

## Understand your customer's experience with this simple technique.

Use a show-and-tell interview to learn directly from customers and gain a wealth of insights to improve your business.

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Understanding and connecting with your customers is challenging. Simply getting out of the office can be an odd change of pace.

And how do you really connect with your customers? Call them up? Email them? Where do you find them if not on your website or in the stores?

Finally, which method should you use? There are countless tools and methods to choose from, each with its own approach and protocols.

Here's the one you should start with. Show-and-tell interviews.

Show-and-tell interviews are great because they bring back an approach we all experienced in kindergarten or grade school – show-and-tell day! Remember?

Everyone brought something from home and when it was your turn, everyone stopped, listened, and watched.

There were exciting stories buried in what people brought in – what things are, how they are used, and the personal experiences those things reveal.

That's how show-and-tell interviews work.

They let your customer show and tell you how they go about their day, how they use your product, and what things mean to them. They tell you what goes wrong, what they love, and what they wish could be.

You stop, watch, and listen.

Show-and-tell interviews help you develop empathy for your customers and drive new insights.

With a survey or a focus group, the information you gather only addresses what you thought to ask. Further, these techniques tend to capture what people say they do, not what they actually do. What they actually do is richer and different and provides more useful information for problem solving and design.

## To get started with show-and-tell interviews try the following:

### Go where your user is.

First, you have to get out of the office and into your customer's environment. If you're developing a new weekday breakfast for young families, don't start by talking to people about breakfast. Instead, go to their home at breakfast time to watch how they do it.

Seeing your customers in their everyday environments engaging with your product or service, and the others around them, brings out much more information than a conversation ever will.

### Let them go about their business.

You want to see how your users normally behave in context, so let that unfold as naturally as possible. Tell them what you're interested in learning about (making weekday breakfast) but otherwise, follow their lead.

As people, we tend to forget things and gloss over small details that we've become accustomed to. Those little details that we witness when we pay attention are the most interesting parts of a show-and-tell interview.

Observing your customer at home will help you understand that their "breakfast time" is a frenzy. Their "breakfast" has to happen inbetween getting kids dressed, packing lunches, locating misplaced shoes, and letting the dog out. And then you might see a moment of pleasure when the frenzy subsides, fresh coffee is poured, and your customer takes the time to enjoy some warm, aromatic oatmeal.

Feeling that experience and understanding that experience will help you design for and communicate with the customer.

### Have the user narrate their experience.

Observation will reveal what people do. But you'll need more to understand why they do certain things or how they feel about a particular experience. Have them talk aloud and narrate what they are doing. If they pause for a second, ask, what are you thinking?

Sometimes what is happening is mundane and sometimes, profound. You'll never know unless you help users share their experiences. A narration helps you avoid guessing and making assumptions about what they were really doing or why.

Let the customer be your guide – but don't ask leading questions. We all want to do this, because we have questions we want answered. But they may not at all be relevant to the user. And don't believe they will always just tell you, "That really isn't relevant." They will try to come up with an answer to your question. They want to be helpful.

Questions that have a yes or no answer, multiple-choice answers, or strong descriptors built in are usually leading in nature.

**Avoid questions like this:**

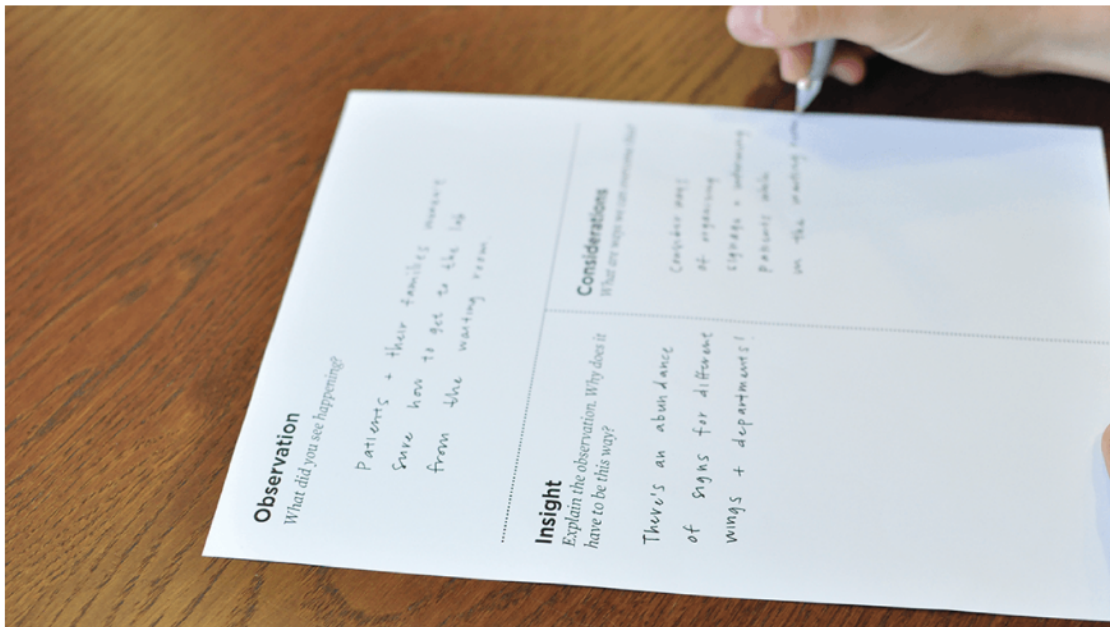
- Would you say that you shop a lot?
- Do you shop on even or odd days?
- How would you describe how convenient these granola bars are?

On the other hand, using the phrase, “Tell me about...,” is an invitation to the user to talk about how they feel about something. Wait through the silence as they consider how they want to answer. Avoid filling the silence with alternative ways they could answer.

After they have shared some content, use the phrase, “Say more about ...,” to continue the non-leading approach to interviewing.

**Ask open-ended questions like this:**

- Tell me about how you shop for groceries.
- Go ahead and try the granola bar. Tell me what you think.
- Say more about how it is different. (Assuming they said it was different.)



**Document everything.**

Good notes are indispensable when conducting research with your customers. Whenever possible, and it often is, record audio, take photographs, and shoot video.

Video is the most powerful tool at your disposal, because it enables you to capture the richness of your customer's experience and perspective in order to view it later.

Thorough documentation helps you communicate your findings to colleagues who were unable to see it for themselves.

## Just starting to visit customers? Start with a show-and-tell interview.

It is easy to hesitate to visit customers to learn more about how they live or work in their daily lives. Especially when your products or service is being used. Compared to the comfort of a daily office schedule, getting out into the field seems overwhelming.

But the value that comes from just one or two visits will energize your team. You don't have to have a very formal or sterile approach to customer research. The goal isn't to be scientific or statistically significant. The idea is to learn straight from your customer in their context.