methods of engagement, and we have embraced them as they have developed. We have also tried to engage our customers on the methods, and channels that they have preference for._

(Anne O’ Leary, CEO, Vodafone Ireland).

The next willing participant stated that customer engagement in their organisation has always been there, but they have got better at measuring customer’s attitudes, and reacting:

_It is there from Day one. We are a professional organisation, and we need people to come because otherwise we have no money to pay for the player’s salaries. Customer engagement is always about listening to the customer, knowing where they are buying that ticket, why are they not buying the ticket, where are they sitting, are they standing, how do they get there, are they on the road from Cork to Limerick, what can we do. It has always been there but this year, we have got much better at measuring their attitudes after the games rather than just before it._

(Enda Lynch, Marketing and Commercial Manager, Munster Rugby).

The eight contributor explained how they always had a healthy paranoia, and this particularly extends to how the customers measures their performance, hence they are continually engaging the customers to ascertain how they view them:

_I think we always had an appreciation that we need to understand how our clients measure us, and how we need to perform to be successful. I think we have a healthy paranoia about our competition. Even though we win some big contracts, this does not mean that our competition is not going to come in, and win those clients from us, in the very near future. We have a very strong paranoia about that. This forces us to constantly engage the customer, and make sure that we are constantly talking to them so that we know how we are doing versus how they measure us._

(John Goulding, Chief Executive Officer, Core HR).

The next willing interviewee stated that customer engagement has evolved from selling to telling, and engaging:
What’s happened with customer engagement is that you have moved from selling to telling, and engaging. The model in the past was - we have created this new product it’s wonderful, these are the features, and these are the benefits. You were selling these products. Now days we are telling a story, and by telling a story means that the customer has more empathy with the brand. I experienced this particularly when I was with Waterford Crystal. You are looking at the product ranges which were a very traditional range, and a designer range. The key thing was that we had to change our brand messages depending on the range. The traditional range, and the designer range needed different messages because they were different products, targeted at different market groups, and if you used the same message for both groups then you wouldn’t achieve your sales.

(Helen Murphy, Owner, Brainsell, Ex Brand Manager, Waterford Crystal).

The last respondent explained that they embraced customer engagement because they had to listen to their customers, in order to retain them:

_We realised that we needed to listen to customers more or we needed to have an offer that was flexible. We realised that it is easier to have the same people coming back again and again, and this made good economic sense for our business._

(Kenny Jacobs, Chief Marketing Officer, Ryanair).

4:5 Methods of Customer Engagement:

The findings of this research show that the methods of customer engagement vary between each organisation as each have their own criteria to follow to determine how they will engage the customer, so it is therefore not a ‘one fit all’ strategy. It is very noticeable that the majority of the interviewees prefer face to face as their most favoured option but a wide variety of other methods are noted, such as: direct mailing, personalized portal, direct e-mails, digital channels, websites, apps, and e-newsletters. Organizations are now also identifying ways to become part of their customer’s processes, provide advice, and so raise the relationship to a higher level.

The first interviewee outlined their methods of customer engagement, which were varied, and included a number of different channels:

_We have like most companies a number of different communication channels that we use depending on, what we are trying to portray. If customers want to know the most up to date things that we are doing in Ireland, we might use a direct mailing or we would have a number of customers e-mail addresses that they would have given permission to use. We keep them up to date with any marketing information we would have or any e-newsletters. We would also have our internet site that we would keep up to date in terms of new developments, and innovations that are going on. We have our online portal, or personalized customer portal that customers could log into, and obtain_
unique message to those particular customers. We use a number of methods but assess it in terms of value of our customers. In terms of value of customers, we are looking at going from millions, down to thousands, and down to hundreds. You can’t have an account manager for practically everybody but you have to have a structure there in terms of who should fall into an account management level. The ones that don’t will be looked after by telephone account managers or direct sales. The larger ones would have key account managers or account managers depending on what level,

(Mr X, Commercial Manager, BOC Gases).

The next contributor spoke about three different methods of customer engagement, while highlighting his thoughts on the topic:

I touched on this earlier, and I think the key here is customer satisfaction surveys. In Trend we actually survey too much. On each service request or ticket, on each case closure, they are sent a customer survey. This is too much, and I have already spoken to them about it. In terms of engaging the customer, going for visits, and setting up customer advisory boards, this is an interesting thing that is out there. This is where you get some of your biggest revenue customers into a room, have a discussion with that group of customers, plus executives from your own company, and review whether you are doing the right thing, while sharing the outcomes. You can highlight to the customers, that they are valuable to the organization. You allow them to talk to each other about trends, and what they are seeing in their market environment. You can engage with this group of customers to make changes for the better. Other things can be shared like new products, and the marketing function,

(Mr Sean O’ Keeffe, Director of Customer Services, Trend Micro).

The third expert suggested the different layers that his organisation used for customer engagement, but highlighted benefits that can be achieved through having an effective process:

There are many places we engage with the customer, the obvious one is with the Business Manager. He is the front man if you like, out with the customers. Behind the scenes we have other departments. Customer’s service department, who are on the phone taking orders, giving guidance on pricing, availability, and tracking of orders. We’ve got a sales support team, who give free sales support to projects. The marketing team engage with the product, carrying out customer needs, carrying out voice of the customer interviews, around specific items. We also run ‘gold partner events’, where we get the elite distributors together, and we create a network around that, which fosters sharing, and good practices. It also allows us to share what we are doing, and it gives opportunities for feedback, so at every point that we touch our customers, we try to get feedback, and improve on what we do,

(Richard Paine, Product Marketing Manager, Notifier by Honeywell).

The next expert reflected on the methods his organisation used, detailing both the online, offline and B2B Methods:
The answer is every way. We are both online, and offline. Online everything from our own website through social media, through our partner websites, through PR, the full spectrum of online activities that you would expect. Offline again, it's going to be in print, it's going to be speaking at events, within the retail stores, ensuring that we are very, very visible, within our partner retail stores. From a B2B perspective, face to face is hugely important. I have to sit in front of our distribution partners, our retail partners. It's very important for me, to actually go, and sit in front of them, and meet them because the stuff in the retail store probably doesn't happen unless I am doing that. There is the engagement with the consumer, the engagement the retailer has with the consumer about our products but that engagement at retail level, doesn't happen, unless I am doing my job properly.

(Bobby Kennedy, International Senior Sales Account Manager, Logitech Ireland).

The next contributor spoke about different methods of customer engagement, while highlighting their opinion on the most effective method:

In my view the most effective method of dealing with customer engagement is face to face, video, skype of course they are great. Digital is a great means of getting scale, email campaigns, telephone calls but face to face is always the most effective. Obviously if is scalable you are going into other stuff such as newsletters, periodic phone calls, periodic emails, digital campaigns, and then making sure that you are prevalent in terms of advertising, PR, and that kind of thing just so that you don't fall to the back of mind.

(Mel Galloway, Enterprise Ireland Business Consultant).

The next interviewee highlighted the channels that they utilise for both existing, and new customers:

We use all the channels that are available. We try to engage the customer on the channel that they prefer, these channels vary depending on the demographics, and the market segment. For existing customers we use our Facebook page, twitter, snap chat, our website, and my Vodafone account. We also use traditional methods like telephone calls for people who have preference to this method, in particular older people who would not be using the newer technology. To attract new customers we use methods such as Advertising -Radio and TV, outside advertising and a lot of sponsorship. In terms of being the most effective, this is dependent on which method the customer has preference for.

(Anne O'Leary, CEO, Vodafone Ireland).

The next willing participant highlighted their experience with the different methods but highlighted digital communication, and in particular ‘e-mail’, as the most effective:

E-mail, yes e-mail. You can shout off the rooftops from radio, and you might have 18-20% reach, with e-mail you are guaranteed a high number or an open e-mail for the supporters group where you are guaranteed an open rate of about 80%- 85%. Most companies would jump to have an open rate of 15%. We have over 20% on our non-supporters. We are the second most followed twitter account in the world in Club Rugby
behind the boys from Leinster. We used to be the number one but they have slipped ahead of us now in the last year. We have the most followed supporters Facebook page in world rugby, so there is discourse there. Outbound information from us creates discourse, and creates conversation because we don’t run a forum. We do not run a Facebook page from Munster Rugby itself, because we cannot monitor it. If you cannot monitor it then it is a problem. With Twitter, you can inform them with really nice, good content. Customer engagement by the way is not customer services, I am not talking about customer services here which is one fraction of customer engagement. What are the most effective channels of customer engagement? Digital, because it allows you to have rich engaging content, time, and time again, and it costs you very little! It costs you very little to do a good e-mail, outbound quoting content. An e-mail from Anthony Foley before the semi-final, the media were quoting it because it was from Anthony, and it was passionate, it had real content,

(Enda Lynch, Marketing and Commercial Manager, Munster Rugby).

The eight willing respondent highlighted the methods of engagement that their organisation utilize, and stressed that structured engagement results in increased sales:

Yes. It is. Most of it is face to face. Bigger clients would get more time face to face than the smaller clients but we try to get face to face with all clients. We do have an inside customer success team, and that basically is there for customers who do not get face to face, at least we are calling them, and getting their insights. We check in with them, and make sure they are aware of what we are doing. Typically there is revenue that falls out of that for us, where the more conversations you have with a client, the more sales opportunities that falls out of it. Clients are not aware of the fantastic things you are doing unless you tell them. It might be that they are not aware of the new version of software maybe 3 or 4 years old, and the things it can do or the features it has, as they are on an old version. When they are made aware typically they are delighted that we can do it, and it is a revenue opportunity as well.

(John Goulding, Chief Executive Officer, Core HR).

The next interviewee highlighted the need to select the correct method for the brand, to make sure that you reach your target market:

It’s all about what do you want to become famous for. Once you become famous for it, it’s all then about what is the most effective way to talk to your core target market. For me as a strategic marketer I want to be famous for being strategic, and marketing so I don’t go down the Facebook route. I don’t go a direct mail route but I would absolutely use word of mouth. I would then write articles for key journals for example I wrote an article for Business Plus, and Aer Lingus rang me up, and asked me could they quote me. Stuff like that really works, so it’s all about understanding who the key influences are within the core target market that you are engaging with. They become components of your brand, and your message, and your product.

(Helen Murphy, Owner, Brainsell, Ex Brand Manager, Waterford Crystal).
The last respondent identified what his organisation considered the most effective methods but pointed out that the most effective method was the actual customer experience i.e: the actual flying experience:

*I would find the most effective method to be the actual flying experience, the second most effective on the marketing channels would probably be our own Website followed by our own App, followed by Twitter.*

(Kenny Jacobs, Chief Marketing Officer, Ryanair).

### 4:6 Success and Limitations of Customer Engagement in your Organization:

The findings of this research show that the interviewees believe that many advantages exist including an awareness of how the client views the relationship, the client being happy with the choice of channel, the effectiveness of digital, and the tailoring of products to customers depending on their individual preference. The limitations include large customers influencing overall opinion, sheer size of task due to number of customers requiring engagement, lack of time, and resources.

The first interviewee outlined their methods of customer engagement:

*Definitely getting closer to the customer, understanding them better, and tailoring our products, and our interaction with them, to meet their needs.*

(Mr X, Commercial Manager, BOC Gases).

The second participant explained his organisation's advantages and limitations to customer engagement:

*You get closer to the customer. The whole industry is moving towards this “end to end” type model where an engineer will handle multiple type issues, he will deal with administration type stuff, he will deal with real scary technical stuff, and he will deal with a customer down situation. The advantage is that if that engineer is dealing with the customer more, he will have an understanding of their environment, and the customer themselves. The customer will be happier with it, as they do not have to go to all these different type of layers, to get help or support.*

*It is all about recognising what the customer’s preference is as opposed to what your mind set is, and what you believe the right engagement model is. They might have a preference for chat or web or e-mail rather than on the phone.*

(Mr Sean O'Keeffe, Director of Customer Services, Trend Micro).

The next contributor agreed with the second participant, that an advantage was that you got closer to the customer but also outlined limitations to customer engagement:
I think the advantages are, that you get very, very close to your customers, and that gives you the ability to get some really good insight, and to be able to provide market leading products. The disadvantage of getting too close to customers is that it becomes very difficult to see the overall picture from individual’s points of view. Certain customers can carry more weight within the organisation, because they have been a customer for a long time,

(Richard Paine, Product Marketing Manager, Notifier by Honeywell).

