‘Facility Evaluation on Aspire Measuring Customer Satisfaction Levels’

Bachelor of Business (Honours) in Tourism and Sport Management

Business Research

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this business research project is being presented as part requirement for completion of Bachelor of Business (Honours) in Tourism and Sport Management. It has not been submitted to any other higher education institute or department within Athlone Institute of Technology, and is the sole work of the author. Where literature from other authors has been used in research, it has been acknowledged and referenced accordingly.

Signed

__________________________
Michelle Kenny

Date

__________________________
25 March 2011
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Abstract

The aim of this research project is to evaluate customer satisfaction levels with the leisure facility, Aspire in Clara, Co. Offaly. The objectives are to primarily examine customer opinions regarding service, facilities, staff and location. Through identifying and determining satisfaction levels from the information collated, satisfaction management and improvements will then be discussed.

A quantitative research method has been adopted for the purpose of this study and a specifically designed questionnaire distributed to current and past clients of the facility. On completion of twenty valid questionnaires the analysed data will be used to measure current satisfaction levels, while allowing respondents the opportunity to offer their opinion on how the facility and service could be improved.

High levels of satisfaction were found where service offering and staff were concerned, however the facility evaluation exposed a weakness where cleanliness and maintenance were concerned. Overall satisfaction levels however were not affected by this weakness as an average score of 8.85 was received out of a maximum of 10. The end result of this research project was to examine, identify and manage satisfaction levels going forward, which has been achieved.
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Introduction

The sport and leisure industry is one highly sensitive to economic factors. In 2008 as consumer spending dropped, it coincided with the sharpest fall in sport participation, especially in individual sporting activities, such as gym usage. Evidence of this fall in active participation is strongly linked to income levels, and in today’s economic environment, in order to survive, it is imperative to address these issues (Irish Sports Monitor, 2008). With liquidators currently being appointed to Total Fitness gym chain in Dublin, following closure of three leisure facilities and loss of over 100 jobs, the sensitivity of the service industry to economic impacts is all too evident. (The Irish Times, 2011)

While participation levels in leisure activities are decreasing, and the Irish economy is only showing signs of a very slow recovery with forecasted GNP of 0.25% in 2011, business survival in this sector has never been more difficult (ESRI, 2010). In maintaining a secure foothold in the marketplace, customer service is often seen as a tool to achieve this. Customer service helps gain competitive advantage, as it is seen as a differentiation strategy that cannot be easily imitated (McGuinn, 2009).

For the purpose of this research project, a selection of clients from Aspire, both current and past, have completed a satisfaction survey. In operation since January 2008, Aspire is a custom designed sports and fitness conditioning centre with accommodation and dining facilities. The service offering includes personal training, team and group sessions, team building events and weekend training camps.
Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

This research project investigates customer service management and how to maintain high satisfaction levels among customers. In order to analyse this, a questionnaire was developed for a sports performance facility, Aspire, in order to meet the following objectives:

- **Objective 1**: To examine customer opinions regarding service, facilities, staff and location
- **Objective 2**: To identify levels of satisfaction and how these can be improved

The purpose of this literature review is to gain an understanding into how to meet customer needs and how to ensure continued presence in the marketplace. In achieving the aims and objectives of this study, the areas of research are as follows:

- Defining customer service and satisfaction
- Measuring customer satisfaction
- Customer satisfaction reports
- Web-based research and survey methods

In order to determine whether an organisation is providing a service that exceeds that of competitors, and meeting the needs and expectations of their customers, it is important to have policies in place to measure and manage the levels of customer satisfaction. In monitoring these levels it will provide an organisation with feedback from customers and help to develop service standards based on findings *(McKinsey, 2001)*.
1.2 Customer Service

A current trend in the area of customer service is to have a customer charter in place to outline an organisation’s customer care policy. In their mission to “plan, lead and coordinate the sustainable development of competitive and recreational sport in Ireland”, the Irish Sports Council (ISC), have set out twelve guiding principles.

This policy outlines what defines a quality customer service and the importance of monitoring and reviewing these guidelines, which can be summarised as follows:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>To publish a customer charter and to display prominently at all service points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>To eliminate all barriers to service, such as poverty, social exclusion and geographical factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>To provide clean public offices accessible to all and in line with health and safety standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>To be proactive in provision of information to all in a simplistic manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>To foster a climate of mutual respect in dealing with the public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>To maintain an effective complaints procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>To deal fairly with appeals in a simple to use procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>To ensure the needs of the public are met and provide choice in delivery service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>To use emerging technologies to ensure improved service delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>To provide quality service in either English or Irish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>To foster a coordinated approach to service delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>To ensure staff are seen as internal customers and properly supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Irish Sports Council Customer Charter)
The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government also have a policy in place entitled Customer Service Action Plan 2009-2011, which was compiled in 2009. As outlined in the departments Statement of Strategy 2008-2010 their aim is to provide a “quality, efficient and effective service to all our customers”. The twelve Quality Customer Service Principles in their action plan are summarised as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Service Standards</th>
<th>A published statement of service quality displayed for customers information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equality / Diversity</td>
<td>To ensure equal treatment to all and to help eliminate barriers to services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Access</td>
<td>To provide a clean environment accessible to all including those with specific needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>To provide clear, timely and accurate information to meet the customers requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeliness and Courtesy</td>
<td>To foster a climate of mutual customer and provide respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints</td>
<td>To maintain an accessible, transparent complaints system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeals</td>
<td>As with complaints system, to maintain an easy to use system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation and Evaluation</td>
<td>To provide a structured approach to service delivery and ongoing evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
<td>To provide options to customers with regard to service delivery such as opening hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official Languages Equality</td>
<td>To provide quality service to customers in their own language where possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Co-ordination</td>
<td>To create a co-ordinated approach to service delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Customer</td>
<td>To see staff as internal customers and provide the same quality service as external customers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Customer Service Action Plan 2009-2011)*

