

How to Interview Customers

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Agenda

- I. Introduction
- II. Overview
 - a) Why you should listen to customers
- III. Designing the interview process
 - a) Writing an Interview Guide
- IV. How to interview customers
 - a) Interpersonal skills
 - b) Language processing skills
- V. Summary

Overview:

Why the Voice of the Customer Matters

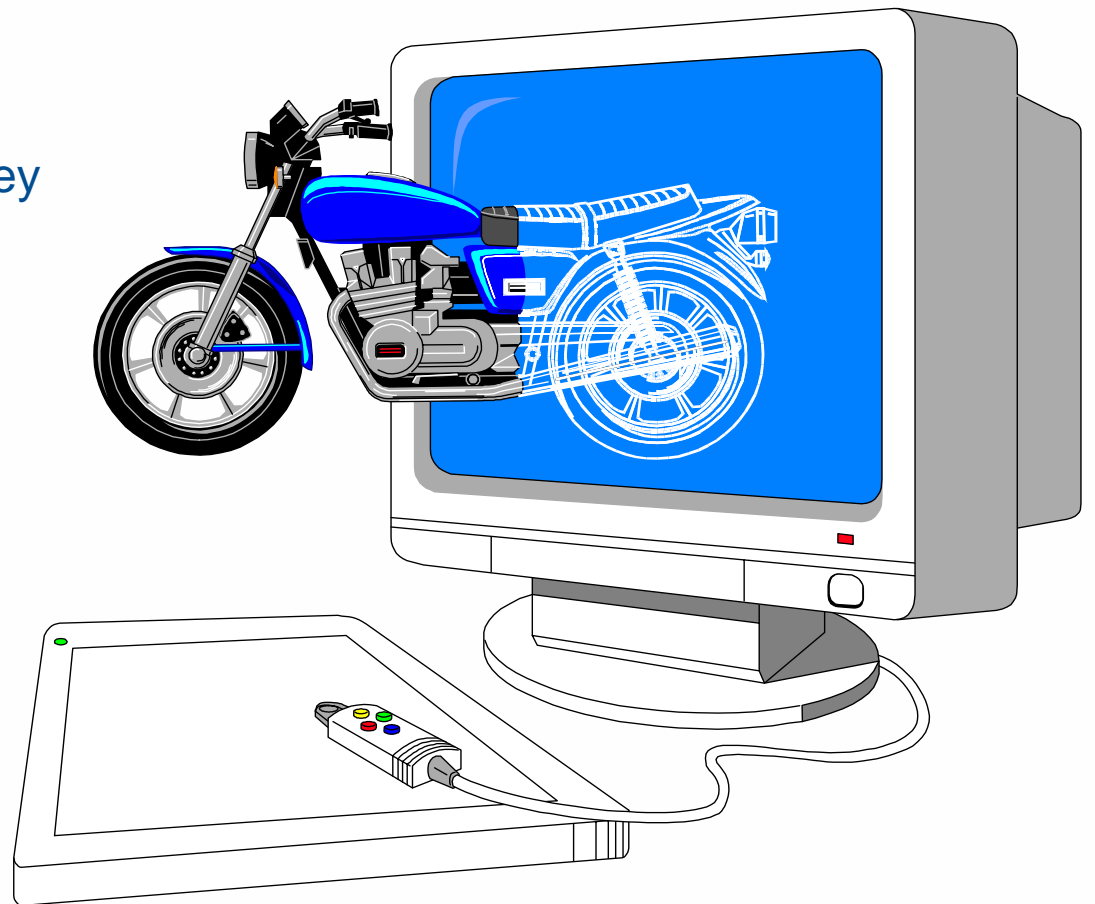
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Engineering Folklore



- “Customers can't tell you what they want.”
- “Customers don't know what they want until they see it.”
- “No customer would have said they wanted a ...”
 - microwave oven
 - VCR
 - Walkman
 - hula hoop



What Customers Can and Can't Tell You



- Customers do know what they want!
- They know their wants and needs, but not the exact features and solutions that will satisfy those needs
- Customers are not engineers, cannot set technical specs for you

What we want are products that are:

- “Not *designed* by customers, but *inspired* by customers”
- To do this, we have to get beyond the *features* or *solutions* or *specifications* they ask for to understand the underlying *needs* they represent.