The next interviewee explained his advantages and limitations to customer engagement:

That's a tough question. I think there are lots. One that springs to mind, is the stuff within a retail store. It is very difficult to find the bandwidth to be able to visit all the retail stores that our products are in across Europe, and globally. Secondly it is difficult to engage with each of the sales people that exist within those stores. You have try to train them up, indoctrinate them on Logitech way, on our products, our brand value, and what we stand for. Actually touching retail sales staff is very difficult, that’s a huge challenge for us,

(Bobby Kennedy, International Senior Sales Account Manager, Logitech Ireland).

The fifth participant explained their advantages, and limitations to customer engagement:

The advantages to customer engagement is it will give you growth, scalability, good market reputation, organic growth, referral value, market intelligence. I worked with a chief executive officer recently who did a really good management course. He was told that senior executives should be out of the office at least sixty percent of the time, because, that is where the information is. Limitations, I would say time,

(Mel Galloway, Enterprise Ireland Business Consultant).

The next contributor outlined the advantages their organisation are obtaining but also identified a major limitation, which is relevant if a company is not engaging their customers:

We have seen a lot of advantages as engagement has allowed us to communicate directly with our customers, obtain feedback, tailor new products, and assist us in trying to make the customer experience the best it can be, but also the easiest. This is important in retention of our customers especially with 2.4 million, and in attracting new customers. In terms of limitations, if you are not engaging your customers, and listening to them it will have a very negative effect on your business,

(Anne O' Leary, CEO, Vodafone Ireland).

The next willing participant delivers cost and access to rich content as limitations, and highlights the importance of external professional support:

We have been very lucky with our Commercial Board chaired by Niall Fitzgerald the ex-chair of Unilever. We have being lucky to be exposed to the best learning, and the best thinking that these organizations give us pro bono. This group is heavy weight. We have been very lucky to get input from the agencies, and the organisations that they are
working with. We continue to drive, and drive. People have different views on what
customer engagement is, whether it is on-going discourse across all channels, and it is
not just about rugby. About 75% of people when they go to a match are not fully
engaged in the match, even some of the Munster fans. They are on the phone, they are
communicating with their friends, and it is a social occasion, so 25% are there for hard
core rugby. You ask 100 people to describe a try in a game, 95% of them would have
described the try from the replay on the screen, to form their opinion. General rule of
sports research is that 75% of people are only there for the occasion.

Limitations are cost, it should not be but sometimes it is. Secondly for us is access to
the richest content which is the players. They have to learn to how to play rugby so we
cannot do much with them. I really wish we could do more with them, because that is
what people want,

(Enda Lynch, Marketing and Commercial Manager, Munster Rugby).

The eight respondent explained the advantages and limitations that were applicable to their
organisation:

I think the advantage is that you have to know the “temperature” of the client. I think
if you do not know the temperature of the client or how the client sees or perceives what
you are doing for them then I think it is too easy to convince yourselves you are doing
a good job. The client might have a completely different impression so I think that is
the value it brings. I think it is essential. I do not think you can survive without it, as
there is too much competition out there. Somebody is always going to be looking to do
it better, offer more value etc, so you have to be paranoid about it, you have to be
engaging with the client.

Limitations: One of the things that we struggle with, and is always a question for us is
should the people that we have engaging with clients, be the same people that are
closing on a revenue opportunity, if a revenue opportunity arises. Presently if a sales
opportunity comes up, they will look to close it out. This means that they have a sales
hat on as well, and sometimes that effects them so sometimes it is the right thing to do,
and sometimes it is not,

(John Goulding, Chief Executive Officer, Core HR).

The next contributor outlined the limitations that she endures but also explained that innovation
helps create advantages:

From my own marketing consultancy I am one person. This means the limitations are
that I have to win the work, do the work, bill the work, and get paid for the work Coupled
with this I have to at the same time win more work, so that I have enough coming
through my sales pipeline at all times. That’s a major limitation for my customer
engagement point of view. I work with associates, and other people, and they will
deliver parts of the project that I need delivering but sometimes it might not work best.
Sometimes people just want the secret sauce which is me, and they may not necessarily
want anyone else doing their work. That’s the problem with being a single sole trader
who is good at what they do.
From a product point of view it's completely different. One of the key things that I would have done in Waterford Crystal is the ‘launch house’. We would have brought in some of the key buyers from Saks Off 5th Ave, Macy’s, and so on. I would have also targeted key editors of journals such as the editor of Brides magazine. I took her on a personal journey around the factory in Waterford, she cut her own crystal bowl, and took that home. Suddenly she becomes your brand advocate. I created words like “release the sparkle of the crystal” when you do the cut, and she is now talking in those terms, when she talks about Waterford Crystal.

(Helen Murphy, Owner, Brainsell, Ex Brand Manager, Waterford Crystal).

The final respondent outlined his organisations advantages and limitations, while identifying how the scale of his organisation impacts on the limitations:

The big massive advantage in the last few years is on the digital, and the in-flight experience.

The limitations, we are a big organisation, we have a 100 million customers this year. We are flying to a 190 different airports. Today for example over the summer period we will have about 2,500 flights everyday operating around Europe. That is a lot of people, a lot of airports, things go wrong from time to time. We have to be able to deal with those things that go wrong from time to time, when you are an operation that is this big.

(Kenny Jacobs, Chief Marketing Officer, Ryanair).

4:7 Effect of Customer Engagement on Corporate Strategy:

The findings of this research identify that customer engagement has had a significant effect on the corporate strategy of organizations, and allowed them to make informed decisions in terms of customer services. An argument exists that many highlight in their corporate strategy about using customer engagement but very few master it, because of the difficulty involved. Those organisations that do master it, differentiate themselves from their competitors, use modern techniques to gauge reaction, and become more dynamic.

The first interviewee indicated the effect of customer engagement on their organizations corporate strategy, explaining that their goal was to make the customer process the easiest possible:

I suppose the strategy would be, to make it as easy as possible for the customer to complain, to listen to the customer, to take on board the surveys that are done by the external consultants, and act upon those. A lot of effort is put into those surveys, and they are fairly open, and honest. This allows you to break it down into the relevant sectors so you can see where you are falling down or whether you are increasing, in terms of customer service within a particular sector of the business. Surprisingly, you could be doing very well in an area, so why not incorporate that into another area of
the business. Those are things that we are learning as each survey is done. Customer loyalty in terms of fairness, we would have certain structures in place to award customer loyalty. We have some contracts in place where we make sure to stock product that is critical to our customers business. We would make sure to always have that product so that it would not stop us supplying that customer, if we have a signed contract with them. In terms of our liquid customers, this stock would be coming from the UK. We would therefore make sure that we have enough stock in Ireland to be able to supply them. Our customer service, the service we give our customers, customer loyalty, our reputation, would be key to the BOC Strategy. BOC would have been taken over by Linde a number of years ago but we still have the BOC brand, because of that reputation that we have. It's a strong brand within Ireland, and anyone within the industry, if you mention BOC, would say they have a good reputation within the country.

(Mr X, Commercial Manager, BOC Gases).

The next participant identified that the customer engagement strategy was the centre focal point of the corporate strategy, as they were entering a new market space:

The corporate strategy therefore does impact on the customer services strategy because the company is focusing more on enterprise space, and needs to build a customer service strategy for that space. We are going through a transformation right now in Trend that does just that.

(Mr Sean O'Keefe, Director of Customer Services, Trend Micro).

The next candidate highlighted the effect of customer engagement on their organizations corporate strategy, and detailed that it was the starting point of the process:

Our corporate strategies are all aimed at the customer, looking after the customer, understanding the customer, delivering on expectations to the customer. If we can do that, then everything else in corporate life is easy because corporate life is all about shareholder value, and delivering a return on shareholders' investment. We can only do that if we are selling our products, and looking after the customers in the first place. Therefore all of our corporate strategies are around making us fast, and more efficient, delivering better products, quicker and, delighting customers.

(Richard Paine, Product Marketing Manager, Notifier by Honeywell).

The fourth expert highlighted the effect of customer engagement on their organizations corporate strategy:

It is perfecting how we appear in a retail store, this is much more fundamental to our business now, than perhaps it was. Recognising that the consumer has much more power at their fingertips through accessibility to online has driven this strategy of making sure that our retail execution in store is at a world class level. It must be better than our competition. You could also argue that it has taken us, and made us focus, much more on the bigger partners that we work with, rather than every small computer electronics retailer in every small town.
The next participant identified the effect of customer engagement on corporate strategy from a consultancy perspective:

*In general your corporate strategy should be informed. Ultimately you can have a group of people sitting around a table, deciding the way in which their company is going to go, but if they are not getting external input, it's a very insular view. I know they may each have a view of the market from their own experience, and observations, but that's a perspective, there is going to be a bias, so you really need to get out there, and ask the questions.*

(Mel Galloway, Enterprise Ireland Business Consultant).

The next contributor highlighted the importance of knowing exactly what the customer wanted, and how customer engagement allows you to obtain this information. This contributor also identified that by connecting customer services to an employee’s bonus it will focus the employee:

*Customer services, and customer engagement have been at the centre of our corporate strategy. If you look at a company like Apple they are product focused and their products differentiate them, and create a “want” or “desire” from their customers. In Vodafone we have a lot of competitors from other mobile providers, from Skype, from Google, from Microsoft, they are all trying to occupy our market space. We therefore try to differentiate ourselves from our competitors by being customer-centric, and giving the customer what they want. If a customer uses a lot of data, then we will need to give them a bundle which meets their needs. If they make a lot of oversees calls or need excellent roaming rates because they travel a lot, then we need to identify this. We need to get our customers services team to contact them, and make them aware of these bundles. No point forcing a bundle with extra data on a person who has no need for this. It is to identify this need, through understanding the customer, through analytics, and create an individual offering for them. Everyone in our organisation from the chief executive officer down, is brought into this strategy. If you receive a bonus of say €10,000, then 40% of this is judged on customer services i.e. how we retain our customers, how they perceive us. This focuses everyone, but also means that the senior management team, and me included, must also perform. No point someone not receiving their bonus because I did not give €150,000 for something required, when I spend over €200 million in capital, and staff becoming de-motivated. I have to respond, that is why all our C-Level executives get close to our customers, whether it is listening in on our customer services phone calls, working in the retail shop for a day as I do, or talking to customers face to face. We have to be close to the front line. So yes customer services, and customer engagement has an impact on our corporate strategy.*

(Anne O’ Leary, CEO, Vodafone Ireland).

The next willing contributor argued that customer engagement has always been there, but conceded that technology has changed it. His believe is that the fundamentals remains the same,
in regards to understanding your customer but presents a working example to articulate his opinion:

_It is funny because it is a very leading question. There is an assumption that customer engagement is a newish thought process or a newish strategy within most companies. Campbell’s soup were a soup manufacturer with over a 50% share in the 80’s They were not shifting their numbers up, so they proceeded to do in-home research in the market-place. What they discovered was that people were buying Campbell’s soup, and putting it in the cupboard, for an emergency. “If we are stuck we will use it because the soup lasts for ages”, was the underline message. Campbell’s put together a campaign to say that Campbell’s soup is there for you every day. Then they started to build it into programs. Methods included inserts for magazines so practical uses for Campbell’s soup such as sauces to go with your chicken meal etc and, their growth exploded. They then went to 70% market share for the year because they went, and engaged with the customer. Why are you not buying our products- I am. Why are you not using it more? I am but it is there for the emergency. This is before digital. The reality is they engaged with the customer, and understood. So engagement is research, so it is discourse. Customer research, and customer engagement have been going on forever._

So to go back to your question, it has always been there, and a good organisation has always listened to its customers. It has advanced, and now you must know what the customer wants. The greatest of research is when you take away the insight of what the customer wants, and you create something that they never thought of in their life. These are wonderful products that the market is going to sell back to them. One of the greatest examples of all time is the iPad. People did not even know what they needed it for, you have one in front of you. Why? Because they took an insight. The insight was, ‘I want to be portable with my stuff’. But I have all the stuff! No, you do not- we are going to make it bigger, better, and different and that is how Apple sold the iPad. I think they created a niche that did not exist, they engaged, and listened to the customer..............