While the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government may not be directly linked to the leisure industry in Ireland, the above guidelines can be closely linked with the previous Irish Sports Council examples. As both customer charters appear to follow generic strategies, therefore it can be assumed that these are considered best practice across a number of industries and provide a basis for customer service procedures in a business environment.
1.3 Customer Satisfaction

In measuring customer satisfaction, one invaluable report sourced was the European Primer on Customer Satisfaction Management carried out by the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN) in 2008. EUPAN are an informal network responsible for public administration in the member states of the European Union and the European Commission. (www.eupan.eu)

Intending to provide organisations across member states with a practical guide in customer satisfaction management, the report is divided into five areas, as follows:

- The changing face of public services and the role of the citizen / customer
- Understanding customer satisfaction
- From satisfaction measurement to satisfaction management
- How to measure and manage customer satisfaction
- Customer satisfaction management and improvement

The report discusses the demands of society and the ever changing needs of the citizen or customer in relation to government departmental services. EUPAN state that they need to manage needs and expectations of the public more efficiently, through customer involvement. With customers availing of high quality, low-cost services from leading airlines and supermarkets, their government service expectations rise in accordance with these benchmark levels. (European Primer on Customer Satisfaction Management, 2009)

In understanding customer satisfaction a number of difficulties may be met in determining satisfaction levels. As it is dynamic in nature, raised levels of awareness and customers becoming vocal about their needs, the levels of satisfaction are prone to fluctuation. In a service offering where intangibility is a factor, expressing dissatisfaction is often easier than to actually pinpoint reasons for satisfaction. Should this be the case and a reason for satisfaction cannot be determined, it may be perceived as a negative experience on analysis.
A measure that can be used in determining customer satisfaction is the Disconfirmation Theory. This takes the service the customer expects to receive, and what they feel they have received, and the difference between these two areas is called the service quality gap.

This model and theory determines whether customer expectations are met and exceeded, or if they have not been reached. It is seen as a starting point in developing customer satisfaction strategies, using customer needs and expectations as the first step, and in measuring levels of satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction management can be defined as “the input of the citizens / customers in all their roles and at all stages of the cycle”, (European Primer on Customer Satisfaction Management, 2009). This means that the customer will be involved at the first stage of defining their expectations and needs, right through to policy formation, decision making and implementation.

Methods to measure and manage customer satisfaction are as follows:

- Develop a strategy for service user consultation
- Use appropriate research methods
- Ensure research methods are of use for the purpose
- Various methods for gaining insight
In order to get valid feedback from customers, methods have to be consistent and standardised. This will allow for accurate measurement of data collected. In collecting research data, it is important to use appropriate methods. Quantitative methods are useful in compilation of statistical data, and can isolate specific areas to allow comparison between groups. However if a more detailed insight into opinions, and to provide a depth of understanding, qualitative methods are more of benefit.

To ensure methods are suitable for the purpose, it is important to look at who the respondents will be. In order to achieve the maximum number of responses possible, accessibility is a key factor. If the chosen method is an online survey, it may not be suitable for determining satisfaction in relation to local services for older people in the community. In this instance it may be more suitable to utilise employees in conducting face to face interviews in order to measure and manage satisfaction levels appropriately.

In conclusion emphasis is placed on the importance of communication when implementing a policy or revised service, and to turn the information gathered through customer satisfaction measurement and management into action. The overall concept of satisfaction management is an ongoing process, and in a dynamic environment will need constant monitoring and evaluation and feedback to succeed.
1.4 Customer Satisfaction Reports

In 2010 Chelmsford Borough Council published a report on customer satisfaction levels at the Riverside Leisure Centre. This is an impressive survey that actively seeks to identify issues and respond to these in order to meet the needs of the local population. (Chelmsford Borough Council, 2011)

In carrying out the survey, Riverside engaged in the task of carrying out research into customer satisfaction levels within their facility. In doing so they defined the population that were to be included in the survey and decided on methodology. The methods used were an online survey which was linked to all borough council websites, direct email to 1,000 customers, direct email to Councils Corporate Citizens Panel and hard copies were available at facility reception. This variety of methods was supported by use of press release in local media in order to raise the profile of survey. Out of the 310 respondents in 2010, 83% were online web-based and 17% were hard copy based which shows a complete turnaround from 2006 when a previous survey was carried out and 31% were web-based and 69% hard copy.

Due to the major turnaround in response methods in surveying, and the embracing of technological advances, this example indicates that web-based surveys are a valid and accepted measuring tool in customer satisfaction.
1.5 Web-Based Research and Survey Methods

In the current era of technological advances, the barriers to web-based research in time past are almost completely eradicated by current progressions.

