

User Interview

Why we have this Process

User Interviews, also known as Customer Development Interviews, help to deeply understand the into (potential) customer needs / pains. Additionally it provides insights in world of the potential customer: What task is he/she is this painpoint a part of and what is the outcome of the task he/she is trying to achieve. For a **quick video example** of a good interview, see the section further reading below.

Context and Scope

User Interviews are done early in the Discovery phase, where we try to understand user needs for either a new product or just a new bigger feature (Roadmap theme).

When should the process be performed?

Recommended frequency is as part of user tests (opening questions) or at least quarterly. It's OK if questions are the same as the last time, but usually you go deeper every time based on your growing understanding of the customer needs.

Who performs the process

Who **performs** the process: Product Manager (or Product Researcher / Marketeer)
Who is **monitors** if process is done (correctly): Head of Product

Process steps

1. Decide on **interview learning objective** (tip: **Start a Topics to validate / test backlog**). Choose from these. Initially, you want to focus on the first learning objective (you can always come back to this interviewee to dive deeper into the other questions, don't rush to conclusions).
 - a. Does the customer **have this problem**?
 - b. Does the customer **care enough** about this problem?
 - c. Does the customer **already have a solution** that's good enough?
 - d. Does the customer think **our solution solves the right problem**?
 - e. Does the customer think **our solution is better** than existing products/services?
2. **See below for good interview questions.**
3. Plan Interview days (recommendation: Fixed day(s) every 4 weeks). Per period interview 5 people (i.e. on 1 or 2 days).
4. Determine interview goals, i.e. what to interview users about.
5. Recruit participants (see FAQ below for tips).
6. Schedule interviews with the users (90 minutes recommended. Offer them timeslots via www.calendly.com)
7. Prepare a User interview script or at least talking points (**see template below**)
8. Run a circa 5 User interviews (see below for agenda)
9. Store your detailed findings on the wiki.
10. Summarize and share your findings with the team.
11. Decide if you want to continue with this problem/pain (/roadmap theme) or that either you pivot to a different or more specific persona (who has the problem) or to another problem the current persona has.

Quality criteria

- The participants represent real users.
- The moderator does not steer the user by giving hints or answering questions (yes you really can not answer questions until the end of the interview).
- If more than 50% of the interviewees say they have the problem in the first 5 interviews you are making one of these two mistakes. It is part of the process that you get rejected several times initially:
 - Your problem is formulated too broadly, i.e. : Finding more clients.
 - You are asking leading questions.
- Don't get discouraged by rejection, but instead adjust the niche/persona to those who seem to have the relevant problem or change to another problem that you hear.
- Record what participants do and say.
- Don't over analyze: Make a top 5 learnings per interview.

FAQ

What is the optimal length for a interview?

40 mins - 90 mins. (30 minute slots are really to short).

Where do I find people to Interview?

The first source would be emailing your current customer base (make sure you mention the reward, i.e. an amazon gift certificate). You can also add a popup to your site, i.e. Mailchimp can create this signup popup for you and can send an email with a link to the Interview. For startups they can use communities like LinkedIn groups and Slack.

Where to do the interviewing (remote/ face to face)?

I recommend combining Skype and face to face interviews.

How to reward participants ?

An 20-50 Euro/Dollar [amazon.de](https://www.amazon.de) voucher is common, up to 50 Euro/Dollar for hard to get audiences.

Which questions to select for quick results, save time and do it the LEAN/Agile way?

The iterative, lean approach is to see interviews as part of an ongoing learning process. Each interview you quickly validate what you already learned and then move you one step further. If you assumption about the customers, or his high level needs or a certain solution is right you can go one level deeper: i. e. within a higher level need (ie save time in a certain job) you can zoom into into the job steps to figure out where the biggest pain is.

Why Interview when I can Interview and Experiment?

Interviewing will give you great qualitative insights but a few interviews do not provide enough qualitative data to base decisions on. Based on your learnings from interviews you can create a survey to validate the findings with a larger group (at least 40 people in your target audience).

Experiments will take you hours to create and days to weeks to run.