_There has always been customer engagement, and there will always be customer engagement from a marketing perspective. From a customer perspective, from an insight perspective, from a product development perspective, there has been, and there will always be customer engagement. You do not just make products out of nothing. There has been self-thought inventors who have produced from nothing but in general most products come from research, and understanding your people._

(Enda Lynch, Marketing and Commercial Manager, Munster Rugby).

The eight participant spoke convincingly about how customer engagement had influenced their organisations customer strategy, and introduced the researcher to the concept of Net Promoter Score:

_I think our customer strategy is hugely influenced by customer engagement. We introduced a thing called “Net Promoters Score”. Net promoters score is really, really powerful. It is basically a form of survey but normally I would be sceptical on surveys. I feel clients don’t like them, you don’t get a high participation rate, and a lot of the_
time you do not get good information. With the net promoters score you basically ask your clients, typically 3 or 4 questions. What you are really interested in is how they answer one question. The question you ask them is, "how willing they would you be in recommending Core HR in this instance, to a friend or colleague?". If they rate you as a 9 or 10, then they are "promoters". If they rate you as a 7 or 8, then they are "passive". If they rate you 1-6, they are a "defector's". Defectors are really damaging for your business. It means that they are people who would speak negatively about your business. 7 or 8 are the passives. They will not speak negatively about you or win your business. If you have 9 or 10’s, these are people that will evangelise you. They will generate new business for you because when they talk about you, they are talking massively positively about you, and are recommending you. They would recommend you in a heartbeat etc. What we have introduced over the last 9 months is
go out periodically, typically once a quarter, and we ask the client’s 4 questions. One of those questions is how willing would you be to recommend us? How you calculate your net promoter score is-
How many clients are promoters minus how many clients are defectors?
This gives you your net promoter score. We found that by measuring it, we are getting fantastic information about what the clients feel, and it is a benchmark for us, as we want all our clients to be promoters. We are not there yet but we know who we need to work on, based on feedback coming back. We are finding it very simple, and very effective.

(John Goulding, Chief Executive Officer, Core HR).

The next respondent gave a working example of customer engagement impacting on corporate strategy:

'It's a very interesting question because a lot of my work would be working with the same level people, and understanding what they are going to do. When we look at the Crafts Council of Ireland. For a time they were really trying to understand what it is they were trying to do, and how relevant it would be to their craft makers. They had a responsibility also to the people that purchase craft, they really took that seriously, and they did a huge piece of work about that. Ultimately it came down to changing their strategy, and then developing their business objectives from that strategy. This then made them far more successful in what they are doing so they become far more relevant to their crafters, and far more relevant to the people who purchase craft.

(Helen Murphy, Owner, Brainsell, Ex Brand Manager, Waterford Crystal).

The final participant explained that many companies talk about engaging more with their customers but in reality few are successful. The only way to prove success is by tangible results, and his company can identify their results with physical measures:

I think that every corporate strategy that I read says, we need to do more to engage with customers. Everyone is saying those words but fewer businesses are achieving the results. The results for us is more people on Ryanair flights so we have two measures to assess this. The two hard measures are (1) is there greater forward demand for flying with Ryanair that is called our forward demand. I would look at September, October, and December 2015 versus last year, and see how many seats do we have booked
already. Second measure is what we call our load factor. This year we have a 6% higher load factor so that means there is 12 additional passengers on every Ryanair flight, which is phenomenal. We then get into the softer measures of Net Promoter Score, and number of retained customers etc, etc. These are the measures we use, we are happy with the success so far, every business says customer engagement is important but delivering it, and having more engaged customers is a harder thing to do.

(Kenny Jacobs, Chief Marketing Officer, Ryanair).

4:8 Controlling Negative ‘Word of Mouth’:

The findings of this research revealed that negative ‘word of mouth’ is a real threat to companies because of the evolution of the internet, and social media. If left unattended, this negative feedback could cause the company reputation damage so companies must be proactive in their detection, and their approach.

The first interviewee identified their approach to negative word of mouth, explaining how the internet had changed the impact an unhappy customer could have on an organisation:

A number of years ago if you had something bad to say about a company you would tell 10 or 11 people, some might even only tell 1 or 2. Nowadays unfortunately with the internet, and word of mouth, you could tell thousands of people, you could tell hundreds of people, the whole world. So we need to act on this quickly. What we do to prevent this is we give the customers the option to provide negative feedback directly to us straight away. Maybe it is the driver who receives the complaint, sometimes customers feel more comfortable explain to the driver. The driver will give him the form to complain in an easy way to BOC, and it will then go through a structured route so that we can hopefully do something about it. Whether it is the customer services centre that were on to the account managers, or whether it is the account manager that has the complaint, they can go through this process. Also in terms of a high level, customers can go to the BOC internet site. There we have options for the customers to feedback information. This is about trying to pre-empt or give the customers, a way to feedback the information to us before the negative word of mouth, actually gets out there. If it gets out there, and even if the value of the account is not in the remit of an account manager we will get a local account manager to call into that customer. The plan will be to try, and understand where the customer is coming from. We try to be logical about it.

(Mr X, Commercial Manager, BOC Gases).

The next participant identifies the merit of negative comments, and how the resultant process change can result in a better customer experience:

In terms of dealing with unhappy customers, one of the things I have learned over the last number of years is that companies get into a rut. They look at the customer satisfaction surveys as something that just happens, so your “C-Sat” is just going up this month or going down. The message might be negative, so you have a negative
survey from a customer, and that is “gold dust”. You need to take it, and then drill into that negative response in as much detail as possible so that you can correct the process which is broken. You do have to take each bit of this information, each line item, and go back to the root cause of it so it does not re-occur. If you do that you will change customer satisfaction, and you will change the customer experience.

(Mr Sean O’Keeffe, Director of Customer Services, Trend Micro).

The next interviewee reflects on their model but points out that because they are B2B with specific partners, the risk of negative WOM on social media is lessened:

The business that I work in has sixty five partners, and a limited number of engineers, in the marketplace. Our customers are not using social media, so I think we are relatively protected. I think we deal with negative word of mouth in a slightly different way. Our unhappy customers tend not to voice things through social media as they talk to us directly. This is because of how deeply we are involved with them, so hopefully in that way we can satisfy them.

(Richard Paine, Product Marketing Manager, Notifier by Honeywell).

The next contributor outlines the importance of acceptance of a problem, and the responsibility that the company has to the customer:

For the last twenty years, we have had a philosophy of really strong quality in our products, and then that leads into customer service. We are very, very focused on the customer, and we are very focused on ensuring that the customer has a good experience with our products. I think that if people have problems, then you have to accept this, and you must deal with them as effectively as you can. We have online customer support, and we engage with consumers through social media. Absolutely, social media is monitored very closely typically by our PR group, who would own social media. Any negative responses would be passed back into our customer care organisation, and it would be up to customer care to follow up on it, so there is absolutely a loop to it.

(Bobby Kennedy, International Senior Sales Account Manager, Logitech Ireland).

The next participant concurs with (Sean O’Keeffe, Trend Micro) identifying the merit of negative comments, and how the resultant process change can result in a more loyal customer:

That’s a difficult one, because everyone has a different way of approaching it. My own view is deal with it instantly, don’t pretend it’s not happening. The power is with the customer, a disgruntled customer can cause mayhem, on social media for you. Yes you are giving them the outlet, and they control it. There are figures out there, but if you can take an unhappy customer, and resolve their problem, you actually have a much more loyal customer afterwards. You know yourself, if you went to a hotel, and the meal was bad, and they gave you a voucher for a day in the spa, you are going to leave on a positive, rather than a negative. So I would say quickly, and as close to the source as possible.

(Mel Galloway, Enterprise Ireland Business Consultant).
The next contributor outlined their organisation’s strategy which involves the use of a dedicated team, and expensive software:

There is no doubt but that the developments in technology, and in particular the internet, and social media has changed how companies deal with negative word of mouth, and unhappy customers. We as a company are active on all channels, and are constantly monitoring what people are saying whether it is, on our Facebook Page, our Twitter Account, our Vodafone Website, customers “My Vodafone” Account, or snap chat. We have expensive software, and a team monitoring these channels. I also have a twitter account, and I follow-up on anything I receive. We are proactive, and will do our best to correct mistakes or act when required. We also use the Net Promoter Score to gauge the feelings or view-point of the customer, and these surveys are analysed to see what customer sentiment is there.

(Anne O’ Leary, CEO, Vodafone Ireland).

The next participant outlined their organisation’s strategy which was to be selective to what they responded to, but they always remained positive in regards to the Brand:

It is harder for us than most companies because we could get it six weeks in a row, for six different reasons. You can’t respond to every negative piece of criticism but people are entitled to it. If we are playing muck, then we are playing muck. But what they are entitled to is to say it. Sometimes you make a generalised response i.e: yes could not agree with you more, the team had a hard month, but on wards we go, and then sometimes you say nothing. Engagement should be two way but if it is incredibly negative sometimes you have to select your moments, and address it. You cannot respond all the time or otherwise you will turn into an argumentative auld biddy who is moaning all the time, and you do not know what you want. Yes you have to defend your guys, your team manager is not going to allow you to speak negatively, and you have to remain positively about the brand all the time.

(Enda Lynch, Marketing and Commercial Manager, Munster Rugby).

The eight respondent was in agreement with the majority of the other interviews who believe you must acknowledge that negative WOM exists but did detail how they innovatively create forums, where they can enter their own information, and respond to negative comments:

The first thing is you have to do is acknowledge that it exists. There is a new landscape there where anything you do well or not do well is amplified or advertised to the masses. You now have social media where existing clients or new clients will interact with each other, whether you want them to or not. This is something that you could control in the past but you cannot control it now. You just have to acknowledge it, and essentially you have to make sure that you put clients in a position where they are willing to say good things. Basically they are promoting the good things about your company on these social media channels........................

I think two things,(1) you got to acknowledge that it exists, and be aware of it (2) you got he doing the right things so that clients are saying the right things at these forums. The other thing we do in terms of acknowledging that it exists is we would have set-up
a client forum as well. Rather than ignore it we use our customer relationship management system, and the customer services software which is "salesforce.com", to combat the problem. Within salesforce it has a customer services ticketing offering operating on the Cloud. Through this we have set-up a "Community" essentially, where clients, and potential clients can comment. We can also post up there so it gives us the ability to put some very positive stuff up there, which lets clients know what we are doing. The clients feel that they can comment, and it is their forum as well, which is good.

(John Goulding, Chief Executive Officer, Core HR).

The next contributor explains the difference in perception which exists between Europe, and the USA in terms of failure, and provides a working example of a company who handled a negative situation with a positive outcome:

I was at a conference last week, and the speaker after me was talking about how some companies were getting to grips with the whole issue of social media. A hotelier decided to get involved with social media, and a customer complained about the service they had received, and in particular the state of the room. He said "well if you didn’t like it then don’t come back again". This was all on social media so he didn’t exactly manage that very well. There is a huge challenge with that because first of all there are social media trolls who will try to damage your brand irrespective. You have to recognise that from true feedback, and if it is true feedback, then you need to put your hands up, and say that you didn’t do it quite right this time. You ask for a chance to do it again, and accept that you are wrong. I think that a lot of companies find that difficult to do because everyone strives for excellence but we are not perfect as human beings. As Europeans we believe that failure is a really bad thing to happen. Whereas when you look at technology companies in the United States of America if you haven’t failed about four times beforehand, they don’t think that you have any war wounds. You learn from your mistakes more than you learn from your successes, so we as individuals have to be more open to the feedback from social media. Yes it will kill companies if you don’t manage it properly. A friend of mine has a bus company based out of Wexford. They made some really major mistakes. They were shipping people from Wexford to Dublin to the airport, they missed flights, and they went on social media to say that they were wrong. They paid for the people for their onward flights to wherever they were going. ‘We have done wrong please give us a chance’, was their message. Their business has increased by fifty percent as a result of this. It’s powerful because you admit that you are human, and you make mistakes, then people will understand.

(Helen Murphy, Owner, Brainsell, Ex Brand Manager, Waterford Crystal).