Web-Based Research Tools and Techniques (Albrecht & Jones, 2007) examines the advantages and disadvantages of online research methods. Although it was presented in 2007, the information discussed is still relevant in today’s environment. The advantages and disadvantages outlined are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to reach a greater population</td>
<td>Concerns with data integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible to a larger number and to those with specific needs</td>
<td>Initial development time and cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility and control over format</td>
<td>Data security issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to complete by participants</td>
<td>Limited internet access for some people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More cost and time efficient than traditional methods</td>
<td>Technical problems with internet connections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to these advantages, a more current online document (www.restore.ac.uk) includes anonymity and data accuracy, while disadvantages include the addition of sample bias where the researcher is using a select population group as opposed to a random selection. Drop-out rates are also an issue and tend to be prevalent where a questionnaire exceeds 10-15 questions (Harris, 1997).

Ethical issues such as privacy and confidentiality are also issues to be taken into consideration, as unintentionally collecting or sharing data can be seen as an invasion of privacy. The overall consensus however is that while there are disadvantages to online research, the advantages outweigh these, and that by showing responsibility, every researcher and selecting the most suited methodology can overcome any negative issues.
1.6 Summary

On overall analysis of the research reviewed for this study the findings outline the importance of customer service quality in attaining customer satisfaction. In relation to customer satisfaction it is important to have measures in place to determine levels among customers, and in turn then to manage this satisfaction. As stated by EUPAN (2009) it is important to have the customer part of the decision making process in policy and service creation and implementation as it contributes towards it being successful.

As customer satisfaction is the most important factor in the competitive market, with benefits such as loyalty, repeat purchase, customer retention, recommendations to friends and family, and the reduced cost of retaining a customer versus sourcing a new customer (www.anthilonline.com), the need for a proactive strategy in any organisation is a must. In our current economic climate where survival equals success, having a differentiation strategy where an organisation can offer a unique service or high quality service, places them above their competitors.

Measuring and managing of customer satisfaction may be a complex and ongoing responsibility, and while it may put pressure on resources such as financial and staff, it is a process that will benefit the on-going success of an organisation if correctly implemented.

This research will focus on applying the literature reviewed in a practical manner to determine levels of customer satisfaction within an organisation. It will also discuss strategies to measure and manage these levels in order to provide a high quality customer service, and as a result gain competitive advantage in an increasingly difficult business environment.
Methodology

2.1 Introduction

Outlined in the methodology are six definitive sections. These detail the process of measuring customer satisfaction with service offering at Aspire, the facility under evaluation. Also discussed in this section are methods used to gather information and issues that need to be considered, such as ethical considerations and limitations to research and analysis. This is a step-by-step process that is necessary in order to manage satisfaction levels and to develop policies to ensure the needs and expectations of customers are being met.

2.2 Research Methods

In carrying out research, the main methods used are quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative methods are ideal for use in an area where statistical data will be compiled as a result of the research, as a wider sample group can be reached. In using this method the findings are quite clear cut and can be readily analysed. As stated by Hoepfl (1997), quantitative research is where methods and measures are used to test hypothetical theories and generalisations. Therefore it will confirm or contradict management perceptions on customer satisfaction.

Qualitative methods are used to provide a deeper understanding into consumer opinions. This method gives a greater amount of feedback, however responses are often not a simple case of yes or no answers. This method can be more time consuming in terms of researching and analysis, although the findings are more detailed, providing a greater insight into satisfaction measurement. (Sanchez, 2006)

For the purpose of this research project a quantitative approach has been used. The aim is to reach the widest sample group possible and to achieve the highest amount of responses. As there have been no previous research studies carried out at the facility it was decided that in using a quantitative approach it will give a statistical result, indicating areas and levels of customer satisfaction. Once the results have been compiled and analysed, if further research is required, a quantitative approach may be adopted.
2.3 Sample Group

In order to collect valid information for research purposes it is important to identify the sample group or population that will be completing the survey or questionnaire. A stratified random sampling procedure has been used in order to ensure representation of population subgroups. (Hopkins, 2008) For the purpose of this research project, the sample group will be customers of the facility, and representing subgroups as follows:

- personal training clients
- team building event customers
- group training sessions
- overnight visitors who avail of accommodation and dining services

To achieve an overall snapshot of how experiences with service measure up to expectations, regardless of the nature or duration of stay, customers will be questioned on satisfaction levels with service, facilities, staff and location of Aspire.

2.4 Procedure

As a substantial number of respondents were required in order to compile an analysis across all manner of visitor to the facility, both a web-based and a hard copy questionnaire were made available. The preferred method of response would be web-based as it facilitates ease of analysis upon completion. However, having a hard copy available enabled those with barriers to internet access, the opportunity to be part of the study.

Having piloted the questionnaire to persons non-related to the facility, and receiving clarity in the comprehensiveness of the questionnaire, it was then distributed online and to those completing a hard copy. The questionnaire was distributed to a minimum of ten of each type of visitor to the facility, and in order to avoid biased sample. A timeframe for their completion was determined in order to allow for analysis to take place.
2.5 Ethical Considerations

A number of ethical issues can arise when asked to complete a survey. A primary concern for many respondents is privacy and confidentiality. If worried about confidentiality, a respondent may not be completely honest in their answering, as they may not wish to offend those generating the survey, and this can lead to invalid responses. (Albrecht & Jones, 2007)

The questionnaire is to determine satisfaction levels and is being conducted on a quantitative basis, therefore the need for further examination into respondents’ deeper opinions will not be required at this time.

