Determining What People Really Want!

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People will always **need** new products which solve their emerging and evolving problems!

Therefore you need to find out their problems.
Reality check

Remember, only 60% of new products are successful; the rest fail!

Absence of a perceived need by the user is the #1 cause of new product failure (Crawford).

Thus learning customers’ problems can increase your chances of successful new products.
The Problem

People are not accustomed to thinking and talking about their wants and needs.

It is much easier for them to talk about their problems, especially their problems with the products they use.
This presentation’s focus:

• An overview of qualitative techniques which can be used to identify customers’ problems
Three market research methods to learn customers’ needs

• Be your customers
• Live with and critically observe your customers
• Talk to your customers - Voice of the Customer
The objectives of these techniques:

• Provide rich information about your customer’s problems

• A deep understanding by the development “doers”

• Breadth of understanding across the development team
What is tacit knowledge?

• It is knowledge about problems that a person has but cannot articulate
• The consumer/user may not perceive problems well enough to verbalize them

We must surface and capture this knowledge!
1. Be your own customers - do what they do

- Learn from doing what they do
- Experience first hand the issues that are involved in product design trade-offs
- Use your own and your competitor’s products
- Experience “everyday” and “extraordinary” situations
Be your own customers

Strengths:

• Depth of knowledge gained
• Ability to capture tacit knowledge

Weaknesses:

• Hard to transfer experience to others
• Time, expense and access
2. Critically observe customers

• Critically observe, not just watch - ask why!
• See both “normal” and “abnormal”
• Actions unfold slowly in real time
• Gain process and work flow knowledge
Critically observe customers

**Strengths:**

- Capture process and work flow knowledge
- Capture tacit knowledge if you ask why

**Weaknesses:**

- Have to translate observations into words
- Time and expense
3. Talk to your customers

- People **can’t** evaluate that with which they are not familiar
- They **can** tell you about product excellences and short-comings in their specific context
- Situational in-depth interviews lead people through their problems
- Specific questions elicit specific details
- **Why** is as important as **what**
Buried in the conversations with people are the nuggets of information detailing their problems and thus their needs for solutions.
Example - POS systems - clerks

• How do you ring up a purchase?
• Describe your worst spill
• What do you do when the price doesn’t register?
• Tell me about the last time your register broke
• What is the biggest problem you ever had?
• How do you start up/check into the system?
• What do you like best/least about the system?
POS systems - store managers

- Describe the last report you generated
- What happened the last time the system crashed?
- How do you close at the end of the month?
- What do you want the system to do that it can’t?
- What was your last major problem?
- What is the system’s best feature?
- What is the system’s worst feature?
Another example:

Please tell me about the most recent time you experienced a problem with a delivery on pallets.
Generic probing questions:

• Why did you mention that feature?
• Why is that feature important to you?
• What does that feature let you do?
• Does that feature cause you problems?
• What works well about that feature?
• What doesn’t work well about that feature?
Talking to customers

Strengths:

• Provides richness of details & contextual information

• Faster

Weakness:

• Difficult to obtain tacit, work flow and process knowledge
In business-to-business situations being your customer, observing your customer and in-depth personal interviews with them can best be conducted through a program of customer site visits by the multi-functional new product development team.
How do you do it?

• Who interacts with customers?

Research professionals

versus

Design team

Note: There is a trade-off between professionalism and team exposure and understanding. Teams can be trained to do most qualitative research.
How do you do it?

Differences between customers and non-customers or users and non-users

– Non-users have the need, may not buy
– Customers already buy

Note: You need to talk to both!
In closing, remember these methods will start you along the process to successful new product development by enabling you to determine what consumers really want (ie. solutions to their problems)!