Further reading

Great intro to some of the concepts behind good user interviews: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=OTkP2JDeGWM

Video recording of a Good(ish) user interview for a new product (while watching, note how the interviewer is a bit blinded by his own idea, and does not hear that everybody is saying they have 1 specific communication issue) (also be warned: There is nothing wrong with using the tool this video is promoting, but learn about the process first) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXBaBbR04oU>

More interview example video's: <https://swipemyideas.com>

<https://www.mindtheproduct.com/2018/04/search-product-market-fit-setapp-found-customers/>

<https://blog.kissmetrics.com/26-customer-development-resources/>

<https://customerdevlabs.com/2013/11/05/how-i-interview-customers/>

Google ventures Research Sprint - <https://library.gv.com/the-gv-research-sprint-a-4-day-process-for-answering-important-startup-questions-97279b532b25>

<https://www.playinglean.com/blogs/playing-lean-blog/how-to-do-problem-interviews>

<http://startitup.co/guides/285/problem-interview-script>

<https://blog.leanstack.com/the-updated-problem-interview-script-and-a-new-canvas-1e43ff267a5d>

<https://marmelab.com/blog/2016/01/27/lean-startup-designing-a-problem-interview.html>

<https://hanno.co/blog/7-best-practises-for-better-user-interviews/>

Interview Sections and Questions

Quickstart 1

If you just want to kick off your first interviews, without too much preparation, this is a great script to start with. To fine tune/ extend your script, look at the next few paragraphs.

1. Over the course of the last 12 months, what has been your most consistent present problem?
2. How do you go about solving that problem right now?

3. What happens if you don't solve that problem?
4. If you could wave a magic wand, or if you had a genie that could solve this, how would you solve that problem?
5. Would that be worth paying for? If so, how much?

Quickstart 2

1. Thanks for taking my call, I'm doing some research on [main activity related to problem] (i.e. were looking to get healthy snacks delivered to your office). Before we start, can you **tell me a bit about yourself**?

- Focus on learning about WHO your customer is before moving onto the problem.

2. When was the **last time you [main activity related to problem]**?

3. What's the **biggest challenge** you face **when [main activity related to problem]**?

- Listen if they mention the problem you're trying to solve.

- If not mentioned, then it may not be a big enough problem! Dig deeper into their biggest problem.

4. **Why** is this a **problem** for you?

5. **How often** does this **happen**?

6. Have you tried to **solve it? If so, what did you do?**

7. **How did you discover that solution?**

8. How **satisfied were you with the outcome?**

- If unsatisfied, what does your preferred solution look like? How would this solve the problem?

9. I'm actually exploring a solution to solve your problem. **Can I contact you for feedback if we find a solution?**

10. I'm trying to understand this from more perspectives. **Do you know 1 or 2 other people dealing with this problem** who I can speak with?

Section 1: Introduction

An Interview introduction is essential to break the ice. (i.e. where are you from, could you easily find our office, how long have you been living here?)

Section 2: Getting to know you

Asking some questions about who the participant is will help you later identify what persona has a certain point point. Also this will make your marketing, research and product development far more effective as the customers with the biggest pain will become your most eager and helpful early MVP customers.

If your Interview also targets non-customers or users of competitor products these answers will help you segment your results and gain insights if your or competitor products are actually reducing certain pains.

In this section, you also ask qualifying questions to see if the participant is relevant to your company (i.e. does he/she indeed manage a team). Limit this to the max five most important questions.

1. Are you male or female?
2. How old are you?
3. What is your job title?
4. In one sentence what is your core job responsibility (i.e. "Outbound marketing for Canada")?
5. [Specific questions relevant to your product, i.e.] B2B: What are your company's revenues (ranges)? How many monthly uniques visitors does your website have? Do you use process x / tool y within your company?
6. Industry your company operates in [see the Interview template for a industry list. See process step 3 for the link]
7. Company size in terms of [employees or revenue]
8. [Any qualifying questions to see if they are relevant to your company, ideally combine it right away with a usage question i.e.:] How often do you conduct outbound sales at your company?
9. [Conditional question if previous answer is "I don't do this know"] What is keeping you from doing X?
10. What products/services do you currently use, or used before, for [process your investigating]?