As the main aim of this survey is to measure customer satisfaction, which is seen as a non-sensitive topic, it is hoped that by informing respondents on how the information they are providing will be analysed and developed into policies and practices to improve on customer service and satisfaction, therefore allowing for open and non-biased responses.

2.6 Limitations

In order to achieve maximum number of responses for the purpose of this study, a more concise, quantitative questionnaire was selected. The disadvantage with this however is that a deeper understanding of customer behaviours and expectations will not be addressed at this time. Having weighed up the advantages and disadvantages, the limitations of quantitative research methods were less that those of qualitative. Also in the timeframe allocated, the chosen method allows for ease of analysis, as opposed to a qualitative approach.

By selecting only one research method, the depth of responses can be limited. This can be dealt with through analysing responses from quantitative surveying and determining areas that may benefit from further analysis. An example could be poor satisfaction rating regarding facility equipment. Prior to investing in new equipment to conduct qualitative research in order to determine what customers are looking for and what they need as opposed to using financial resources to purchase equipment which may not be used.
2.7 Method of Analysis

In analysing the results of completed questionnaires the first area will be client profile. This area is sub-divided into gender, age, employment status and type of visitor to Aspire. Following this are questions based on experience in Aspire, marketing and future use of the facility. In determining satisfaction levels, a rating scale style question is used to examine the main areas of the organisation with regard to service, staff, facilities and location.

Once the data has been collated, the findings will be presented in graph format, and can be seen in the results section of this research project.

2.8 Conclusion

As a result of material researched within the literature review, the importance of measuring customer satisfaction became increasingly apparent. The nature of the service industry in particular leisure, is dynamic in nature, and customer service satisfaction can often be the only factor in maintaining loyalty among customers.

In measuring satisfaction levels a quantitative research method was selected in order to achieve a large number of respondents. The sample group was selected from past and existing customers of the facility. On receiving results and analysing, findings are then to be displayed in graph format, and further discussed in this study.
Results

3.1 Introduction

Outlined in this section are the results from both web-based and hard copies which were distributed to customers of Aspire. Out of the twenty questionnaires completed, 35% were hard copy and 65% were from those who participated in the online survey created on www.freeonlinesurveys.com. The results are combined and not analysed on the basis of methods used by customers to complete questionnaire, as it is a non-relevant factor.

3.2 Respondents Profile

The first area of the questionnaire focussed on the respondents’ profile. This was in order to get a background into the type of respondent and to create comparisons and contrasts in how they perceived customer satisfaction levels.

3.2.1 Gender

A. Male
B. Female

The gender balance of respondents here can be seen to be a greater number of females at 65% (13 respondents), and 35% male (7 respondents).
3.2.2 Age

A. Under 18
B. 18-25
C. 26-32
D. 33-40
E. 40+

The above graph displays the number of respondents, non-gender specific, by number of respondents in each age category. Only one respondent was under the age of 18 (5%), two were aged 18-25 (10%), four were aged 26-32 (20%), six respondents were aged 33-40 (30%), and the largest age group that responded to the questionnaire were aged 40 and above, with 7 responding (35%).
In examining employment status among customers responding to the questionnaire, it was found that the largest percentage were employed at 45% (9 respondents), followed by those who are unemployed at 25% (5 respondents), self-employed at 20% (4 respondents), and students at 10% (2 respondents).
3.2.4 Give reason for visit to Aspire

A. Personal training (one-to-one)
B. Team / group training sessions
C. Team building event (day)
D. Overnight event at Aspire
E. Non-sport related event

According to the results of this questionnaire, the largest number of respondents visit Aspire for the purpose of group or team training sessions, with 9 respondents selecting this option (45%). The next largest group were those attending personal training sessions with 7 respondents (35%), followed by 4 respondents attending a team building day (20%). Although the questionnaire was distributed to a wide selection of Aspire customers, including those who attended weekend or overnight events, there were no respondents, nor those who participated in a non-sport related event.
3.3 Customer Service & Awareness

This section of the questionnaire examines the level of awareness of Aspire and how their facilities are perceived by customers. It also examines how well received the service offering is among clients and overall levels of satisfaction.

3.3.1 How did you hear about Aspire?

A. TV advertising
B. Newspaper
C. Sports publication
D. Website
E. Facebook
F. Word of mouth
G. Recommendation from existing client
H. Other

The only significant method of raised awareness among customers of Aspire appears to be as a result of ‘word of mouth’, with 12 respondents (60%) selecting this option as the way in which they heard about the facility. Recommendation from existing client and other were both selected by 3 respondents each (15%), and newspaper and sports publication were selected by one person each (5%). Television advertising, website and Facebook were not selected by any respondents.
### 3.3.2 Customer opinions on facility and related performance at Aspire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very poor</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>As expected</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Doesn't apply</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall service</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Range of services available</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opening hours</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Value for money</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality of instructors</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff friendliness</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff availability</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facility maintenance</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facility cleanliness</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equipment</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Changing facilities</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accommodation</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dining services</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accessibility by road</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parking facilities</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Road signage</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table displays the percentage on customer perceptions in relation to facility and staff. Highlighted in green are those areas that performed higher than 60% in the ‘very good’ category, and the areas highlighted in red refer to any areas that received a ‘poor’ mark in relation to performance. The main areas that performed at a very high level were staff and overall satisfaction, and the areas that performed at a poor level were in relation to facility maintenance and cleanliness.
3.3.3 Overall satisfaction on a scale of 0 to 10

The overall satisfaction with Aspire calculated as an average of combined individual scoring was 8.85 out of a maximum of 10.