The final respondent explained that negative WOM is a reality, and you must take it on the chin, do not be afraid, learn from it, and improve. The truth is what customers say about you, is much more important than what you say about yourself through advertising, so listen to your customers:

I think this has been happening for years, and I think our view is, we take it on the chin. We try to address it in a transparent way. If it is something that we need to fix, then we try to learn from it so that it does not impact on us again. We are not afraid of it, and
we would now have a much better balance of what our customers are saying. I flew Ryanair I love the changes, I love the business product, I love the family product etc, etc. It is out there, you can't shut it down. Some businesses try to run away from it on Facebook, and they are idiots. If they try to run away from it on Twitter then they are bigger idiots. It is out there, it is modern, it is transparent, and it is all about trust. What customers are saying about you is more important than what you say about yourself through advertising. My advice to any business would be don't ignore it, listen to it, and don't get too upset about it but improve what you do based on that feedback.

(Kenny Jacobs, Chief Marketing Officer, Ryanair).

4:9 Using Modern Analytics to Measure?

The current research has found that modern analytics are used extensively to measure performance, assess whether Key Performance Indicators (K.P.I's) were achieved, and to facilitate in making business decisions. The analytical tools are now being given to staff to enable them to efficiently perform their jobs. The analytical software can now instantly run reports, provide immediate customer account information at the touch of a button, and create an environment where future sales are produced. Modern uses include enabling an organisation to understand how the customer views them, help retention, and value customers.

The first interviewee outlined their approach to modern analytics, and measurement, and explained that the key is their SAP system:

*We use Customer Profitability Analysis, and a system called ‘SAP’, which pretty much does everything that we do in terms of transactions within BOC. We take the orders through the ‘SAP’ system, we do our invoicing through the ‘SAP’ system, and we do our account management through the ‘SAP’ system. With this system we can drill down, and create different reports for different segments of our customers. This is very important, and very powerful. From this we can have our own customer profitability analysis, and we can value the customers through that particular aspect. Obviously profitability is very important to every company. It is very important that we can relay that information to the account managers that are going out into the market place, and for the customers to understand as well. Other analytical tools that we would have are tools to help the account managers, to account manage in a more intelligent way. They would have a data base of all their customers in one place which is segmented out to a ‘time, and territory’ management system. Each manager has control over this themselves, and they utilize it when they are calling out to the customers. We have a customer relationship management system (CRM), and again it is mainly for the sales guys, it is “Salesforce.com”. Salesforce.com is a very powerful tool.*

*After running these analytical tools, if you are not making any money on a customer, you are going to have to make a decision, but make it in such a way that will not be cold heartily done. You will need to explain to the customer, that your costs have increased through unforeseen circumstances, and especially with ‘special’ gases that have to be bought on the world market. We would therefore have to make sure that our*
costs are in line with price increases that would have gone through to the customers. Yes, you would have to make analytical decisions but by keeping control of that on an ongoing basis, it never really comes up unknowingly to the account manager as they are aware of their accounts. The account manager must know their customers because whether it is the industrial gases or medical or other areas of the business, by knowing your customer, and having that relationship with your customer, you are telling them well in advance before things are going to happen. They appreciate that, and then they can prepare. They also have budgets, they need to prepare for the following year. That relationship is very important.

(Mr X, Commercial Manager, BOC Gases).

The second interviewee portrayed their approach to modern analytics, and how these measurements were actually helping with customer retention:

They are starting to do analytics on the customer services function, and in particular “Customer Retention”. There is now a big focus around customer retention in Trend Micro. This focus is even bigger than C-Sat, because the companies understanding is that if you lose a customer, then that is more expensive than trying to win a new customer. This is a key focus so it is a key measurement. You therefore need business analytics to measure customer retention, and evaluate what is happening with customer retention rates. If they are going down, it is like C-Sat, you need to understand what is causing us to lose customers.

(Mr Sean O’Keeffe, Director of Customer Services, Trend Micro).

The next willing interviewee portrayed their approach to modern analytics, and how they used it, to drill down into the profitability of different lines. They also use this analytics for planning:

We do an awful lot of analysis on our data. My personal view is that analysing the data is like keeping score, you want to know that you have done a good job or not. The only time that you know you have done a good job, is when sales are up, and you know how you are doing against the competition. We don’t tend to look at our customers in that kind of analytical way. We tend to look at our own business, and look at how profitable our lines are. We focus on the value that is been derived from them, rather than looking at the customers, and looking at the margins that we are developing through that side of the business. We use the statistical tool in the enterprise resource planning (ERP) system which looks at the historical demand, works out what it thinks the demand for that product will be moving forward. We have regular reviews to look at any spikes that may occur, and any issues that may arise the software doesn’t understand.

(Richard Paine, Product Marketing Manager, Notifier by Honeywell).

The next contributor confirms that his organisation is now embracing modern analytics, and how they are now measuring things:

We are starting to measure more, and more things in our business, more than we would have done, maybe four years ago. Every time there are different measures. I mean, we look at how we spend marketing money, it’s not out of one broad pot, and it’s broken down into the different categories. If I am spending marketing money on mice, and
keyboards, marketing money on keyboards or marketing money on tablet accessories
or on some of our music products, it's all itemised, and segmented so we are always
looking for that extra level of detail.
(Bobby Kennedy, International Senior Sales Account Manager, Logitech Ireland).

The fifth interviewee outlined the lack of analytics they are witnessing, and pointed out, that
this is a wasted opportunity, to gather some valuable information:

I would say in general companies that I work with, are not doing this effectively. A few
are, but the majority are not. As an example I would have worked with an engineering
firm, who had a huge success, with a great global client. I asked them how much it cost
you to produce the product, and go through the R & D. The financial guy said "that he
did not know", so that would be a classic example. I work with small to medium
enterprises (SME's) mainly, where they are just delighted to get the sale,
(Mel Galloway, Enterprise Ireland Business Consultant).

The next participant stated that analytics allowed their organisation to remain dynamic, and
able to respond quickly to changes in the marketplace:

Yes we spend a lot on analytics. We have a lot of expensive software, and have a
complete data analytics department. We are using all the modern software, and are
looking at the data, so we can tell if customers spend is up/down or is changing. We
can tell immediately if customers are leaving. This allows us to ring them up, and see
why. We then try offering them a different bundle to stop this, and this is the important
part. Despite our size we try to remain dynamic, and able to respond. We also look at
other criteria like customer profiles, and overall try to measure all elements of the
business so if there is change, we see it and have time to react,
(Ane O' Leary, CEO, Vodafone Ireland).

The next willing interviewee indicated that his organisation is employing a Customer
Relationship Management System (CRM) this summer, to help segment their customers, and
properly store customer information so it can be utilized:

We have a shed load of data about our customers, but we have not always used it in the
right way. We have tried, we have failed, and we have tried again. We have not cracked
it. We have figured out how we want to do it, how we want to crack it this summer, and
how we want to segment our customers. We now want to collect even more data...why?
Now I want to segment my customers even more, and know why they like going to
games, and why do they not like going on Friday nights. Then I will focus on the digital
message because digital allows you to put out that personalised rich communication.
We want to use our data to segment our customers, to be able to give a message that is
unique to you, and relevant to you, and not just a general blast, all the time. We are
taking on board a digital customer relationship management (CRM) system this
summer that allows us to track, and monitor every interaction that the customer has
with us. This will also allow us to see their e-mail address, and any transactions they
make through Lifestyle.

(Enda Lynch, Marketing and Commercial Manager, Munster Rugby).
The next contributor explains that their organisation uses Salesforce.com to drill down, and provide the required analytics:

*We use the Net Promoter Score (NPS) for Referrals. We would use “Sales Force” which has massive analytics in there in terms of what value different clients are bringing to us, in terms of revenue, lifetime revenue, spend outside of the committed contract revenue. We would have a very solid understanding of all of that.*

(John Goulding, Chief Executive Officer, Core HR).

The next interviewee outlined the importance of measuring the success/failure of a campaign:

*From a Waterford Crystal point of view, yes, we would do all sorts of measurement. My view is that there is no point in doing any piece of marketing or advertising that you can’t measure so there should always be “call to action”. The call to action will either be to engage, and get twenty percent off or the call to action might be to engage with a social media campaign. I will send you a branded item, and you give me your feedback. What’s the best porridge you’ve made, how you do like your favourite porridge, and I will send you the makings of it. Then all of a sudden you have a food blogger talking about how to make porridge. How do you monitor it, it’s very difficult to monitor it but certainly within Waterford Crystal I would look at the range spend, and uplift in sales having run a certain campaign. Some of my campaigns were brand awareness only, some were to drive sales, and some were to have customers as co-creators.*

(Helen Murphy, Owner, Brainsell, Ex Brand Manager, Waterford Crystal).

The final respondent explains that his organisation sees the future in analytics, and so are investing heavily to create a unique digital experience for their customers, that results in a more personalized offering:

*In the past 18 months we are doing a lot in this space so we are currently implementing a suite of software products that will capture a lot more data on our customers. We are introducing a bigger My Ryanair customer account function that will allow you to say, this is me, this is where I like to go, this is what I like to do when I go to places. This will give us a much richer profile on you as an individual, and then we will know our customers better. We will capture their web behaviour better so we will know for example that this is William Ryan, every time he comes to book a flight he comes on average about three times checking the price. How do we make that simpler for him? Does he then check the price on things like Opodo.com, does he then go onto the Aer Lingus website to check the price? We are using the best Google type technologies available, so therefore the same data platform that Google, and Tesco are using. This allows us to track information, so that we can give customers back a more personalised Ryanair digital experience.*

(Kenny Jacobs, Chief Marketing Officer, Ryanair).
4:10 Customer Services and Customer Engagement – Which Methods could be transferred to SME’s?

The current research outlined some of the customer services, and customer engagement methods used by the large companies, which could be implemented by Small to Medium (SME) companies. This selection, and implementation process would be unique to each SME, as each would need to assess what works best for them, in terms of industry, customer base, and the capital that would be required.

The first interviewee highlighted what in his opinion, would be transferrable methods to SME’s, while focusing on customer feedback, and technology:

*The fact that BOC is global, you have restrictions on what you can do, as it cannot be a one fits all process. What is being done may not suit you. Two things would be easily transferrable to a Small to Medium enterprise. The first would be the ‘rant and rave’ solution. It is a fairly simple solution. It is only a solution that could be used through a portal, by text messages or phone calls. The other tool would be salesforce.com. I believe this would be a very easy, and transferrable tool to a small to medium enterprise. Some of them are probably using them already but it is a very powerful tool in terms of customer relationship, and customer management. These are two that BOC use that would be very transferrable,*

(Mr X, Commercial Manager, BOC Gases).

The next participant outlined what in his opinion, would be transferrable methods to SME’s:

*Certainly I would say the philosophy to enable customers to use whatever entry channel that they want. That being said for a small to medium sized enterprise this would be a challenge because they would need to invest in a phone system, in a chat system or a system that allows customers to solve their own issues like e-support or e-service,*

(Mr Sean O’ Keeffe, Director of Customer Services, Trend Micro).

The third contributor outlined what in his opinion, would be transferrable methods to SME’s, focusing on technology:

*It’s important that we can take those methods of customer engagement, such as apps information on delivery, website content, supply of goods, timely delivery those kind of things, and translate them through the supply chain. So I think that, they are the things that we could transfer to an SME company,*

(Richard Paine, Product Marketing Manager, Notifier by Honeywell).

The next interviewee suggested that social media in his opinion, would be transferrable to SME’s, and subsequently gave an example to sell the concept:
I think there is probably a lot actually that could transfer. If you start looking at things like online engagement through social media, through our website, through any of that kind of stuff, it is transferable. If I was going back into the business in the morning, I would have a LinkedIn page, a Facebook page, maybe Twitter. I suppose a lot of it depends on who your target customers are, if they are on these platforms, or not, and how they liked to be engaged. My seventy one year old dad is on Facebook, so simple things like that, say a lot to me. I think that a lot of these are transferable.

(Bobby Kennedy, International Senior Sales Account Manager, Logitech Ireland).

The next participant outlined what in their opinion, would be transferrable methods to SME’s:

Small to medium enterprises by their nature are going to have less resources, to commit to sales, and marketing. You have to be practical, and it is that blend of future investment and existing resources. It’s also about in certain cases when you deal with an SME, you expect more of the personal touch, as opposed to when you deal with a multinational, and you expect it to be more systematic. Even though you still will have engagement with them, but it’s not going to be quite so humanistic. In terms of the SME’s, the kind of thing I would be recommending, is trying to get that blend.

(Mel Galloway, Enterprise Ireland Business Consultant).

