

How to run a customer interview

CUSTOMER INTERVIEW GUIDE

Most interviews go wrong in the same way: the interviewer pitches, hints at the “right” answer, and gets polite agreement back. This guide keeps you on past behavior and away from opinions about your idea, so your research and validation tell you something real. Fill in the [brackets] for your case.

01 BEFORE YOU START

A good interview is decided before you sit down. Get these three things right and the script does the rest.

RECRUIT PEOPLE WHO LIVED IT RECENTLY

Memory fades fast, and people who “might” have the problem only give you hypotheticals.

WRITE YOUR TOPIC IN ONE LINE

“How people [do the thing / deal with the problem].” That is all you tell them.

HANDLE SENSITIVE TOPICS WITH CARE

If it touches money, health, safety or similar areas, keep every question about behavior, not judgment. Let the person set the pace, tell them they can skip any question or stop anytime, and have a support resource ready if needed.

02 QUESTION SCRIPT

Five steps, in this order. Do not skip ahead to the concept.

STEPS 01–03

STEP 1 / INTRO

SET THE FRAME

Tell them you are researching how people [do X]. No pitch, no right answers, nothing to sell.

Ask consent to take notes or record.

STEP 2 / WARM-UP

START WITH THE PAST

- “Think about the last time you [did X]. Walk me through it from start to finish.” *Past behavior beats hypotheticals.*
- “When you think about [X], how do you feel?”
- “How do you usually [handle X]?” Offer no options. Write down the first answer verbatim, then ask “anything else?”

The gap between the first and later answers shows the default versus the fallback.

STEP 3 / GO DEEP

FIND THE PAIN

- “Tell me about a time [X] was difficult, frustrating or didn’t work out.” Probe: where, when, who was involved, what did you do next?
- “On a scale of 1 to 5, how [easy / comfortable / confident] do you feel about [X]?” Ask it after the story, not before. Then: “Why that number?”
- “What do you do today to deal with it?” Do not suggest answers.
- “What would make it easier?” Then stay quiet a few seconds longer than feels comfortable.

Workarounds are your strongest demand signal.

STEPS 04–05

STEP 4 / CONCEPT

TEST THE IDEA

- Describe your solution in 2 to 3 neutral sentences. No loaded adjectives like “easy,” “safe,” “fast,” “affordable” or “seamless.” If you can’t describe it without them, you don’t understand it yet.
- “What’s your first reaction?” Then: “What would worry you about it?”
- “When would you use it, and when definitely not?”
- “What would it replace?” Accept “nothing” as a valid answer.
- “What do you spend now on [the current way of solving this], in money and time?”
- “At what price would this feel too cheap to trust? A good deal? Getting expensive? Too expensive?” Also ask who should pay: them, their employer, someone else.
- “Would you change or suggest something different?”

A price range beats a single “how much would you pay?” The user is often not the payer.

STEP 5 / AFTER

CAPTURE IT

- Write up verbatim quotes and the first-versus-later answers within 24 hours.
- Separate what people did from what they said they would do. Weight the first heavily, the second lightly.
- Count the workarounds.

One enthusiastic “I’d totally use that” is noise.

03 GOLDEN RULES

01 PAST BEATS FUTURE

Ask about what people actually did last time, not what they would do in theory.

02 NEVER OFFER THE ANSWER

Offer no options and suggest nothing. Take the first answer verbatim, then ask “anything else?”

03 STORY FIRST, SCALE SECOND

Ask for the 1 to 5 rating after the story, then ask why that number.

04 USE SILENCE

After “what would make it easier?” stay quiet a few seconds longer than feels comfortable.

05 DESCRIBE NEUTRALLY, PRICE AS A RANGE

No adjectives in the concept. Ask for too cheap, a good deal, getting expensive and too expensive.

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