3.3.4 Do you use / have you used Aspires website?

A. Yes
B. No

Out of 20 respondents who completed the questionnaire, only 3 people (15%) have used the facility website. The table below (3.3.5) displays how those that have used the website rate it with regard to how useful they found it.

3.3.5 How useful was the website in relation to the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very poor</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>As expected</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upcoming events</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; fitness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pricing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enquiries</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4 Future use of Aspire and Recommendations

This section examines how clients feel about recommending the facility to a friend and whether they see themselves as a future client of Aspire. Also examined in the form of open questioning are the reasons for the above responses. At the end of this section the option to submit any suggestions in relation to improving the facility was provided.

3.4.1 How likely would you be to recommend Aspire to a friend?

A. Definitely would
B. Probably would
C. Undecided
D. Probably would not
E. Definitely would not

The above table clearly displays a definitive response in that 17 respondents (85%) would recommend the facility to a friend. While one person was undecided (5%), there were no respondents who selected ‘probably would not’ or ‘definitely would not’.
3.4.2 Reasons for recommending Aspire to a friend

In response to the open ended question regarding why clients would recommend Aspire to a friend, the majority of responses were in relation to the service they were provided with. This question was posed in order to further examine how the client felt about the facility and service offering and what drove them to positive recommendation. Below is a sample of responses received in relation to personal training, group training sessions, team building event and a general comment on Aspire.

“Staff friendliness goes a long way to making your workout more enjoyable - as well as improving fitness you can have a good time.”

“Circuit training is excellent, trainers are very motivating, you work on core and cardio and it doesn't feel like an hour of exercise!”

“Very beneficial from a number of aspects from the training of a team to team building. Also Joe Quinn is an excellent guy who is very knowledgeable and professional to deal with.”

“Brilliant gym, local business, staff always on hand and friendly.”
3.4.3 How likely are you to use Aspire in the next 6 months?

A. Definitely will be
B. Probably will be
C. Undecided
D. Probably will not be
E. Definitely will not be

The quantitative response to whether clients saw themselves using Aspire in the next six months was varied in opinion with 8 respondents (40%) saying that they definitely would be, 4 respondents (20%) probably would be, 6 respondents (30%) were undecided. While no one stated that they definitely would not return, there were 2 respondents (10%) that probably would not be using the facility in six months time.
3.4.4 Reasons for using / not using Aspire in the next six months

As the responses to the previous question were varied, therefore the open ended questions led to a selection of positive and negative responses in relating to future use of the facility. Below is a selection of responses received.

“I need to get back into training and this is the only place that I would feel comfortable doing it and above all, I trust them.”

“Weekly circuits are excellent. Always have a good workout and feel better when I leave, look forward to sessions.”

“Might change to outdoor sports when weather improves.”

“If I return to work won't have time.”

“I am not currently involved with a team, have taken a temporary break.”

“Players have no money.”

3.4.5 Suggestions to improve customer experience at Aspire

This final section in the questionnaire was also an open ended question to allow clients to offer their opinion on how to improve their experience. As an optional question, only four responses were received. Two of these responses were related to improved cleanliness of the facility, both internally and externally, one was to continuously improve the outdoor standard of the complex, and the last comment was to provide greater variety in ladies fitness classes, for example kettle-bell classes or boxing.
Discussion

4.1 Introduction

Having based the literature review on customer service and satisfaction, and the importance of customer satisfaction management, this section takes the findings from the customer satisfaction survey completed by customers of Aspire. Also examined are opinions and thoughts regarding whether service expectations are being met. On collecting data and further analysing, identifying these levels became the first step in managing customer satisfaction and methods of improvement.

4.2 Objective 1: To examine customer opinions regarding service, facilities, staff and location at Aspire

In examining customer opinions, the first stage was to define a profile or background. The questions that were posed in this area were gender, age, employment status and reason for visiting the facility. This allowed for further cross-examination of findings through selecting, for example, male or female respondents only, and comparing responses regarding equipment or service.

4.2.1 Client profile

The main findings in this section were that the majority, 65% of respondents, were female. Of that percentage 54% were aged 40+, 46% were employed and 62% were attending Aspire for group training sessions. The predominant male profile taken from the 35% who responded to the questionnaire were as follows; 43% were in the 33-40 age category, 43% were employed and 57% visited Aspire for a team building event.

