



This guide is designed to help you carry out customer interviews to get to those golden insights that will give you your much needed competitive advantage.

Customer research is hard, because it's difficult to get underneath the reasons why people do what they do. David Ogilvy put it best:

“The trouble with market research is that people don't think what they feel, they don't say what they think, and they don't do what they say.”

It's very tempting when setting out to do some customer research to fill your head with questions like “what other products do you use apart from ours” or “what don't you like about our product.” But, real insights come from seeking to understand people's world; the environment they live / work in, who or what they are influenced by and who they are trying to become. If we can understand the context in which your product or service fits into people's lives in a more holistic way, and how their values and community influence their choices, then we are much more likely to be able to build something that people actually want.

The key to this is to forget everything you already know. You need to go into this with a beginner's mind, listen and be curious. Keep asking “why” - and then ask again. When someone tells you they always buy organic food, ask them to show you. Go through their cupboards and fridge with them and see what they ACTUALLY buy, instead of what they say they do. This is not an exercise in shaming them, it's about understanding all those little micro decisions they make when they shop. They might actually mean they always buy organic for the things that matter - so the insight might come from WHY some things matter more than others.

The best way to get to know the people who might buy your product / service, is to spend some time with them in their own environment, be that at home or work, whatever makes more sense. If that's not possible you can do a video call. The aim is to get to know them as a person, asking open-ended questions that make them want to keep talking - it's these observations that can turn into real insight gems later on.

To record your session, you can either just write notes on paper, or record the audio on your phone (or video call). If you have an iPhone you can use voice memos to do this, if you're on Android you can use Sound Recorder. If you can meet them in person, you can also take pictures and videos of their environment, or of them using the product with their permission.





To start, we are aiming to put the interviewee at ease. We want them to be relaxed and we want them to be honest. A lot of the time what happens with customer research is that the interviewee feels the need to impress the interviewer, so will give overly positive responses to the questions. We want to know what they really think though, so we need to put them at ease. Start by asking them about themselves then slowly transition to brand focussed questions.

Here are some examples of open ended questions to ask, you'll need to tweak them to make them appropriate to your industry or category and some may be more relevant than others.

What problem are they trying to solve?

- What does this product / service solve for you? What is the thing you need to get done?
- Are there any other products that you use to solve this problem?
- Are there any different types of product that could solve this for you?
- What is most frustrating / difficult about this problem?

What does success look like to them?

- What makes a "good" product or service?
- How have products let you down in the past?
- What factors do you look for in a product / service?
- What's the best product experience you have ever had in this area?
- What's the best product experience you have had anywhere? Why?
- What are your expectations of the product?

How would solving this problem make them feel?

- How does the experience of using the product / service make you feel?
- How does the product / service fit into your daily routine?
- Does the product or service have a place in your local community?
- How would you talk about the product / service? Are there any stories you tell about it?
- Does the product / service / brand have any values that you align with?
- If it doesn't, how could it?
- Are there any anxieties / worries that come up for you when using / shopping for this kind of product?
- What are brands that you would never purchase and why?

Who or what influences their purchase decisions?

- Do other people you know use this product / service? What do they use?





- Who would you ask for their opinion before purchasing a product like this?
- Do you look for people's opinions online? Where would you look? Why?
- How did you find out about the product / service you are using at the moment?
- How do you decide what product to choose?
- What puts you off?
- What people or brands do you follow on social media? Why?

What is the environment like in which they use the product / service?

- Where do you use the product?
- How would you describe that environment?
- What is the environment like where you buy the product / service, on and offline?
- What brands, if any, do they see in this space? What are their opinions of them?

General values-based questions

- What are your favourite brands? Can you tell me a bit more about why you like them?
- What would your favourite holiday be? Who would be there? Why did you pick that?
Can you tell me about some memories you have of that?
- Describe your perfect job, is it what you're doing now? What makes it perfect for you?
- What would your dream house look like? Where would it be? What elements are important? Why?
- What does having fun look like to you? Who would be there? Why?

Please note that when carrying out any customer research it's important that you consider GDPR rules. This means storing any information you collect securely and obtaining consent to use and store their information. You can read more about GDPR and research [here](#).