The next contributor stated that in their opinion, everything their organisation does in terms of customer engagement was transferrable to an SME:

I think every element of our business could transfer to a small to medium enterprise company. The way we understand our customers, and the customer feeling out there, is something that an SME could do. They should know what their customers are thinking, they should have a paranoia, and not just think they know. Whether it is getting a net promoter score survey, that is suited to their business or whether it is the senior management visiting the customers, and talking to them or getting feedback from other means, they should know. They should also know the CLV (customer lifetime value) and CPA (customer profitability analysis). What we do is transferrable for each customer. They should know who their big customers are, and treat them accordingly. When they get feedback from customers they should react. The layers are less so it should be easier to react. I know they will not have a huge amount of capital but there is still a lot they could do, in terms of offerings, and give the customer what they want. So yes a lot of what we do is transferrable.

(Anne O’ Leary, CEO, Vodafone Ireland).

The next willing interviewee stated that their organisation was in fact classified as a SME, and then outlined his opinion:

We are a small to medium enterprise company. We are just under 100 employees so we are a small to medium company. SME’s think that they have to be corporates, and that they have to think that way, but they don’t. They have to do it from the ground up. I know a guy that has set up a company. He has 4-5 employees, and he is building data analytics at the core of everything he does. For the first year he had only two customers but two large customers. He knew everything about them, he tracked them, and he built
a database around them. His team thought he was nuts but now he has a one hundred, and two customers. They are all done the same so it is about using the same principles. It is about recording real conversations, which is what Salesforce.com is all about. (Enda Lynch, Marketing and Commercial Manager, Munster Rugby).

The eight respondent agreed with a number of the other interviewees that all the strategies, and technology used by the larger organisations, could be employed by a small to medium enterprise:

I’m trying to think of anything that we do, that would not transfer. Essentially for me, I would have had a Global Customer Role when I was with EMC. When I moved to Core HR, we were a much smaller company than we are now but the vast majority of the things that I would have learned at EMC in terms of customer engagement, and customer services would have transferred directly to Core HR. We were a company with less than one hundred persons. Things like understanding your client profile, the Pareto rule so understanding where your revenue comes from, the top clients, and making sure you are looking after them. Understanding the bold importance of “reference ability”, and that it is not just about winning the clients. It is about making sure that those clients when they talk to anyone about you, they are willing to put you forward with a genuine reference, because of this, you will grow faster, whether you are an SME or a multi-national, you are going to grow faster. (John Goulding, Chief Executive Officer, Core HR).

The next interviewee explains that the SME must have an understanding of what they what to achieve, who their core market is, and must produce applicable messages:

I think the key thing is when people say ‘their product is for everyone, it’s all things to all people’, that’s never true. From a customer services engagement point of view it’s always about understanding who your core target market is, and creating messages for that specific core target market. What I would have done in Waterford Crystal is that I would have actually done a pen picture of each of my core target markets, and I would create messages specifically for those pen picture people. The pen picture might be a couple in their fifties. They have a range of crystal, they like to spend, and they like luxury. What would they want next, and then we would create products, and brand messaging around that for them. We therefore produced a bar range so they would have a beautiful bar filled with Waterford Crystal, and then there was also coloured crystal that came through on that.

The next segment was the ‘aspiring achiever’. They are looking at the more casual use of crystal, and how you could use it, so it was all about candles and scents. Customer engagement is about knowing your core target market, making your message, and addressing your core target market appropriately. You must understand where their key influences come from, be it media, social, print or whatever. You must create the message accordingly, understand what your return on investment is going to be whether is brand awareness, sales or some sort of product creation. Therefore my message to
SME’s is you must measure accordingly, understand what your customers want, and feed this back in to the business.

(Helen Murphy, Owner, Brainsell, Ex Brand Manager, Waterford Crystal).

The last contributor believed that all SME’s could embrace digital strategies of his organisation, and to back this up, he gave a very simple practical example which proved his point:

*Everything we are doing on digital, an SME should also do. If I was running a bakery in Cork that had three outlets, I would have a cracking website, I would have a cracking app. I would let people in Cork open the app, and tell me what bread they want the next day so I could bake the right stuff. No business is too small to have a decent website, to have a decent app, and having built up an on-line community with a Facebook page, with a weekly e-mail that shows that it is a modern brand that listens digitally to customers, and allows customers to communicate with it digitally. All of those things work. I would love my baker or a fancy baker in Cork to say how many croissants you want the next day. I would love to tell them my birthday so because it is your birthday Kenny I am going to drop a cake around in the morning for free. Then he will get all my business. He would be able to sell me fancy French coffee, all of those things. People love all that type of stuff, and you can serve up a much more engaged, a much more personalised customer experience through digital than you can through your store, even if you are a very traditional type Mum, and Pap type Baker business.*

(Kenny Jacobs, Chief Marketing Officer, Ryanair).

4:11 Customer Services and Customer Engagement- The Future?

This current study found that customer services, and customer engagement is becoming a pivotal focal point for companies with customer-centric strategies, endorsed by their most senior managers, and using technology, and analytics to make it work.

The first interviewee in his opinion highlighted what the future holds for customer services, and customer engagement detailing that Chief Executive Officer’s, and technology will have a more noticeable input into the direction companies take:

*I think it is the way forward. I actually think more companies are now looking at their head man being involved in customer services, where the old fashioned way was finance or operations but now globally the chief operating officer for every company has to have an involvement in customer services because that is what is driving the companies. This is what the customers want. I think that approach then filters down through the organization. You must have some involvement with the customers so that at internal or external meetings they are all aware that the customer is king, and you need to have a very good relationship with the customer. Going forward you have to have that relationship as “people buy from people” and the relationship is so important. Technology I feel, it is vital to have you own customer portal that a customer can have*
the option to log on, and see their account online. In my opinion that needs to be a major focus for any company even small to medium companies. You need to give the customer the option with a username, and password to log on, and view their account, 24/7.

(Mr X, Commercial Manager, BOC Gases).

The second interviewee in his opinion, explained a dilemma that he feels exists in customer’s services, and how he would like it answered in the future:

Yes I have thought about this question in the past, and before you asked me for this interview. It is one of the fundamental problems that still exist in customer services support regardless of industry. You have a customer coming in looking for a service, and it is trying to understand why is the customer coming in? The customer has a problem, and it could be a technical problem or it could be a non-technical problem. The challenge that customer support organizations have is trying to match the technical complexity or non-technical complexity of the issue with the resource that is going to satisfy it. If you have un-complex issues being handled by expensive or well-paid resources, there is a miss-match in terms of how much you are paying for your support engineers versus the type of problems that are coming in. That is the challenge! I think it is something that people have not got a better handle on. To me it is like the “Holy Grail”. Solve that, and you will solve any issues for customers in a way that is the right for them, and for the organisation while using the right type of resource. I think this is still a challenge.

(Mr Sean O’Keeffe, Director of Customer Services, Trend Micro).

The next contributor was clear in his prediction, pointing out that if a company did not embrace customer services, and customer engagement – the future was not bright:

I think if you are not engaged with your customer, and you don’t have any form of customer services, I think the future is going to be pretty bleak, for your company. Even through my ten years of working in the construction supply chain, and having my expectations raised by certain customers, if you don’t do it well, you get a very bad reputation. So what does the future hold for customer service, and customer engagement? I believe more focus, more emphasis, and more effort, in that area. I think this is essential to move your business forward in the future.

(Richard Paine, Product Marketing Manager, Notifier by Honeywell).

The fourth willing contributor in his opinion, felt that the future was about how companies now handled the modern informed, and empowered customer:

I think customer is king, absolutely the customer is king. The days where you could give a slip shot service, and poor quality products at an inflated price to a customer are gone, certainly in the industry I’m operating in. They are gone. At their fingertips, they have product reviews, product ratings, company reviews, company ratings, service reviews, and service ratings. They have price comparisons, and all these ratings are coming from other consumers, average people, which they are much more likely to trust than professional reviews from professional reviewers. The level of detail, and
information that the consumer has empowers them to make the right decision. As a company doing anything you probably have to up your game. The customer is absolutely at the centre, and the customer decides. Companies have to step up, to ensure that when the customer does decide, that they chose you.

(Bobby Kennedy, International Senior Sales Account Manager, Logitech Ireland).

The next interviewee in their opinion, highlighted areas of business, where companies should focus:

From a small to medium enterprise perspective, customer services will get more, and more important. The customer has increasing power, and probably in time I would hope that the internet would start to have more regulations so that people can't fire off a rant that has no substance to it. In terms of customer engagement, I suppose maybe through software it will become a little bit more systematic, maybe through higher expectation of marketing, it will become a little bit more proactive. In terms of new product enhancement or new product development etc, a lot of SME's are not engaging the customer early enough. I hope this task would be seen as part of the process more than keeping it in-house, until their ready to drop the new product into the market. They belong to that process, and could really add value to it.

(Mel Galloway, Enterprise Ireland Business Consultant).

The next contributor stated that senior management must be involved at ground level, and that policies must be flexible:

I think the future will be about the channels. Social media is getting bigger so it is how you measure, and become aware of customer feeling, and finally how you react. That is the challenge, especially with large organisations with lots of layers. We had a situation where a customer who spent €80 a month, and was with us for a number of years, wanted an upgrade of handset. The policy was that the customers could only get an upgrade after two years. There was one month left, and our customer services team said "No", because that is what our policy stated they were to do. The customer threatened to leave, and we became aware of it so now the policy is changed. The customer services team can now issue an upgrade at any stage. This is the challenge on how companies gather information, use it, and then respond. Our C-Level Management are involved, and whether it is listening to a customer services phone call, or working in a retail shop or understanding the data we gather, we must measure, and respond.

(Anne O' Leary, CEO, Vodafone Ireland).

The next willing interviewee stated that the future would bring changes in the research methodologies previously used, and that new products would come from insights provided by customers:

I think we have answered this already. The key is for people like me, marketeers, sales executives, and sales managers is to understand the difference between understanding someone, and engaging with someone in the digital age. There is responding in an e-mail and saying ...well that is that done. This does not mean you have answered the question. It does not mean you have encompassed the learning. The future has to be
absorbing rather than just responding to the customer engagement. Absorbing it, storing it, developing your insights, and developing different ways. The research is dead in many ways, in the way we know it. Things like focus groups, a 1000 MRBl's, it doesn't need to happen that way. By doing it a lot quicker, you still have to have the ability to capture all the feedback, and use it. The anecdotal evidence you get now on twitter, is the anecdotal evidence your boss use to get in the shop.

Companies are spending more, and more money on analytical teams to understand what is going on. It is all happening not just word of mouth but most of it is happening digitally. The question is how do you take that, and migrate it into a data base. This will allow you to look at a list of research findings, a list of insights, and then create a list of customer needs. This then allows you to develop a product or improve your product. That is what I think. We need to be disciplined in how we engage with the customer, not just respond but listen, take it in, and do it with the good old fashion principles.

(Enda Lynch, Marketing and Commercial Manager, Munster Rugby).

The next respondent highlighted the effect social media will have going forward, the effect globalisation will have, and finally the importance of knowing through measurement how your customer views your performance:

You referred earlier to social media. I think if you are not providing a good customer services, a good customer engagement, then everyone knows because there is massive interaction now between organisations. If you do something good it is known, if you do something bad then it is known. The clients talk to each other in a much easier way now. There is also more choice available for clients. You are competing with companies that could be based anywhere in the world. We are winning massive business in the United Kingdom (UK), and we are not based there. That is the new reality but that works two ways. It would be the same for a company in the United Kingdom if they are offering a better product offering, customer services or customer engagement than us. They will come after us, and compete with us so it is up to us to make sure that they do not do that. I mentioned earlier about having that healthy paranoia. Just because you think you do things well, you have competition, and that competition is always looking to try, and win your clients. You must be paranoid about it, you have to constantly be looking to improve your customer engagement, and customer support.

(John Goulding, Chief Executive Officer, Core HR).

The next contributor believes that the future will be positive for companies that engage but will be negative for those that don’t, as the reality is that people are now no longer afraid to complain especially as they are now aided by websites such as Trip Advisor:

It's hugely challenging. I think what's going to happen is there is going to be a lot of fall out for those companies who don't engage properly with really servicing the customer, because customers have become more, and more aware. We have come out of the recession, and we expect more value for our money now. People are less, and less afraid to complain. You even now see TripAdvisor making or breaking a business because people are not responding to the customer in the right way. People are losing
businesses over that. It is going to be extremely challenging for those who do not believe that customer is king. It would be very interesting to look at those companies who are perceived to have very strong customer focus, and their growth level. Then compare this to those companies who are not perceived to have strong customer focus, and see what their growth per annum would be. I think this would be a really good comparison to see.