Having identified a profile for clients who responded to the questionnaire, the key question in determining satisfaction levels was question 6 (see appendix 1). This question provided a rating scale question where respondents could select from five options ranging from very poor to very good in relation to service, staff, facility and location.
4.2.2 Satisfaction levels with service, staff, facility and location

In table 3.3.2 (p.25) highlighted in green are the areas that performed at a ‘very good’ level, and in red those that received poor marking. The areas that performed over 60% were related mainly to staff, their performance and knowledge, overall service and range of services available.

- Overall service 80%
- Range of services available 75%
- Opening hours 75%
- Value for money 70%
- Quality of instructors 90%
- Staff friendliness 90%
- Staff availability 75%
- Parking facilities 65%

The areas that underperformed were all related to the facility and access. While no area received a ‘very poor’ mark, the following received a ‘poor’ mark from the percentage of respondents below:

- Facility maintenance 10%
- Facility cleanliness 15%
- Changing facilities 15%
- Parking facilities 5%
- Road signage 10%

As discussed by McGuinn (2009), an exceptional service offering can provide an organisation with a competitive advantage. In analysing the survey results, Aspire appears to be meeting clients needs as far as service being provided is concerned. While this is necessary for survival in a highly competitive leisure market, dissatisfaction with facility maintenance and cleanliness may detract from this perceived success over a period of time.
Upon further analysis of the findings in this section, and in taking male versus female responses in relation to service and staff, both genders scored either ‘good’ or ‘very good’ for all areas, with the exception of opening hours and value for money, which 14% and 28% respectively of males found these to be ‘as expected’, and 8% and 15% of females also found them ‘as expected’.

In relation to the negative ‘poor’ marking received regarding facility and cleanliness, the results display a greater gender divide, with only one male respondent rating the facility ‘poor’ in relation to cleanliness. In contrast to this, 15% of female respondents rated the facility poor in relation to each of the following; facility maintenance, facility cleanliness, changing facilities and parking facilities.

The overall satisfaction rating (question 7) was 8.85 when taking all respondents into account, and on analysing based on gender differentiation the following averages were the result:

- Male respondents overall satisfaction 8.57%
- Female respondents overall satisfaction 9%

These results may be seen to contradict those in the previous section where 15% of female respondents rated the facility poor on cleanliness and maintenance, yet overall satisfaction was higher than that of male respondents.

4.2.3 Web users

In taking the twenty clients of Aspire that responded to the questionnaire, only three of them had visited the facility website on any occasion. Of those that had used the website, all three respondents were male. The questionnaire was designed as both web-based and available also as hard copy in order to facilitate completion by a wider target group. The percentage that responded electronically was 65% (13 respondents) versus 35% (7 respondents) who completed a hard copy of the questionnaire. This is statistical evidence that although 65% of respondents are known internet users, yet only 15% have used the facility website.
4.2.4 Future use and recommendation of the facility

In recommending the facility to a friend, 85% (17 respondents) said that they ‘definitely would’ do so. From the remaining 15%, two respondents stated that they ‘probably would’ recommend Aspire to a friend (1 male, 1 female), and one respondent was ‘undecided’ (female).

The reasons that clients felt confident in recommending the facility appeared to be due to the quality of service being offered and their desire to share this with friends. Female responses were based on trainer and staff friendliness, and the ‘fun’ element of working out, whereas male respondents seemed to focus on the knowledge and professionalism of staff.

In relation to future use of the facility the results weren’t as definitive, with only 40% saying that they ‘definitely would’ be using Aspire in the next six months. The remaining 60% comprised 20% ‘probably would be’, 30% were ‘undecided’ and 10% ‘probably would not’ be using the facility in six months time. The reasons for not using the facility varied from changing exercise to outdoors in the summer, time constraints, and financial reasons.

The final section on the questionnaire was an open-ended question where clients could make suggestions anonymously on how the facility and service could be improved. Only 4 respondents (20%) offered their opinions, of which two were related to overall cleanliness, one to improve outdoor facilities, and one to have a greater variety of ladies classes on offer.
4.3  **Objective 2: To identify levels of satisfaction and how these can be improved**

Having examined the findings in the previous section, identifying satisfaction levels is the next stage is customer satisfaction management (*EUPAN, 2009*). This involves taking the results and analysing further to determine trends or patterns throughout. As there was a significant difference in the number of male and female respondents, 35% male versus 65% female, satisfaction levels were viewed as overall and gender specific figures in the previous section (4.2). Below these findings are going to be displayed comparatively in order to gain a snapshot of satisfaction levels, in order to determine those that need to improve.

4.3.1  **Overall satisfaction levels with service, staff, facility and location**

Below are average percentages selected by gender in relation to areas of satisfaction within the facility, in comparison with overall figures. Where stated non-applicable it is due to the fact that no female clients had used dining and accommodation facilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>Overall (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall service</td>
<td>97.14</td>
<td>93.85</td>
<td>95.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services available</td>
<td>91.43</td>
<td>96.92</td>
<td>95.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening hours</td>
<td>86.67</td>
<td>96.92</td>
<td>93.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value for money</td>
<td>85.71</td>
<td>92.31</td>
<td>90.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of instructors</td>
<td>94.29</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>98.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff friendliness</td>
<td>96.67</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>98.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff availability</td>
<td>93.33</td>
<td>96.92</td>
<td>95.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility maintenance</td>
<td>86.67</td>
<td>80.00</td>
<td>82.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility cleanliness</td>
<td>83.33</td>
<td>78.46</td>
<td>80.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment</td>
<td>90.00</td>
<td>92.31</td>
<td>91.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing facilities</td>
<td>83.33</td>
<td>74.55</td>
<td>77.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>93.33</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>93.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dining services</td>
<td>90.00</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>90.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility by road</td>
<td>88.57</td>
<td>93.33</td>
<td>91.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking facilities</td>
<td>88.57</td>
<td>92.31</td>
<td>91.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road signage</td>
<td>71.43</td>
<td>81.67</td>
<td>77.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.2 Male, female and combined satisfaction levels

Displayed on the chart below is a comparison of three groups; overall figures, male and female independently. For the purpose of this, accommodation and dining have been excluded, as without female respondents there is no basis for comparison.

