

Worksheet 1.1.1: Brainstorming Customer Needs

Background

A customer need is something that a person or an organization is lacking or something that they want to obtain. Products and services exist in order to satisfy customer needs.

This worksheet offers four different approaches to identifying possible customer needs in a given situation. The result will help you to develop or extend your ideas for a solution.

Exercise 1: Initial Ideas

We start with a “brain purge”:

- ✍ What customer needs can you think of spontaneously that your future product is going to satisfy?

Exercise 2: Analyze the Customer's Situation

In any situation in which a product is used, there will usually be one obvious customer need but also several less obvious ones. You can look for these by examining the situation in detail. By doing so, you may discover additional needs that are currently not being served well and therefore represent an opportunity for a new and better solution.

When using your future product ...

- ✍ What do users want to achieve?
Example: Arrive at the best possible decision with my team.
- ✍ What tasks do users have to accomplish?
Examples: Inform the team about the various alternatives; Collect the evaluations for each alternative; Determine which alternative is best.
- ✍ What must the user do beforehand and afterwards?
Examples: Announce the upcoming decision; Arrange a meeting; Inform everyone about the result.
- ✍ What must users pay attention to or take care of?
Example: Make sure that everyone's opinion is heard.

Exercise 3: Pains, Gains und Jobs-To-Be-Done

Customer needs can be divided into three categories called Pains, Gains and Jobs-to-be-done.

- Examples of Pains: Problems, obstacles, losses, risks, setbacks, burdens

- Examples of Gains: Advantages, progress, growth, improvement
- Examples of Jobs-to-be-done: Daily tasks, duties, prevention, necessities

Often, several types of customer need can be present simultaneously. For example, with respect to a foreigner wanting to learn English:

- Pain: *My career is at a standstill because my English isn't good enough.*
- Gain: *If I could speak English, my vacations would be more enjoyable.*
- Job-to-be-done: *I have to chair a video conference every week in English with colleagues from different countries.*

By considering these three types of need, it is often possible to discover additional inspiration for a solution.

Continue to examine the situation in which a customer is using your product:

- ✍ Pains: What do they want to avoid or prevent?
- ✍ Gains: What improvements or progress would they like?
- ✍ Jobs-to-be-Done: What do they have to do simply because it is necessary or expected?

Exercise 4: Customer Value

Customer value is that which customers hopes to obtain from a product or service. There are different types of customer value which you can use to discover more potential customer needs:

- Solve a problem.
Examples: Something that is problematic, blocked, harmful, or painful for the user.
- Reduce a risk.
Examples: Something can go wrong, be lost, break, or fail.
- Improve efficiency.
Examples: Something is too slow, too inefficient, or requires too much work.
- Improve Performance.
Examples: Something could be more plentiful, better, more effective, or have a higher performance.
- Lighten a feeling.
Positive examples: Something could create more fun, joy, satisfaction or happiness.
Negative examples: Something causes frustration, fear, dissatisfaction or annoyance.

- Interpersonal benefits.
Examples: Increase reputation, affection, agreement, or acceptance.
- Reduce effort.
Examples: Something costs too much money, attention, care, or supervision.
- Increase convenience.
Examples: Something is uncomfortable, awkward, annoying, hard to understand, or complicated.
- Improve fit.
Examples: Something doesn't fit, is harmful to the environment, or conflicts with something else.

This list of types of customer value is often very productive and suggests many possibilities for a product's features.

When a customer uses your product:

- ✍ What customer needs does the above list suggest?

Exercise 5: Nobody Wants a Drill

According to the famous statement by Theodore Levitt, nobody wants a drill – what everybody wants is a hole in the wall.

Another method for discovering customer needs is therefore to question the motivation behind known needs, for example:

- Young men want fast cars in order to be able to show off.
- Cleaning personnel want a more powerful detergent, because they want to finish work sooner.

Sometimes it is the “need behind the need” that is the more important one.

- ✍ Examine the customer needs you have already written down using the question “Why is that so?” in order to obtain additional or more accurate customer needs.

It can be worthwhile to ask the question more than once!

Exercise 6: Prioritize Your Customer Needs

Use the following five criteria to prioritize and improve the customer needs you have collected:

- The need is specific.
Need: *The customer wants to reduce their production costs.*
Better: *The customer wants to reduce their production costs that are caused by idling.*
- The context is clear.
Need: *The customer wants to reduce the number of errors.*

Better: *The customer wants to reduce the number of errors when introducing new equipment.*

- The need describes the desired result and not the way to achieve it.

Example: *The customer wants to be able to see where to set the drill bit in the dark.*

Not: *The customer wants a drill with a light.*

- (For business customers): The need corresponds to or contributes to a business goal.
Example: *Reduce the number of errors* (customer need) contributes to *improve customer satisfaction* (business goal).
- There is a way for you to confirm the need.
Example: *We have contact with members of the target market and can interview them.*

Summary and Outlook

The key to success for a startup sometime lies in understanding the needs of a target market better than the competition. Founders can use their deeper understanding to develop a product that satisfies a customer need more completely or a larger number of customer needs. It is therefore worthwhile for founders to research customer needs intensively.

Customer needs are very closely related to the Target Market (Topic 1.2 *Target Market*) and Solution Concept (Topic 1.3 *Solution Concept*). You should therefore work on these three topics at the same time.

The customer needs that you have just written down are currently just assumptions that still have to be validated. For this, you need feedback from your future customers. There is a good chance that this will lead to corrections or additions. When you have validated the combination of customer need, target market and solution concept, you will have reached the first significant startup milestone called Problem-Solution Fit.

Link

- Topic 1.1 at [founders-playbook.de](https://founders-playbook.de/en/plausibility/customer-needs/):
founders-playbook.de/en/plausibility/customer-needs/