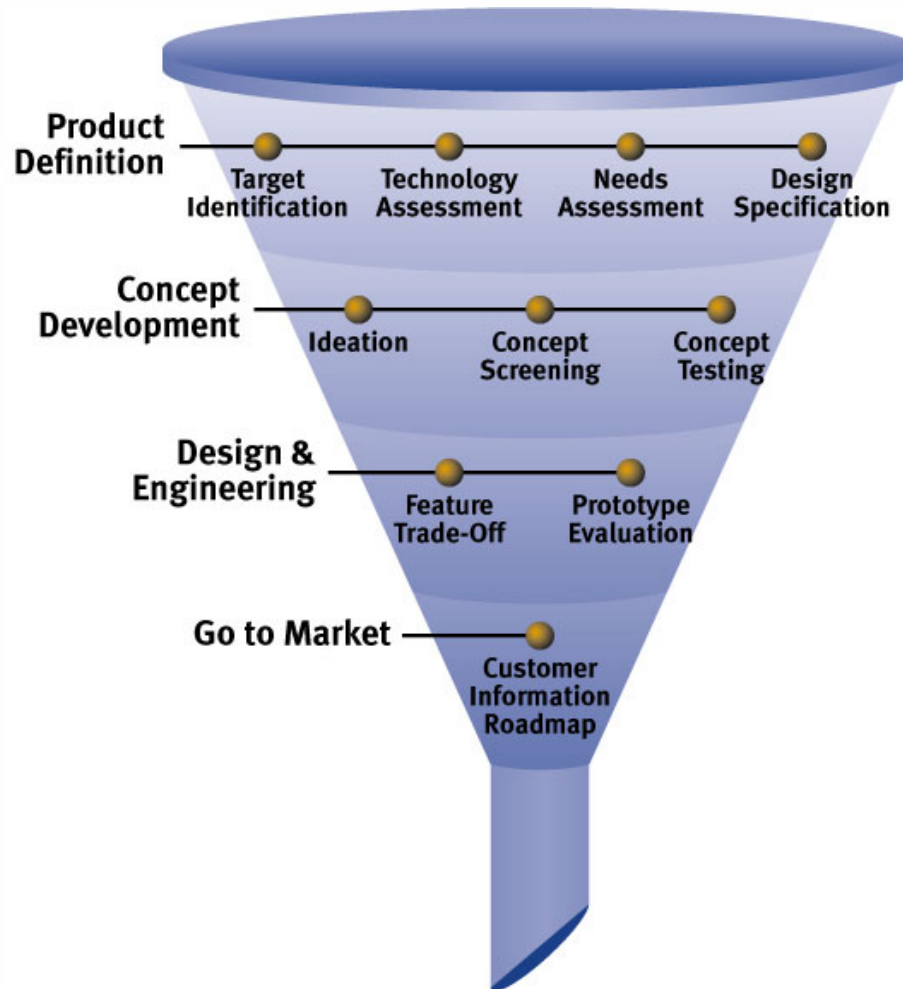




The Voice of the Customer: Definition

- A complete set of customer wants and needs
- Expressed in the customer's own words
 - Customer jargon, not company jargon
- Organized the way the customers think about, use, and interact with the product and service
 - Detailed needs bundled to create secondary and primary level needs
 - Companies and customers think about and group ideas differently
- Prioritized by the customer
 - Importance
 - Performance, i.e. satisfaction with current alternatives

The Voice of the Customer is “deployed” throughout the product development process



Designing the Interview Process

Who?

