The Problem with EFM: No one knows what it is! by Janet Taylor

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If the title of this article caught your attention you probably just said to yourself one of two things: "What the hell is EFM?" or, "I know what it means, but no one else does," both of which bear out my overall frustration for working under an industry heading no one understands.

OK, so for all of you who are dying to know, EFM stands for Enterprise Feedback Management, or as we in the industry like to say EFM systems. And yes, if you say this to anyone, their eyes will glaze over and they'll do practically anything to change the subject. If you're charming enough to hold their attention, you can even attempt to slide in a bit of additional explanation by quoting Wikipedia: "EFM is a system of processes and software that enables organizations to centrally manage deployment of surveys while dispersing authoring and analysis throughout an organization." Try it. I guarantee that you will have no friends or customers, and even strangers at dinner parties will pretend to be occupied with the veggie platter rather than talk to you.

For an industry that espouses the virtues of providing clients with clear information on their customers and markets, why have we accepted such an idiotic, meaningless label to describe what we do? It is obvious that whoever came up with the term EFM doesn't work directly in our industry because EFM simply doesn't resonate with customers. You'd be much better off saying what has worked from day-one, "We develop online survey software". At least people will understand what you're talking about.

The first time I heard the expression EFM was sometime back in 2007 when one of the boffins at Forrester contacted our company to help out with some research they were doing on the online survey industry. Sent to us, was a spreadsheet with a bunch of cells that we were asked us to fill out, which was all swell and fine. However, at the top of the spreadsheet was the heading Enterprise Feedback Management Vendors. I cringed, scratched my head, then picked up the phone and called our CTO. The conversation went something like this:

"Hey Dan, did you know we are a major player in the EFM market?"

"Terrific. What is EFM if you don't mind me askingâ€¦"

To begin with, I don't accept or pander to stupid jargon, and the fact that I still cringe every time I hear this term means something must be done. So, as my duty to making the world a better place, I submit to everyone on this day in history, to drop the EFM moniker and adopt something more descriptive. Ready for it?

Customer Data Management

Sounds good huh? I thought you'd like it. Even the people at the veggie platter are looking interested.

Seriously though, if you stop and think about how our industry has evolved and what it is we do: collecting, analyzing, and reporting data taken from online surveys and forms, integrating this data in a meaningful way with other customer information and business metrics; then I think we've got a much better definition of what we do, and can offer customers.

Additionally, EFM, or online survey systems per se, have grown well beyond providing customers with the ability to centrally manage data collection regardless of where they are located. The arcane

and narrow definition of EFM no longer works (not that it ever did).

So, on this day forward, join me in banning EFM from business vernacular forever. Long live Customer Data Management! (Even the acronym CDM sounds better than EFM.

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