(Helen Murphy, Owner, Brainsell, Ex Brand Manager, Waterford Crystal).

The final participant agrees with Enda Lynch of Munster Rugby that customer engagement has always been around, but feels that the digital era has had an impact, and will continue to do so into future, especially in the area of self-serve:

On customer engagement I feel that customer engagement is two buzz words that have been going around. To me customer engagement is the same thing that it has been for always, that is listening to your customers, and being good at what they want, so you get more people who say that they are loyal to what you do.

Customer Service is helping your customers out when they need some help with using your business or using your service. On customer service you need to be good at it! I would see the future through digital. What we intend to do is leave customers serve themselves more often, so I don’t want you having to ring one of our call centres to change something about one of your flights. I want you doing that in our app yourself so that you say the app is easy; I did it on the app. You don’t want to talk to someone, we don’t want you calling someone, and waiting in a phone queue etc so I see more self-serve as part of customer service as customer service moves on line.

(Kenny Jacobs, Chief Marketing Officer, Ryanair).

4:12 Chapter 4 Conclusion:

This concludes chapter four. The next chapter- Chapter five – will provide the conclusions, and recommendations as a result of the findings discovered in Chapter four.
5.0 Introduction:

This chapter presents an evaluation, and summary of the main themes of the research findings. This current study was undertaken to perform an exploratory study of customer services, and focus specifically on the developments of customer engagement, all within an Irish perspective. The interview pool consists of senior people who are working directly for large organisations, or consultancy bodies, who have direct relevant knowledge of customer services, and customer engagement. The choice of interview candidate allowed for a diverse outlook as they each came from a number of different sectors in the marketplace. The pool included senior management of global organisations, two chief executive officers, and a customer services expert with worldwide customer services experience, two consultants, a company director, and various individuals from diverse commercial, and sporting organisations. The analysis, and conclusions that follow are based on the researcher’s primary, and secondary research.

5.1 The Main Findings of this Study:

5.1.1 Major Shift in Customer Services Philosophy:

A significant finding emerging from this study is that the status of customer services has been altered within the corporate world. Traditionally according to Winner (2014), customer services were used as an operational function to deal with complaints, and warranty issues, but this study has found that customer services has transformed to the point where it influences strategy development in organisations. This study found that 100% of the interviewees believed that in today’s business world, the customer is the centre of attention for organisations, but the focus has shifted to trying to understand their customer needs, and then striving to exceed these. This new focus has meant that the customer services agenda, and in particular the customer is now represented, and appreciated at all levels of organisations. An interviewee highlighted this in Chapter 4, “Everyone in our organisation from the chief executive officer down, is brought into the customer services strategy”, (Chapter 4:72). This shift in importance for customer services, has meant that senior executives in organisations are now actively participating, and endorsing the customer services function, and interestingly this current study discovered that by
doing this they are also increasing their own value in the jobs market. 40% of the contributors interviewed for this research were recruited by large organisations, specifically to implement a new customer services strategy because they had the customer engagement skill-set, and experience required for the task.

90% of contributors to this study believe that customer services will be a driving factor of the companies of the future, and the key to success will be understanding the 'voice of the customer'. According to a senior consultant interviewed for this study the gathering of intelligence in particular customer insights will be so important going forward, and will decide successful companies, “the better companies would be going into that modular review process-the intelligence gathering. This would allow them to understand their customers better, the market, the trends, the drivers, and then, defining a very good value proposition, and this is really the hub of customer service”, (Chapter 4: 50). 100% of the contributors believed that the tool to obtain this intelligence, and customer insights is customer engagement.

5.1.2 Correct Engagement Channels:

A key finding emerging from this study is that 70% of contributors believe the selection of the correct communication channel or engagement method is key for the success of an engagement strategy. With the emergence of technology, and the development of new channels such as, social media, internet, mobile communications, organisations now have to make important decisions on which channels to invest in, to maximise their return by attracting the new customers, and retaining existing. The decision is further complicated by the fact that the new channels, are operating alongside the traditional methods of face to face, P.R, direct sales, and so a balance needs to be made. In this study 50% of interviewees believed the customer should select their preferred method of engagement, and that organisations should facilitate this request, while at all times making it as easy as possible for the customer to engage. This is explained clinically in Chapter 4 by a senior Chief Executive Officer, “we are active on all the different channels, again to make the interaction the easiest it can be, so customers of all age profiles can interact on a channel that suits them”, (Chapter 4: 47).
With the evolution of customer engagement a senior consultant summarised the change “companies are now moving from a selling phase to a telling, and engaging phase”, (Chapter 4:63). The company must now select the methods of engagement to be employed, and this selection is critical to the success of their engagement strategy. The findings of this current study reveal that 100% of the interviewee contributors used a variety of customer engagement methods, and channels but in all cases they were tailored to their specific customers. 60% of the interviewee’s stated that face to face was the most effective method of customer engagement while 70% believed that digital engagement is required. The channels selected will be key to the successful implementation, and so will need to be extremely researched. The goal will be very effective two-way communication that will provide insights, and allow the company to build loyalty from their customer. A contributor highlights this in Chapter 4, “For each of those customers, they want something slightly different so customer engagement is all about understanding them, solving their problems, and providing them with the products, and solutions that they need”, (Chapter 4:58).

5.1.3 Customer Services Champion:

A notable finding from this study has been the discovery that 80% of the interviewees identified the importance of having a ‘champion’ to drive the customer service agenda within an organisation. Companies with a customer services Champion, who has a vision that is articulated to all staff, and is prepared to participate in the customer services process, will act as a catalyst for the process. The Champion identified in all cases, was a senior manager who had the authority to influence the staff, the forum to sell his message, and the ability to back his vision with financial, and human resources. A senior executive explained this in Chapter 4, “We have a new CEO in the business, and he has been with the company now a little over two years. When he came in, one of the first things he did was articulate values”, (Chapter 4:46). An interesting fact unearthed by this research is that 40% of those interviewed for this study, were the ‘champion’ in their organisations, tasked with the responsibility of implementation of the customer services strategy.
5.1.4 Retention is Critical:

According to Van Doorn et al., (2010), modern organisations are now understanding that long-term, sustainable competitive advantage is related to a firm’s ability to retain, sustain, and nurture its customer base. The findings of this current study concur with (Van Doorn et al., 2010), revealing that a senior executive from a major airline details this shift in Chapter 4, detailing the reason his company changed from a strategy of acquiring new customers to a strategy of customer retention, “a lot of businesses focus too much on acquisition of customers. Acquiring new customers costs you a lot of money, it makes much more economic sense in the long run, and in a business sense just to get the same people having a good experience, and coming back again, and again”, (Chapter 4:56).

Retention of existing customers also involves an understanding of customer engagement behaviour, where companies seek to obtain ‘customer loyalty’ from their customers. The study found that organisations used different methods to build loyalty such as personalised offerings, and reward programs. Within the study 30% of contributors believed that customers should be rewarded to keep them loyal, while 20% were totally opposed to any reward scheme believing that when the rewards were removed, the loyalty stopped. Two participants who’s companies engage in rewarding of customers, highlighted examples of their reward schemes which the researcher found were innovative, and worthy of highlighting within the study. BOC Gases use a “Customer Characterisation Tool”, to profile their customers. BOC can then tailor the product offerings to the customers in conjunction with their specific needs, and reward the client with something they value. Notifier by Honeywell use an alternative method for retention, where they appoint customers as “Gold Partners”. The customers then receive financial perks, while Notifier receives valuable feedback from the customer which is used for product development, so it is a two-way relationship. This is explained in Chapter 4, “We also reward our customers. The best customers are rewarded with our gold partner scheme that rewards loyalty. The way the rewards scheme works is, ultimately, the more they spend, the more rewards they get”, (Chapter 4:53).

Within the research study it became evident that each organisation had its own unique philosophy, and approach to retaining their existing customers but one comment from a senior chief executive officer captured the interest of the researcher. The approach in their organisation was not only to reward their loyal customers but more importantly to never give
new customers a better price than they offered their existing customers. "We would never give a potential new customer a better deal on a bundle, which we have not offered to our existing customers. I do not believe in this, you must look after your existing customers, to retain them", (Chapter 4:60). This was a philosophy that the researcher personally believed in, and felt it was a worthy addition to this theme.

5.1.5 Negative Word of Mouth:

Van Doorn et al., (2010) highlighted negative word of mouth, and explained that the effect of unhappy customers is that they could bring potential harm to the company, by causing other customers to speak up, complain, and engage in negative word of mouth. With the evolution of the internet, and social media, companies now need to be vigilant about their image, and the effect of negative word of mouth which can now destroy a business as detailed by a consultant interviewee, "a number of years ago if you had something bad to say about a company you would tell 10 or 11 people, some might even only tell 1 or 2. Nowadays unfortunately with the internet, and word of mouth, you could tell thousands of people, you could tell hundreds of people, the whole world", (Chapter 4:87). As the companies are now actively engaging their customers on various channels both traditional, and digital, this research study observed that 100% of interviewees believe companies must monitor for negative word of mouth. On the question of reaction time, the study found that 60% of contributors believed you must react quickly when negative word of mouth is discovered, while 40% endorsed having a controlled approach, by investigating, and then following up. 30% of participants highlighted a positive to the organisation in receiving negative word of mouth believing that if the organisation successfully rectified the situation, the result would be a more loyal customer. This fact was articulated by an interviewee, "If you can take an unhappy customer, and resolve their problem, you actually have a much more loyal customer afterwards", (Chapter 4:76).

30% of contributors also highlighted the fact that the feedback received through negative word of mouth was invaluable to the organisation, and allowed the organisation to see what customers were saying about them which according to a participant, "what customers are saying about you is much more important than what you are saying about yourself", (Chapter 4:79). The researcher felt it would be prudent to complete this theme by highlighting innovative approaches that the interviewee’s organisations were utilizing to try, and control negative word
of mouth. BOC were using a dedicated link on all electronic correspondence called ‘Rant or Rave’, to facilitate customers praising the company or complaining. Any feedback to this channel was immediately acted on. Core HR were using their Sales Force CRM system to create an ‘online community’ which facilitated customers communicating both positive, and negative comments. The advantage of this portal was that Core HR could also add information, respond to customer comments, and detail new product developments.

5.1.6 Analytics is Key:

*Big data analytics is being used to acquire new customers, retain existing, build higher margins, and gain competitive advantage,* (PR Newswire, 2013).

A notable finding from this current study was that 90% of the respondents were actively engaging in analytics, while interestingly 30% of the organisations were new to the concept. The reasoning for the focus on analytics was varied but was summed up by one of the interviewee’s, “We do an awful lot of analysis on our data. My personal view is that analysing the data is like keeping score, you want to know that you have done a good job or not”, (Chapter 4:80). The study discovered that companies engage in analytics for many different reasons, and this was evident in this research. The study identified that companies were very interested in the spend customers had with them, so this was explained by 50% of respondents producing reports which detailed the Customer Profitability, 30% of respondents evaluated investment success by analysing their return on investment, while finally 50% of respondents used analytics to help with retention of customers. The importance of analytics to customer retention was highlighted by a Director of Customer Services, “if you lose a customer, then that is more expensive than trying to win a new customer. This is a key focus so it must be a key measurement. You therefore need Business Analytics to try, and measure customer retention, and try, and evaluate what is happening with customer retention rates”, (Chapter 4:80). The analytical methods, and techniques utilized by organisations for retention were also diverse, and included modern techniques such as net promoter score, C- Sat Surveys, WOM monitoring, compliant portals, and company specific measurements. The survey concluded that 60% of interviewees utilized their Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) System for analytics, with ‘SAP’ being the most used ERP system with 30%.
5.1.7 Small to Medium Enterprises (SME’s) - What is transferable?