![Satisfaction Levels Chart]

This chart shows that satisfaction levels are above 70% in relation to all areas of the facility and service being provided to the client. According to EPSI rating (2004) the range of customer satisfaction can be evaluated as follows:

- Unacceptable 0-55%
- Very bad 55-60%
- Bad 60-65%
- Medium 65-75%
- Good 75-80%
- Very good 80-85%
- Perfect 85-100%
In following these guiding figures and examining table 4.3.1 (p.35), once again it is areas such as service and staff that score in excess of 85%, by both male and female respondents, with the exception of facility maintenance which was rated 87% by male respondents only. The areas that score 65-75%, which is considered medium on a satisfaction scale, were road signage with 71% (male respondents), and changing facilities with 75% (female respondents). Areas that received 75-80%, which are considered good, were facility maintenance with 80% and facility cleanliness with 78%, both rated by female respondents.

4.3.3 Summary

In managing customer satisfaction levels and having in place monitoring and evaluating strategies, areas that are falling below acceptable levels can be detected before they become an issue for an organisation, which can lead to dissatisfaction among customers.

Considering that Aspire opened in January 2008, the statistics relating to satisfaction levels with maintenance, cleanliness and changing facilities raise concern issues and require immediate attention. While it is possible to further discuss a gender divide with this dissatisfaction, and state that female expectations may be higher, it also has to be noted that a greater number of respondents were female. As Aspire holds fitness classes specifically for female groups, there are periods where the majority attending on a week-to-week basis are female. Due to this it is important to listen to the customer, regardless of gender, and meet their needs and expectations.
Recommendations

As a result of the findings discussed in the previous section, the first recommendation would be to put in place standard operating procedures in relation to health and safety standards throughout the facility, both internally and externally. ILAM, which is the Irish industry body for all leisure, aquatic, outdoor and health facilities, provides training followed by accreditation when expected standards are met, through implementing standards throughout the facility. While they are more commonly linked to facilities with water based activities, their policies and health and safety standards are transferrable across the industry, providing a high standard of health and safety standards which can be applied at operational and management levels.

The Optimus programme, operated by Fáilte Ireland is a multi-tiered programme offering a practical approach to achieving excellence. There are three stages at which success and progress is awarded from service excellence, mark of best practice, and business excellence awards. Involvement in this programme could guide Aspire in providing a more consistent service to clients, especially with accommodation, dining and health and safety standards.

As best practice is a key factor in the Optimus programme, a common trend among promoting a culture of customer care is by having a customer charter in place. As outlined in the literature review of this research project, the Irish Sports Council have in place a comprehensive customer charter. While not all guidelines on this charter may be relevant to a facility such as Aspire, many of them are transferrable across industries. The following are ways in which Aspire can adopt the guidelines set out by the ISC and to put implement them as part of an ongoing strategy:

- To publish a customer charter and display on premises
- To eliminate barriers and make the facility accessible to all
- To provide a clean and safe environment for visitors
- To foster a respectful climate and ensure customer and staff needs are being met
- To maintain effective complaints procedures
- Use a co-ordinated approach to service delivery and strive for continuous improvement
In relation to marketing Aspire, according to questionnaire results, only 15% of respondents have used the facility website. These results reinforce the importance of directing traffic to a company website, and that simply having web presence is not sufficient in the current business environment.

As the website is not publicised or updated on a regular basis, managing and possibly redesigning its functions making it more interactive could lead to increased traffic. In providing increased functions regarding the website, the addition of a ‘rate my stay’ section could be used to give immediate feedback from those who have visited the facility as an overnight guest. Not limiting this solely to overnight visitors to the facility, a general feedback function could be a cost effective way of maximising feedback and increasing website traffic.

Tying in with the digital age, ways to reach a wider market area, and adopting cost leadership strategies, use of social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter can raise company profile. While Aspire currently has a Facebook profile it has not been updated in over a year. Competitors in the area have social network site presence and are using it to their advantage through regular status updates regarding fitness classes and future events. In order for Aspire to engage people and remain in their minds, it is important to see how competitors are doing this and take it one step further.

While advertising in the past has included sports publications, newspapers, television and radio advertising, this does not appear to have made an impact on the market area. Methods of valid and successful advertising for Aspire will require further analysis prior to future marketing initiatives. With 60% of clients hearing about the facility through ‘word of mouth’, it is an area that can be examined and further utilised in order to increase sales for Aspire. A reward scheme could be created where recommending a friend could entitle the client to a complementary personal training session and fitness evaluation.