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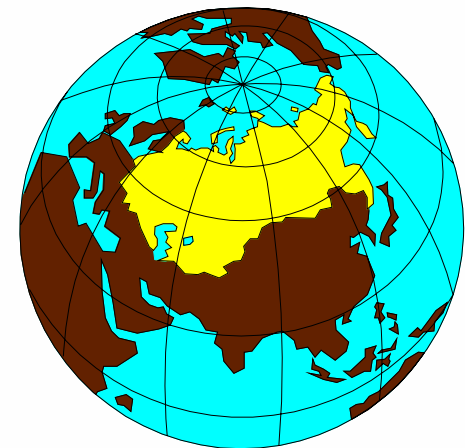
Define Scope of Project

- What will this project encompass?
- More importantly, what won't it encompass?
- Defining the scope drives who you will talk to and what you will talk about
 - Important to get this clearly defined up front



Question #1: Who Is The Customer?

- There can be many important users
 - End users
 - Different distribution channels
 - Key buying influencers
 - Users vs. choosers (decision makers)
- Who needs to be satisfied for your product or service to be successful?
 - Follow the chain back from the end user
 - Each link in the distribution chain wants to satisfy their immediate customer



Designing the Interview Process

What to ask?

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Developing an Interview Guide

- A good Interview Guide should:
 - Have a clear introduction that sets up the interview
 - Be an outline, not a script
 - Be conversational, but have a focus on the particular subject
 - Help build rapport
 - Focus on experience
 - Gradually shift from general to more specific topics
 - Be appropriately provocative by:
 - Exploring conflicts
 - Discussing hypothetical scenarios



The Interview Guide: Basic Structure

- Start with easy questions
 - Put respondent at ease, get them to relax
- Chronology: Start with past, then move toward the present
 - *“What motivated you to switch?”*
- Next ask about experiences
 - *“Take me through a typical ” or “a recent ”*
- Ask about extremes – “best” and “worst” experiences
 - *“What made it your best or worst experience?”*



Logistics: When you get there . . .

- One person should lead the interview
 - That person should ask most of the questions
 - Other(s) can toss in occasional follow-up questions
- Recording the interview
 - Be unobtrusive, but not secretive
 - Assure the respondent of the market research purpose



Interview Introduction

Be prepared to explain:

- The purpose of the study
- How respondent was selected
- Who else is being interviewed
- That the respondent's identity will be kept anonymous
- Why it will be audio taped
- What feedback the respondent will receive (if any)
- How the information will be used
- The idea that you will be probing for details and verbatims
- ***CAN'T COMMIT TO ANY FIXES OR TIMETABLES !!***
- ***NOT A SALES CALL !!***

Sample Introduction



My name is _____ and I'm with _____ located in _____.

What we'd like to do today is to better understand what customers want and need in a _____, so that we can design better products and services that respond to what customers are looking for.

So, the focus of our discussion today is on _____, what you like about it, what you dislike, what could be done to make your job easier, etc.

We've been traveling around the country (state, area) interviewing people like you to get a better idea of how you feel about _____.

I have a rough outline of things we might talk about, but we should feel free to talk about whatever you think is important. There are no right or wrong answers - our primary objective is simply to hear the actual words and phrases that people use when they talk about these things, so I'll probably ask you some seemingly obvious questions. I hope you'll bear with me when this happens!

We'd like to audio tape the interview so that we can transcribe it and analyze it later, rather than trying to take notes or remember what you said. But I want to assure you that the tape and your name will not be released to anyone else and won't be used for any direct sales or marketing purposes.

Any questions before we begin?

How To Interview Customers

Theory

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Getting Started

- Think of it as a “guided conversation”
- Use the interview guide, but don’t just read the questions verbatim
- Be real – be you, be friendly, develop a style that works for you
- Try to maintain eye contact
- Make respondent feel at ease – reassure them, even dress like them



Interviewing Skills: Active Listening

- Listen with your eyes as well as your ears
- Watch and listen for attitudes, opinions, beliefs
- Use positive, non-verbal communication to prompt the speaker
- Don't interrupt the speaker
- Don't offer solutions when problems are raised
- Don't argue with or correct the speaker



Paraphrasing

- What is paraphrasing?
 - Repeating your understanding of the speaker's comments in your own words
 - Asking the speaker if that is correct and whether there are any clarifications
- When / Why should you use it?
 - As a check for verifying understanding
 - For showing empathy
 - To capture the speaker's key points in the transcript



