



Top of the League

Nominet is not a company that everyone will be familiar with but it affects nearly everyone in the country in one way or another. In this article, Juliette Dalitz shares the Nominet philosophy and explains why both customer and staff satisfaction are central to the success of the organisation.

Nominet operates at the heart of e-commerce in the UK, running one of the world's largest Internet registries and managing over nine million domain names. We maintain the register of .uk domain names. We run the technology which locates the computer hosting the web site or email system you're looking for when you type in a web address or send an email to an address that ends in .uk.

We have around 3000 registrars (companies who register domain names for their customers and over eight million individual registrants (domain name holders). We also have principles enshrined in our Articles of Association which require us to operate in a commercial manner (but to apply any funds raised solely to the objects and not to distribute any profits to members) and in the interests of the general public. Our customers include individuals with personal domain names, schools, charities, clubs, partnerships, sole traders, businesses (of all sizes) and Internet Service Providers.

We have strong business relationships with our registrars and are in touch with them almost every month in some form or other. In the main we don't deal directly with registrants unless they are having an issue with their domain name that they

need our help with. Our Customer Services team handles around 400 calls a day. We have a Registrar Relations team who liaise with our registrars and provide account management and 27 Customer Service Advisors who support both registrars and registrants with any support issues they have.

Market trends and challenges

We understand, like any business, that we will face challenges over the next few years. We are obviously dependent on there being a market for domain names and so future challenges are likely to be linked to any downturn or instability in the economic climate and potentially to changes in consumer behaviour. We are also in a very interesting time for Internet-related legal developments and new approaches will no doubt be needed in order for us to keep the Internet a free, safe and secure space for people to use and do business in.

In order to face these challenges, we have been researching the needs of our various stakeholders and will be adapting our service offering to better suit their needs. For example we are working on enabling domain names to be registered for one year periods (currently we operate a two

year registration period) and we are also closely watching the ICANN process for creating new generic Top Level Domain Names (gTLDs) in case there is an appropriate new market that we can develop for our customers.

Not for profit

Nominet is a not for profit organisation. We operate commercially but do not pay dividends to our members (i.e. our members are not shareholders). We invest profits back into the business and give donations to the Nominet Trust which is a charity set up by Nominet to support and fund initiatives that contribute to a safe, accessible Internet used to improve lives and communities. The Nominet Trust supports initiatives which provide

- (1) *web access - providing people with the motivation, skills and tools to get online in a meaningful and sustained way*
- (2) *web safety - improving understanding about the risks of being online and reducing Internet crime and abuse*
- (3) *web in society - imaginative applications of the Internet to address specific social problems.*



Within Nominet we have a technical research team which focuses on research and development for new and developing Internet related technologies. We participate in HOSTCOUNT++, the pan-European research initiative managed by RIPE NCC1 to provide monthly statistics on the number of hosts connected to the Internet in Europe and the surrounding areas. We are also one of the principal authors of OpenDNSSEC2 which enables users to use secure DNS extensions that prevent anyone from trying to spoof or intercept DNS traffic between computers.

Our Board of Directors is now nine strong (six non-executives, two executives & the chair). The Board makeup brings in

a wealth of experience from many different sectors. In-house we have a Senior Management Team (SMT) led by our Chief Executive Lesley Cowley OBE with the executive directors from each business area representing their teams. The SMT is responsible for developing our strategic approach for delivery of the company goals and objectives. We have an Operational Management Team (OMT) led by our Director of Operations, Eleanor Bradley that includes departmental managers representing all areas of the business. The OMT is responsible for managing project delivery within the business and for ensuring that our day-to-day activities support the company goals. We have 120 staff with the majority of these working in the

Operations and Technical departments. We recruit people with talent and drive who want to contribute to the success of the UK Internet.

Customer satisfaction surveys

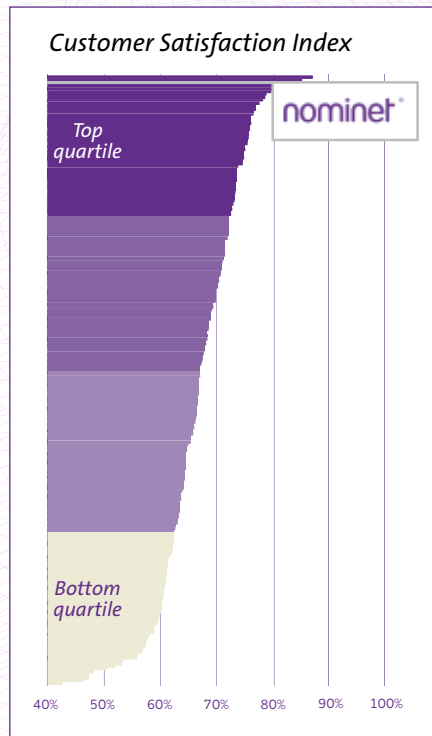
Customer service is extremely important to us and to support this we use The Leadership Factor to conduct three regular surveys to capture feedback from our customers. For our larger customers who benefit from the services of an account manager, we run the Account Manager survey. These customers are interviewed by telephone. We introduced this survey two years ago and the feedback has been really valuable to us. Our managers find



the verbatim comments particularly useful and our customers also welcome the opportunity to express their views. The conversational nature of the interviews combined with the option of anonymity means we gather information we may not have picked up otherwise. At six monthly intervals, we also conduct a web survey with registrants while simultaneously running a telephone survey with registrars. For us, this approach works well. For customers with whom we tend to have less interaction the web survey is less intrusive. It is also extremely cost effective as the survey is emailed to thousands of customers. To telephone this volume of customers would simply be out of our price range. Our registrars are invited to take part in a telephone survey. From time to time we review our methods of data collection to make sure they are still appropriate for us. The combination we run at the present time is working well. For instance, we used to survey registrars online but as time moved on, we decided that the verbatim comments gathered during personal interviews would really help us improve and give us that extra bit of insight.