Section 3: Understanding your Challenges

This section is about understanding challenges a participant has in relation to the task, i.e. hiring a freelance developer or doing employee performance reviews. To prevent overlooking potential needs make sure you focus these question on the whole task, or the bigger outcome, i.e. hiring a freelancer, and not 'vetting freelancers'. However also don't make it too broad, i.e. 'finding talent' as this will deliver too diverse and generic pains to start with.

- What are you top 5 responsibilities / processes you are responsible for as a [job role] in just a few words per area? [If your product doesn't address one of these top 5 processes it not a so call "hair on fire" problem and it will be difficult find buyers.]
- How often do you [process you're improving] per week? [Or: How much time do you spend on [process you're improving] [per...]?]
- Do you find it hard to [(new) process]? [It's easy to do and time required is minimal, Somewhat hard / time intensive, Hard / Time intensive, Very challenging to get the results I want]
- When trying to [find a freelance marketer] what is important to you? And what would be the kind of results you are looking for?
- Think back to the last time you did [process]. What's the hardest part about [process / achieving related outcome]?
- What challenges did you run into the last time you did [process]?
- What, if anything, have you done to solve that problem?
- In short, How are you currently doing [this process], i.e. steps/tools?
- What are your most important goals in [process your solution supports, i.e. writing project proposals, hiring freelancers, giving employee feedback]?
- What was happening in your world that led you to sign up for the product/service you are currently using for [process]?
- What happened during your [trial / or first time use in case you don't have trail] that convinced you [PRODUCT] was the right solution?
- What were you skeptical or anxious about when you signed up, that would have prevented you from using [PRODUCT] long-term?
- Did you try or use a similar service before? (no, I tried these but stop using them, I actively used these)

Section 4: Improving Our Product

This section will help you understand what current customers think your product is missing. If you don't have a product yet (for this process) you can either leave this section out or use it to see where a competitor product is dropping the ball.

- How likely is it that you would recommend [Product] to a friend or colleague? [0–10] [This is the famous NPS question, to calculate the NPS score do not average the score but use this formula: <https://goo.gl/33sZnq>
- How would you feel if you could no longer use [your product]? [This is the Product Market fit formula. 40% very disappointed is considered market fit] (Very disappointed / Somewhat disappointed / Not disappointed / Not applicable — I no longer use your service.
- What is the primary benefit that you have received from our product, and in general what do you love most about our product?
- Have you achieved [core benefit of your product] using [Product]? [i.e. hired a freelancer, got insight into customer satisfaction, etc] (scale)
- What motivates you to continue using this product?
- How quickly is the product evolving?
- How satisfied are you with customer support and working with the company? [The last two questions indicate **churn risk**. It's also a great diagnostic tool for exposing overselling. Do the salespeople in the company overpromise to attain quota, only for the product to disappoint later on?]
- What's the hardest part about using this product?
- How would you improve our [product/service]? What might improve your experience using the product?
- What would make you want to tell your peers about this product?
- If you were not allowed to use our service, how would you do [process]?

Section 5: Improving Our Product — Part 2

This section goes deeper into your current product functions to find out, in a quantifiable way, which area needs the most attention. The bigger Job /process is split into smaller steps for which each the user need is measured. This section is based on JTBD (Jobs To Be Done) style questions which are always a importance and satisfaction question pair as shown below. I recommend also recommend include the step the user has to do just before, and just after, using your service, to look for opportunities to extend your product.

- [Example sub-need/outcome: Setting the optimal project budget (other examples: Writing the project brief)
 - How **important** is this to you? 1. Not at all important / 2. Slightly important / 3. Moderately important / 4. Very important / 5. Extremely Important. [There is science behind these two scales, I recommend to keep them as is]
 - How **satisfied** are you with the way you are currently doing this (with our product or otherwise)? 1. Completely dissatisfied / 2. Mostly dissatisfied / 3. Somewhat dissatisfied / 4. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied / 5. Somewhat satisfied / 6. Mostly satisfied / 7. Completely satisfied
- [Example sub-need/outcome: Selecting the best freelancers by scoring their relevant experience, certificates, customers ratings, etc] (and then the same 2 questions as above (importance and satisfaction))
 - How **important** is this to you?
 - How **satisfied** are you with the way you are currently doing this (with our product or otherwise)?
- [Example sub-need/outcome: Negotiating price and contract terms with my preferred freelancer(s). Another example: Interview / question freelancers in order to judge them]
 - How **important** is this to you?
 - How **satisfied** are you with the way you are currently doing this (with our product or otherwise)?