Probing

- Why, why, why, why, why . . .
 - Keep asking “why” types of questions until it almost gets ridiculous !!
- Try to get at the real underlying need
- Be Inquisitive, but not judgmental
 - Not “*WHY DID YOU DO THAT?*”, but:
 - *Why do you say that?*
 - *Why do you feel that way?*
 - *Why do you prefer that one?*
 - *Why is that important?*
 - *Why did that interest you?*
 - *Why would that be better?*



Probing: Clarifying Generalities

- Key Word Triggers
 - *Explain and clarify all of those words which can mean anything:*
 - “What do you mean by _____”
 - “How do you define _____”



REPEAT and Probe on KEY WORDS: *“What do you mean by . . .”*

- ALL RIGHT
- APPEALING
- ATTRACTIVE
- BAD
- BAD FOR
- BETTER
- BEST
- COLOR
- COMPLICATED
- COMMUNICATION
- CONSISTENCY
- CONVENIENT
- DIFFERENT
- DIFFICULT
- DURABLE
- EASY
- EASY TO USE
- EASY TO UNDERSTAND
- ECONOMICAL
- ENJOY
- EXPENSIVE
- FAST
- FINE
- FLAT
- FLEXIBLE
- FUN
- FUNNY
- GOOD
- HARD
- HARSH
- LIKE
- LOOKS
- LOVE
- NICE
- OKAY
- PARTNER
- PRETTY
- PRICE
- QUALITY
- QUICK
- RELIABLE
- SATISFACTORY
- SHAPE
- SIMPLE
- SIZE
- SMALL
- TASTE
- TEXTURE
- TIMELY
- TOUCH
- WORSE



Some Do's and Don'ts

- Do remember important pieces of information mentioned earlier in the conversation
- Do watch out for fatigue (Limit of 3-5 interviews a day)
- Don't be afraid of tangents – every interview should be different !
- Don't communicate boredom (even when you are!)
- Don't get so absorbed in the Interview Guide that you rarely look up
- Don't make respondents feel that they are being used as a pipeline for competitive intelligence



Remember . . .

- Don't try to ask every person every question in the interview guide
 - Within any single interview, depth is more important than breadth
- Every interview will be different
 - Some will be more interesting than others!
- Don't take the quality of the interview – good or bad – too personally

“Language Processing”: Categorizing Phrases



- Customers say many things that are close to a need, but aren't quite a need
 - Engineering Characteristics
 - Solutions
 - Target Values
 - Opinions
- **Goal:** To end up with a set of true Wants and Needs
 - Most useful for product and service innovation

Engineering Characteristics / Solutions



- Solutions To Customer Wants and Needs



- *“A Thermal Cup Would Keep My Coffee Hot”*



- *“Uninterruptible Power Supply” (hardware)*

- *“Automatic File Saving” (software)*



- *“Board Passengers From The Rear of the Aircraft”*



Target Values

(More the better, Less the better, Target is best)

- Amounts, Time Frames, Sizes (i.e. a numerical value)



- *“My Coffee Should Stay Hot For 20 Minutes.”*



- *“Mean Time Between Failure Should Be No More Than Twice Per Year”*



- *“Once They Begin Boarding, It Never Takes Me Longer Than 10 Minutes To Get To My Seat”*



Opinions

- Opinions Are Personal Comments



- *“My Coffee Never Stays Hot Enough”*



- *“My Computer Always Crashes at a Crucial Time”*



- *“You Feel Like You Are Herded Onto The Jet”*



Needs / Attributes

- Phrases That Describe Real Customer Wants and Needs



- *“A Cup Of Coffee That Stays Hot Until I Finish Drinking It”*



- *“I Never Have To Worry About Losing My Work”*



- *“Relaxed, Stress-Free Boarding of the Airplane”*

Summary



- Listening to customers is hard work, and requires:
 - Time
 - Energy
 - Money
- But there are a number of systematic approaches for effective listening to The Voice of the Customer
- The payoff:
 - Better products and services
 - More satisfied customers
 - Increased market share
 - Higher profits

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Voice of the Customer (VOC)
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Ideation

1. E-mail me at: gkatz@ams-inc.com
2. Go to our website: www.ams-inc.com



Thank You!