Top of the league

Our staff are committed to making sure our customers receive a great standard of service. Since 2008 our registrar survey Customer Satisfaction Index has (with the exception of a one-off blip down to 89.6%) continually been over 90.0%, peaking at over 92.1%. (This places Nominet in the top 2% on The Leadership Factor's very large league table of customer satisfaction performance across all UK sectors – Ed.) For us, it is not necessarily about improving our score year after year (although it's great when we do improve) it is about maintaining these high standards and consistently performing well. For registrants, satisfaction is a little lower but still in the top quartile. Generally speaking, we



have consistently improved. We started with a CSI of 80.0% in 2005 and our index has been on an upward trend since then.

Although we do hold a unique position in being the only provider of .uk domain names we believe passionately that we should operate our service to the highest possible standards so that consumers and businesses using the UK Internet space can have the best possible experience. We measure satisfaction levels so that (a) we can ensure that we are focusing our attention on the things that matter most to our customers and (b) that any improvement activities that we work on will bring the maximum benefit possible to our customers. We carry out our surveys regularly in order to be able to monitor our progress and to measure the impact of any changes that we introduce. We use the results in our company wide balanced scorecard to give an indicator of our performance in the area of Customer Service.

Apart from the surveys we also have other initiatives to help us understand customers. We do other qualitative research, host focus groups, run workshops and other events and we have recently set up a .uk Policy Development Process which convenes Issue Groups to discuss policy issues and make consensus based recommendations.

Making improvements

We put our continuous improvement down to the fact that we maintain a focus on the areas where we need to improve. We trust in the survey and we trust in the results. Whilst we analyse the findings, we do not spend so much time cutting and slicing the results that we lose the meaning. We trust our judgement and our staff to concentrate on what really matters and 'keep the faith'. We have had many changes over the years and we understand that, from time to time, when we make big changes we may see a temporary change in our results. We are very open about our results and publish the findings on the Nominet website.

Our mission statement makes it clear what we are trying to achieve. Our mission is to make a positive difference to our stakeholders, driven by their needs and to fulfil our public purpose. We will do this by:

- *Being a driving force in shaping the development of the Internet in the UK and globally*
- *Delivering a safe and secure .uk*
- *Delivering excellence and innovation in our products and services*
- *Creating a company where our people are skilled, talented and engaged.*

The survey results play an important part in our organisation. They are used to set improvement targets for our Customer Service and Operational teams. They give



us insight into what is wowing our customers and what is not. They enable us to benchmark our performance against other companies that use the Leadership Factor's satisfaction index scoring mechanism.

Internal feedback

We religiously share the results with our people. We do presentations to everyone in Customer Services and share the reports with our manager community, Registrar Relations team, OMT and SMT. We focus on the business-impact matrix provided as part of The Leadership Factor's analysis which highlights quick wins and areas which will bring the maximum value to our customers. On top of this, we incentivise and reward people based on their work. One of the targets in our performance related pay is based on us achieving a certain minimum score in the annual surveys.

Happy people = happy customers

Keeping our people happy is also very important to us. Since Nominet's inception back in 1996 the company ethos has been to make our business a great place to work in order to attract the best possible employees. We take pride in our low staff turnover rate and feel that you need happy, challenged and focused people in order to be able to offer a consistently high level of service to our customers. It's a win/win for all of us. In order to do this, we focus on what really makes our people tick. We offer good training and development opportunities, a great employee benefits package, a family-friendly environment, fantastic office space and we try to be as open and transparent as we can be throughout the business.


One of the great benefits of this approach is that if our people feel valued and supported then they can use their skills and potential to the full which in turn ensures

that they deliver the best service they can to our customers. We have an incredibly loyal and hard working team of people here at Nominet who believe in doing the right thing for our customers. We are constantly looking for ways to improve and enhance our service but always try to keep our customers' needs in mind to ensure we deliver improvements that they benefit from. This results in our high levels of customer satisfaction.

Future goals

When it comes to our plans for the future, we want to sustain and develop trust in the UK Internet. We want to make the Internet a safer, more secure place for people to go about their business. We want to provide a best in class service to our customers. We want to deliver innovative new solutions and services to those that use .uk domain names. As for my role, I want to make Nominet an even stronger service provider and I hope to be able to lead and contribute to developments which will both improve our customers' experiences of the UK Internet and will highlight us as an example of best practice throughout the world. I really want to continue making a difference; making the UK Internet in particular a better place to be.

References:

1. The RIPE NCC is one of five Regional Internet Registries (RIRs) providing Internet resource allocations, registration services and co-ordination activities that support the operation of the Internet globally
2. OpenDNSSEC is software that manages the security of domain names on the Internet. The project intends to drive adoption of Domain Name System Security Extensions (DNSSEC) to further enhance Internet security. 



Juliette Dalitz

Head of Operations Support

Juliette joined Nominet in 1997, and was appointed Head of Operations Support in May 2010. Previously Juliette worked in Customer Support managing Nominet's Registrant Services department which provided support and advice to .uk domain name holders and the general public. She is now responsible for supporting the Operational teams to deliver end-to-end service excellence with a key focus on project delivery, business continuity and disaster recovery planning. Juliette and her colleagues at Nominet, who are based in Oxford, are extremely keen to meet other Customer Insight readers to benchmark their performance and share best practice. You can contact Juliette on 01865 332211 or by email her at Juliette.Dalitz@nominet.org.uk

For more information about Nominet: www.nominet.org.uk



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