In relation to recommending Aspire to a friend, the facility rates highly at 85%, however only 40% of clients definitely see themselves using the facility in six months time. As the remaining 60% clients and are currently using the facility, it is important to maintain their custom and ensure their expectations are being surpassed in order to engage them as future clients.
Conclusion

Overall the findings of this research project outlined the importance of offering a high quality service, how to meet customer needs and expectations and how to successfully manage satisfaction levels. In relation to Aspire, where a facility evaluation was conducted in order to determine satisfaction levels across all aspects of the facility, results were outlined, examined and analysed in order to identify areas where improvements could be made.

While there were areas that performed very well in relation to satisfaction levels, it is important not to assume that no change is required. With the dynamic nature and changing trends in the leisure industry, close monitoring is vital. Through customer feedback, observing competitors, adopting cost leadership policies and implementing workable marketing strategies, these will help to ensure that what is working for an organisation will continue to work, and what is not meeting expectations can be rectified.

With spiralling customer service expectations, continuous updating of services and product are required in order to remain in a competitive position. A method as described by Palmer (2005) known as ‘blueprinting’ (Kingman-Brundage, 1989) has three elements in allowing analysis of the service framework:

- Identify the key functions required to distribute service and those responsible for this
- Define of how these functions occur
- Standard variations are defined and terms of variation so as not to affect customers perception of service quality

The main concept behind this process is in that all steps of the service process are clearly defined and communicated to all involved with the service offering, therefore reducing the risk of a negative customer experience.
In tying in with the literature review, having researched customer satisfaction and survey methods, the areas that required examination were successfully targeted in the questionnaire. However as quantitative research methods do have limitations, the results of this survey allows scope for further qualitative research to be conducted in relation to:

- customer retention due to only 40% of current clients definitely returning to Aspire
- advertising spend and web presence as a result of only 15% using the facility website

The combined results did provide a positive picture of the facility and its successful areas, and also outlined areas which require attention. With increased market choices, and higher demands for service quality, customer satisfaction measurement allows specific issues to be identified and corrected before it leads to losing a customer to a competitor. This research highlights the importance of regular monitoring and analysis, and listening to customers in order to maintain a strong position in the competitive market.

(www.customerfocusconsult.com).

“The gulf between satisfied customers and completely satisfied customers can swallow a business”. (Harvard Business Review, 1995)
References


Slattery, L. (18/03/2011). Liquidator Appointed to Total Fitness Gym chain as 100 Made Redundant. *The Irish Times*.


www.epsi-rating.com (11/03/2011)

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www.ilam.ie (10/03/2011)

www.optimus.ie (19/03/2011)
List of Abbreviations

GNP – Gross National Product

ESRI – Economic and Social Research Institute

ISC – Irish Sports Council

EUPAN – European Public Administration Network

EPSI – Extended Performance Satisfaction Index
Customer Satisfaction Questionnaire - Aspire

1. **Gender**
   - Male
   - Female

2. **Age**
   - Under 18
   - 18-25
   - 26-32
   - 33-40
   - 40+

3. **Employment status**
   - Student
   - Employed
   - Self-employed
   - Unemployed

4. **Please give reason for visit to Aspire**
   - Personal training (one-to-one)
   - Team / group training sessions
   - Team building event (day)
   - Overnight event at Aspire
   - Non-sport related event

5. **How did you hear about Aspire**
   - TV advertising
   - Newspaper
   - Sports publication
   - Website
   - Facebook
   - Word of mouth
   - Recommendation from existing client
   - Other (please specify)
Customer Satisfaction Questionnaire - Aspire

6. **Please give your opinion on how Aspire performs under the following headings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very poor</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>As expected</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Doesn’t apply</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall service</td>
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<td>Range of services available</td>
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<td>Opening hours</td>
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<td>Value for money</td>
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<td>Quality of instructors</td>
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<td>Staff availability</td>
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<td>Facility maintenance</td>
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<td>Cleanliness</td>
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<td>Changing facilities</td>
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<td>Accommodation</td>
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<td>Dining services</td>
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<td>Accessibility by road</td>
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<td>Parking facilities</td>
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<td>Road signage</td>
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7. **On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is poor and 10 is excellent, how would you rate your overall satisfaction with Aspire**

[ ]
Customer Satisfaction Questionnaire - Aspire

8. **Do you use / have you used Aspire's website**
   - Yes □
   - No □

9. **If yes, how useful was the website in relation to the following**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Very poor</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>As expected</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upcoming events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Health &amp; fitness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pricing</td>
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<td>Enquiries</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
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10. **How likely would you be to recommend Aspire to a friend**
   - Definitely would □
   - Probably would □
   - Undecided □
   - Probably would not □
   - Definitely would not □

11. **Please give reason for the above answer (Q.10)**

   

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Customer Satisfaction Questionnaire - Aspire

12. How likely are you to use Aspire in the next 6 months?
   - Definitely will be [ ]
   - Probably will be [ ]
   - Undecided [ ]
   - Probably will not be [ ]
   - Definitely will not be [ ]

13. Please give reason for above answer (Q.12)

   [ ]

14. Please add any suggestions you may have in order to improve your experience at Aspire

   [ ]

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.
Your feedback and opinions are greatly appreciated.