Section 6: Feedback on Product Ideas

This section will show you the best way to test any feature ideas that you might have. I highly recommend splitting up any solution idea (feature) into a question about if the participant has the related problem (need) and if he would like the solution. This allows you to identify important needs which need a better solution.

1. How relevant is this to you? [Here goes the PROBLEM you are trying to solve, based on an insight you have on your (potential) consumers. A well-written problem speaks to what the consumer thinks, feels, or believes before he/she knows about your product. Example: When finding freelance onsite developers it is hard to find freelancers who would partially work for equity.]
2. If a product delivered this benefit how relevant would this be to you? [Here goes your SOLUTION idea including the benefit(s) of your product. It can be functional or emotional. When possible give proof to they will actually be able to achieve the benefit and consider adding a visual. Shortened example: Based on your requirements we will find the the right freelancer for you and negotiate a contract for you and take the paperwork out of your hands].
3. Based on the description how would you rate the value of this product (service)?
4. Is this idea unique and different?
5. How likely would you share word about this idea with your peers?
6. How much time (or money) would this feature save you? Or how much is -some outcome, i.e. a lead- worth to you? (and take 15% of that value as a price).
7. What do you think the average [job role, i.e. broker / hiring manager] would find a fair and reasonable price for [this service product?] [This is not a great predictor nor great question, especially for uncommon/new services.]

Section 7: Feedback on Feature ideas

Let's say using earlier research you discovered that the product area 'selecting a freelancer/bid' is the biggest sub-problem in your product. You can now dive deeper in this area to figure out of your hypothesis of the problems are correct and test if the participant likes your solution. Like the previous sections splitting up problem and solution hypotheses will help you find valid user problems that just need another solution. Problems can be both functional (i.e. too something is too time consuming) as emotional (uncomfortable, embarrassing, uneasy, overwhelming, concerned, etc).

1. How relevant is this **problem** to you? [Example: It costs me too much time to evaluate the years of relevant experience of the freelancers who bid on my project]
2. How relevant is this **problem** to you? [Example: It don't know how to optimally I don't have the experience to optimally... It is overwhelming when... I don't know how to best start/implement/etc]
3. How relevant is this **problem** to you? [Examples: It is uncomfortable for me to / too costly to / ...]
4. How relevant is this **solution** to you? [Example: Evaluate all interested freelancers for me and propose a top 3.]

In Closing

The closing page should thank the participant and provide information on how and when an eventual compensation will be handed over. It's also a great please to recruit people onto a mailing list for your customer panel mailing list that you can use to recruit people for beta tests, in skype interviews, etc.

Thank you for completing this Interview. Your feedback helps us create an even better product for you. You will receive an 10 Euro Amazon Gift Card within two weeks from today.

- Can we keep you in the loop on how our product develops? If you answer is yes please fill in your email here and we'll keep you posted. You can unsubscribe at any time and we will keep your email private.
- Can we approach you for future beta tests, interviews and Interviews? If so fill your email address below so we can reach out to you. [Or Alternatively;]
- We are looking for a few people to participate in a follow up skype conversation about how they shop for art (30 minutes long). If you are picked, you will be compensated for your participation (20 Euro Amazon Gift Card). If you would like to participate, please fill your email address below so we can reach out to you.

Questions that Don't belong in this type of Interview

- What problem were you trying to solve when you initially came across our product or service? [This question belongs in a **short post signup Interview** you send directly to new customers 1 hour after they sign up, so they have a better recollection of what they were looking for]
- How much would you pay for service X? This question doesn't result in reliable answers. It's better to just try out what people would actually pay by either increasing your price for small customer group (please don't pick the germans 😊) , or for new product make a (fake) payment page and see if people pay. You could ask "How much time (or money) would this feature save you? Or how much is -some outcome- worth to you? (and take 15% of that as a price).

Internal note

Process module 010+User+Interviews+and+Sales into this page