This research study has found that small to medium enterprises (SME’s) are not as progressive in the area of customer engagement, and analytics as larger organisations. This was explained in Chapter 4 by an Enterprise Ireland Consultant who works direct with SME companies, “I would say in general companies that I work with, are not doing these effectively, a few are, but the majority are not, (Chapter 4:81). 50% of the participants in this study identified the availability of capital, and a lack of resources as inhibitors for SME’s but 30% of interviewees believed they should start small within their financial budgets, and work-up. A conflict arose among the participants in regards to the philosophy that the more digital engagement the SME’s employed, the more impersonal the relationship became. An argument was presented that a lot of SME businesses are built on this personal service but a Senior Chief Marketing Officer argued against this theory stating, “you can serve up a much more engaged, a much more personalised customer experience through digital than you can through your store, even if you are a very traditional type Mum, and Pap type business”, (Chapter 4:86).

A notable finding discovered in the current research was that 50% of interviewees believed that SME’s should learn skills that allow them to know their market, know their customers, and know what their customers are thinking of them. This information will be critical to the success of their business by allowing them to focus on retention as well as new customer acquisition. They could also get a greater understanding of the importance of each customer by utilizing Customer Lifetime Value (CLV), and Customer Profitability Analysis (CPA), and applying such techniques as the Pareto rule, i.e. 80% of business coming from 20% of your customers. 40% of interviewees identified the importance of correct channel choice, and engagement selection with an effective App, and website been the channels of choice. A number of respondents proposed some technologies to help SME’s gather the required intelligence. These included 30% of interviewees choosing Salesforce.com as the most applicable Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, while a cost effective proposal suggested, was the availability of a feedback portal such as BOC’s ‘rant or rave’ which allows the gathering of intelligence with a very small capital outlay.
Table 5.1 Summary of the Main Empirical Findings:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>100% of interviewees stated that in modern business everything revolves around the customer, understanding their needs, and then exceeding these while 100% of the contributors believed that the tool to obtain this intelligence, and customer insights is customer engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>70% of contributors believe the selection of the correct communication channel or engagement method is key for the success of an engagement strategy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>100% of respondents used a variety of customer engagement methods but all tailored to their customers while 60% of interviewees stated that face to face was the most effective method of customer engagement.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>50% of interviewees believed the customer should select their preferred method of engagement, and the organisation should facilitate this request, while making it as easy as possible for the customer.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>80% of the organisations represented by the interviewee’s now focus on retention of existing customers as a strategy, while 50% have had a shift in strategy from a focus on acquiring new customers, to retaining existing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>100% of interviewees believe companies must monitor for negative word of mouth (WOM). 60% of contributors believed you must react quickly when negative WOM is discovered. 40% endorsed having a controlled approach while 30% of participants highlighted a positive to the organisation in receiving negative WOM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>90% of the respondents were actively engaging in analytics while 30% of the organisations were new to the concept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>50% of respondents produced reports which detailed the Customer Profitability. 30% of respondents evaluated investment success by analysing their return on investment, while finally 50% of respondents used analytics to help with retention of customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>60% of interviewees utilized their Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) System for analytics, with SAP being the most used ERP system with 30%.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>30% of participants believe you should reward your customer to keep them loyal, while 20% were totally against any reward scheme, as they believe that when the rewards are removed, the loyalty stops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>90% of Interviewees believe that customer services will be a driving factor of the companies of the future, while 70% believe that digital engagement, and providing new channels will be very important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>80% of the interviewees highlighted the importance of having a ‘champion’ to drive the Customer Service and customer engagement agenda within an organisation. 40% of those interviewed were the ‘champion’ in their organisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>40% of the contributors interviewed for this research were recruited by large organisations, specifically to implement a new customer services strategy because they had the customer engagement skill-set, and experience required for the task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>50% of the participants in this study identified the availability of capital, and a lack of resources as inhibitors for SME’s. 50% of interviewees believed that SME’s should learn skills that allow them to know their market, know their customers, and know what their customers are thinking of them. 30% of interviewees choose Salesforce.com as the most applicable Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Evidence produced to indicate that companies were at different stages in terms of customer engagement, ranging from no engagement to companies employing all modern methodologies, and available tools.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>No clear definition available to define each of the stages of a customer engagement strategy so an organisation could assess where they were currently positioned, compared to the worst or best companies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Unavailability of a holistic, and practical model or roadmap that would guide an organisation on a customer engagement implementation program, detailing clearly defined stages, and targets within these stages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Available models were very theoretical in approach, and concentrated only on individual sub-areas of the customer engagement process as opposed to the complete process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. <strong>Significant Finding:</strong></td>
<td>A model was needed that would address the issues identified in Points 14, 15, 16, and 17.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
5.2.0 Customer Engagement Strategy Model:

Figure 3 presents a model for the implementation of a structured, and holistic customer Engagement Strategy, which has been developed by the researcher using the findings of this study.

Figure 3: Customer Engagement Implementation Model:
5.2.1.0 Customer Engagement Strategy Model- Introduction:

Following in-depth analysis of the contributions from the interviewees in this current research study, the researcher identified that companies were at different stages in terms of customer engagement, ranging from no engagement in some companies, to other companies employing all modern methodologies, and available tools. When the researcher searched for a proven model that would (1) identify these stages, (2) detail what existed in each stage, and (3) explain how an organisation could advance to the upper levels, no complete model could be identified. The researcher came to the conclusion that there was an unavailability of a holistic, and practical model or roadmap that would guide an organisation on a customer engagement implementation program detailing clearly defined stages. Available models discovered were very theoretical in approach, and concentrated only on individual sub-areas of the customer engagement process as opposed to the complete process. Therefore the researcher identified a gap in academic knowledge.

Using the information abstracted from the interviewees the researcher set about creating a model which was complete, and presented a practical roadmap, clearly guiding an organisation on a customer engagement implementation program. The model created was designed in such a way that it would allow a company to start the process, and when resources were available, advance a stage at a time. The sixth stage of the model was designed around the best companies in customer engagement which were identified in the study, and which currently employed all the modern techniques. Examples of these companies from the interview research were Vodafone Ireland, Ryanair, and Core HR.

The model would allow companies to benchmark their own customer engagement process against the stage criteria, and so determine what stage they were at. They could also benchmark themselves against the “best in class” at stage six. This model could be the focal point of their customer centric strategy with the advantage that clearly defined stages were documented, to facilitate them advancing, always with the aim of reaching stage six. The model itself would continue to evolve as the top companies at stage six, employed additional new techniques that became available in the customer engagement environment.
5.2.2.0 Customer Engagement Strategy Model- Explained:

5.2.2.1 Stage 1: Lethargic Stage:

The first stage of the model is the most basic stage encompassing companies who are only interested in selling, and moving on externally to future new sales. One interviewee described the companies in this stage perfectly, "Other companies are I would have to say are maybe a little bit lethargic, where they are more watching the selling, than the actual customer scenario, therefore once it's sold they are looking back out externally again, (Chapter 4:47). These companies do not focus on the retention of their customers, and so are constantly spending money in the hope of acquiring new customers.

5.2.2.2 Stage 2: Added Value Stage:

The second stage of the model encompasses companies who are sales orientated but also invest in up-selling, and cross selling. The focus of the organisation is still on turn-over, new selling, and new customers but they do introduce an element of customer engagement in order to increase the size of the sale. With this stage of the model, there is no real focus on the establishment of a business relationship with the customer or future repeat buying resulting in retention of business. An interviewee identifies this sales orientated engagement from their experience as an Enterprise Ireland consultant working with SME companies, "In terms of retention, in general I wouldn't see as much activity, one of the recommendations that I would have made to a number of SME's that I would have worked with recently, is to engage in regular systematic customer contact programmes. You would be doing that, to allow you to up sell, and to cross sell", (Chapter 4:54).

5.2.2.3 Stage 3: Champion Catalyst Stage:

This stage is dependent on the emergence of a visionary leader who will articulate values, champion the cause, and act as a catalyst. The champion should be a senior figure in the organisation, who can influence strategy, and allocate resources. The philosophy of the organisation should change, and become a customer centric approach, with a focus on retention of existing customers. This change in strategy will have a positive long term outcome for the organisation as was outlined in Chapter 4 by an interviewee, "My understanding is that
customers who engage their customers are in a better situation to react to changes, and look after their customers, therefore they will see a better customer lifetime value, more sales and profitability. (Chapter 4:58).

5.2.2.4 Stage 4: Foundation Stage:

When an organisation enters stage four they are now advancing into the foundation layer of customer engagement. The next important step will be the roll-out of the new customer engagement concepts across the organisation so that everyone from the top to the bottom of the organisation are informed, enlightened, and believe in the new approach. This phase will be imperative to the overall success of this stage. The focus now for the organisation is the building of relationships with their customers, to gain insights that will help retain, and attract customers, and overall help improve the Customer Lifetime Value (CLV). This is explained in Chapter 4, by an organisation champion, “What it is not is selling a product, and then disconnecting from the client afterwards. It is an on-going conversation with the client, and an on-going relationship with the client. For me that is Client Engagement”, (Chapter 4:59).

5.2.2.5 Stage 5: Ascending Stage:

On entry to stage five, the infrastructure, and the culture is now in place to facilitate the organisation ascending to the next level of customer engagement. All members of staff, and management are actively looking to grow customer relationships, obtain insights, and create opportunity. A senior customer engagement champion in Chapter 4 highlighted the importance of senior executives being close to their customers, and setting an example to the other members of staff, “that is why all our C-Level executives get close to our customers, whether it is listening in on our customer services phone calls, working in the retail shop for a day as I do, or talking to customers face to face, we have to be close to the front line”, (Chapter 4:72). This stage involves bringing the relationship with your customers to a new level, a phase where you originally sought satisfaction to where you now look to obtain loyalty. This may be achieved by using the insights, and analytics you have obtained to provide personalised offerings, provide solutions to customer problems, and reward loyalty.
5.2.2.6 Stage 6: Healthy Paranoia Stage:

When an organisation reaches this stage, they have advanced through each of the stages, and have achieved a "best in class" status in terms of customer services, and customer engagement, and are a benchmark for other companies.

Stage Six encompasses all the modern philosophies of Customer Value Management (CVM) from both the academic, and business worlds, and the modern tools that have been developed to deliver this concept. This stage of healthy paranoia allows companies to be a benchmark for other organisations but always vigilant, and aware of how they are viewed by their customers, competitors, and internally in their own organisation. Despite being successful at customer services, companies in this stage never become complacent hence the paranoia, which in this process is healthy for the organisation. In this stage a company will utilize:

1. **Customer Lifetime Value (CLV):** Monitoring the purchase behaviour of their customers with a view to maximising the turnover throughout the lifetime of the relationship. This will be performed using modern analytics platforms, the CLV will be increased through the insights created, the offering of personalised individual offerings, and the relationships developed.

2. **Customer Referral Value (CRV):** This involves a company having a clear understanding of how their customers view them, and whether the customer would recommend them to other people. This study discovered that to get to a level where a company can determine this, they must really engage with the client, be close to them,
and more importantly use a metric which obtains this information. This was explained in Chapter 4 by one of our contributors, “Our aim is that our customers recommend us to their friends, and family, and become loyal to us. We do not just take this for granted, as we invest a lot in data analytics, and are using the Net Promoter Score to identify what our customers are saying, and thinking”, (Chapter 4:47) The modern tool that facilitates this measure is the Net Promoter Score (NPS), which categorizes customers into three distinct categories, defectors, passives, and promoters. Promoters are where you want all your customers to be positioned as they become ‘ambassadors’ for your company.

(3) **Customer Knowledge Value (CKV):** As engagement is a two way process, then benefits must come to both parties. CKV involves engaging with your clients directly to obtain feedback which the company can use to their benefit. Companies at Stage six would be active on the engagement channels that their customers would prefer, and would be constantly monitoring feedback so that they could respond when demand requires. This engagement would allow the companies to collect information, and insights for product development, and this was articulated by an interviewee contributor, “as a company we do a lot of consumer insight. We maybe are not a company that produces products for the sake of producing products, we believe in producing products, which are driven by genuine consumer need”, (Chapter 4:54). The insights companies receive through methods such as C-Sat surveys, feedback portals, and face to face interaction, allow them to produce quality products with consumer demand, and all with less Research, and Development costs.

(4) **Customer Influencer Value (CIV):** Organisations operating in stage six are very proactive in monitoring word of mouth, and reducing the risk of negative publicity. They utilise modern analytics, employ a special monitoring department or set-up their own forums, and create communities. This allows them to have an input into the conversation, and influence the outcome thereby reducing the risk. Within the study a participant highlighted how his organization had implemented a community portal, “within Sales Force it has a customer services ticketing offering through cloud servicing. Through this we have set-up a “Community” essentially, and clients can comment. We can also post up there so it gives us the ability to put some very positive stuff up there, which lets clients know what we are doing. The clients feel that they can
comment, and it is their forum as well, which is good”, (Chapter 4:78). This initiative allows companies to have an input into the content being displayed, respond immediately to negative correspondence, and display marketing developments which further enhance the product. Stage six will always be developing as new methods, and techniques evolve from the academic, and business worlds.

5.3.0 Recommendations for the Future for Practice:

The current research has found that customer services will be critical to the success of organisations in the future. Companies that employ excellent customer services will enjoy loyalty from their customers, be able to attract new customers, and have a sustainable business. Companies that do not embrace customer services will find the marketplace extremely challenging due to the fact that customers are now less afraid to complain, and take their business to other companies who offer better customer services. In Chapter 4 a senior chief marketing officer summarised the future in terms of customer services- “you need to be good at it!”, (Chapter 4:90).

The researcher using the knowledge gained within this study believes that organisations must embrace the customer services agenda in practice going forward. The reality is that companies must be proactive in their approach to customer engagement in order to get close to their customers, to understand them, and exceed their needs. This research has shown that it is not sufficient to talk about it, it is only through action that positive results will occur. The success of the strategy depends on the leadership that is shown within the organisation. This current study has shown that the customer services agenda must be represented at board level, and be endorsed by senior management. The message must be articulated downwards to the staff, and example shown from above in terms of resources, and finance. This decision will be the practical starting point, or as it was described in the implementation model, the catalyst. When this decision is made, it will decide a company who is customer-centric focused, and dynamic or a company who will be totally sales driven, and non-customer focused.

This research study has shown that sales driven/ non-customer focused companies do engage a constructive strategy, and are only driven by turnover or the quick sale. The markets, the customers, and the competition will dictate the future of these companies, and this study has shown that it will be bleak. This study has also shown that those companies who are customer
centric focused, and dynamic will be more successful. Companies in this space who embrace this strategy have a choice to make involving two options, (1) follow the newly developed customer engagement implementation model that this study has produced or (2) follow their own path, and piece together a plan using the existing models which this study has found to be non-holistic, and concentrating on sub-sections, as opposed to an overall plan.

The researcher using the findings of this study would advise companies to select option (1) the new model, as this model will allow them to implement a customer engagement strategy in a systematic, controlled, and documented way. This current study has shown that all the modern customer engagement methodologies, and techniques have been incorporated into the new model, and the higher the stage the company achieves, the more intense the level of engagement, so the closer the organisation gets to its customers. This effect is shown in figure 5.

![Figure 5 Level of Engagement Increases with Each Stage](image)

The model allows an organisation to assess which stage their organisation presently occupies, and what they need to do to advance. The stages are described in detail, identifying what inputs are needed from the company, and what outcomes the companies can expect. The stages are built constructively so that when one stage is achieved, a company can plan to enter, and achieve the next level. The ultimate goal of all organisations will be to become “best in class”,

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and achieving Stage six. Companies can incorporate this plan into their corporate strategy, and obtain capital budgets to help them achieve stage improvements.

Companies can build in metrics, and audits to ascertain how they are progressing, and evaluate success as they advance. The real success will be when companies through their customer services offering, and customer engagement strategy achieve higher retention of existing customers, and can attract new customers, as detailed in Figure 6.

*Figure 6 Effect on Customer Retention and Customer Acquisition*
5.4.0 Recommendations for Future Research:

This section provides a list of recommendations for future research pertaining to ‘Customer services, and customer engagement’.

This research recommends that a future study could examine if the chief executive officer (CEO) selection process in the future will be impacted by the changes in customer services, and the focus on customer engagement. Traditionally in Ireland the CEO is selected from a Financial or Engineering background, whereas in the U.S executives with a marketing or sales background are usually chosen. With the evolution of customer engagement the marketing and, sales departments now have more customer insights, and so are pivotal in the corporate strategy of the organisation. This new focus raises the profile of the marketing, and sales functions but will it change tradition in terms of CEO selection? Anne O’ Leary, now CEO of Vodafone Ireland has come from a marketing/ sales background while Kenny Jacobs who again has a marketing background is being tipped to be a possible replacement for Michael O’ Leary at Ryanair, (Independent, 2014). Is this a shift from the normal selection process in Ireland? The researcher believes (1) this is an area that could be further researched, (2) the research may increase in scope to question the suitability of a marketing qualification for people with aspirations of achieving the CEO position.

Another topic that would merit some further research is the small to medium (SME) sector to establish how they could be aided by government agencies to embrace modern customer services, and customer engagement advances. The researcher within this study identified modern methods that could be implemented in this sector but noted that various limitations exist, which would prevent the implementation of such methods. These limitations include cost, time, and availability of labour resources. The reality is that implementation of these systems would improve the commerciality, and sustainability of these companies, and would help create new jobs, while improving the economy.

Another interesting area of research would be to perform a more in-depth study on the area of customer engagement behaviours (CEB) to establish the psychological effect of customer satisfaction, and, customer loyalty. Such a study would help organisations fully understand the psychological process in progressing an engagement relationship from a stage of satisfaction
to a stage of loyalty resulting in increased spend, increased knowledge transfer, increased referrals value, and positive word of mouth. This new knowledge could help organisations to understand the various stages in the psychological process, with the result of the creation of new marketing tools to influence the outcome. Could the results of such a study form the basis for a Stage seven in this researcher’s model for customer engagement strategy implementation?

As outlined earlier in this study 40% of the contributors interviewed for this study were recruited specifically because of their customer engagement skill-set, and experience, to implement a new customer centric strategy for their new organisations. Further research could be performed to identify if a new trend is emerging for the future? Each of these interviewees had gained the acquired knowledge through experience. The new research could examine if there is now a requirement for universities, and colleges to build a subject syllabus specifically around customer service, and customer engagement either at graduate or post graduate level, to prepare future students for these roles?
5.5.0 Conclusions:

This study has addressed the issues relating to 'Customer Services', and 'Customer Engagement' using the current available academic literature, and through the findings that were discovered using the qualitative research that was performed as part of this current research study.

This study has clearly identified that customer services in today’s business environment can make or break a company, and will be a very important part of corporate strategies for successful customer centric companies going forward. The reality is that customer services has been propelled from a previous operational role to its present position where it is now seen as a source of competitive advantage, with the availability of metrics to prove its effectiveness, and is represented in its own capacity at board level by a customer services champion. This study has unearthed sweeping statements from senior executives, and consultants who articulate a view that companies who do not engage their customers, and introduce effective customer services will face a ‘bleak’ future. The research identifies that organisations who ignore the customer services function will suffer low retention, high competition, and low loyalty.

In contrast the study has shown that companies that embrace these concepts, and engage their customers will obtain a win-win scenario resulting in increased retention, more acquisition of new customers, and a relationship built around ‘loyalty’ as opposed to just satisfaction. The benefits for organisations who reach this level have been documented within this research, and include (1) understanding market intelligence, and customer sentiment (2) customers acting as an ‘ambassador’ for your organisation resulting in increased referrals, (3) exchange of knowledge through engagement which will allow the development of new products with less research, and development costs (4) embracing of modern technologies, and analytics to produce metric’s which allow organisations to comprehensively value their individual customers and (5) companies having an awareness, and an influencing input as to how they are perceived in the marketplace.

The conclusion of this research has identified a direct correlation between the success of a customer services strategy, and the implementation of an effective customer engagement program. This study has proved that an evolution has, and continues to take place with customer
engagement due to advances in technology, communication channels, the internet, and above all changing customer needs. The term ‘the customer is king’ has never been more applicable, as it is in today’s world. This research study has proved that today’s customers are prepared to complain, prepared to share information with other customers through digital means, and prepared to leave a brand, despite being loyal to it in the past. Customers now expect ‘value for money’, and if they do not receive this, they can through negative word of mouth cause immense damage to a company, and its brand. This research study had categorically identified customer engagement as the ‘tool’ to facilitate organisations getting close to their customers, understanding them, obtaining insights, and ultimately exceeding the customer’s needs.

A significant finding in this research study is the gap that exists in the marketplace between organisations who are embracing all available modern customer engagement techniques, and those who are not using any. In essence the gap between the ‘best’ and the ‘worst’. As the researcher proceeded through this study the gap became very evident, and further research proved a void in academic literature for a holistic model to fill this gap. Existing models were not holistic, or focused on sub-areas of the customer engagement process. The effect of this was the absence of a model that organisations could use to help them implement a customer engagement strategy. This presented the researcher with the chance to develop a holistic model, broken into stages that covered the full spectrum of the customer engagement process.

This study has now produced an innovative ‘customer engagement implementation model’, broken into stages which are independently explained, and developed in such a way that it facilitates an organisation advancing through the model over a period of time as resources become available. Successful completion of the model to stage six would result in an organisation operating at the highest level, using all the modern techniques, being a benchmark for their competitors, and achieving a competitive advantage through differentiation in the marketplace. The researcher believes that this study has conclusively identified a ‘gap in academic knowledge’, and that the best practice model developed, fills this gap with an innovative offering.

This study has explored the customer services, and customer engagement concepts within small to medium enterprise companies (SME’s), and discovered that they are not proactive in this area. On a positive note the study found that SME’s can learn a lot from the larger multi-nationals. To help this process, this study has within the findings identified methods that could
be employed to start the process for these companies, and eventually the goal would be to employ the newly developed best practice model.

The study finally concludes that this research has been a success, and that all the aims, and objectives identified in chapter one have been achieved. To help further researchers the study has identified areas, where further research is required. On a personal level, the researcher believes that he has achieved his personal goals with the completion of this study. The researcher through this exploratory study has developed a brilliant insight, and understanding of the customer services, and customer engagement concepts from both an academic, and industry based perspective, to the point he could converse informatively with any professional on the subject, and has achieved 'masters' level.
References:


### Appendix A: List of Interviewees:

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<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mr X</td>
<td>BOC Gases Ireland</td>
<td>Commercial Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sean O' Keeffe</td>
<td>Trend Micro</td>
<td>Director of Customer Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Richard Paine</td>
<td>Notifier by Honeywell. U.K</td>
<td>Product Marketing Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bobby Kennedy</td>
<td>Logitech Ireland</td>
<td>Senior International Account Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mel Galloway</td>
<td>Enterprise Ireland/ Biotector</td>
<td>Consultant/ Senior Marketing Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Anna O' Leary</td>
<td>Vodafone</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Enda Lynch</td>
<td>Munster Rugby</td>
<td>Commercial and Marketing Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>John Goulding</td>
<td>Core HR</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Helen Murphy</td>
<td>Owner -Brainsell and Ex-</td>
<td>Company Owner /Ex- Brand Manager</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Waterford Crystal</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Kenny Jacobs</td>
<td>Ryanair</td>
<td>Chief Marketing Officer</td>
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Appendix B: List of Interview Questions:

An Exploratory Study of Customer Services focusing on Customer Engagement—
An Irish Perspective.

Part 1- Understanding of customer services and strategic use:

Q1- What is your/ your company's philosophy regarding customer services?

Q2- What strategies does your company use, to attract new customers, and retain existing customers?

Prompt- customer loyalty, as opposed to customer satisfaction.

Part 2- Understanding of customer engagement and use:

Q3- What is your understanding of customer engagement?

Q4- Why do you think that customer engagement first came to light in your organization?

Prompts: (i.e: Product development, Product/ service feedback, individual offerings, On-line, Social Media)

Q5- How does your company engage effectively with their customers and in your opinion, which is the most effective method?

Prompt: face to face, facebook, twitter, direct mailing, e-mail, feedback portals.

Q6- What advantages and limitations has your organization experienced with customer engagement?

Part 3: Corporate effect of customer engagement:

Q7- In your experience, what has been the impact of customer engagement on corporate strategies, in general?

Q8- With the evolution of the internet and social media—How does your company attend to and address negative word of mouth (WOM) and the effect of unhappy customers, who potentially could bring potential harm to the company?
Q9- How does your company embrace the modern analytical tools, to value customers, monitor customer spend and customer referrals?


Part 4: Conclusion:

Q10- Which customer services and customer engagements methods as used by your company, could transfer to a SME Company?

Q11- In your opinion –what does the future hold for customer services and customer engagement?