

THE NINE No-No's

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Being on the receiving end of a "No-No" in baseball stinks, even though you'd give credit to the opposing pitcher for their great performance. Conducting voice of the customer (VOC) interviews is another product management sport that takes practice and precision, but can result in getting shutout if you're not prepared. Take a look at these nine "no-no's" of VOC interviews, to help you and your product team prepare for knocking your next VOC project out of the park!

1

TRYING TO BOIL THE OCEAN. Starting a VOC project can be exciting, as so many questions need answering and can help steer your product strategy. However, too broad of a focus will lead to a lack of real insights. Try to identify a single governing question that you're looking for an answer to, and scope the project around that. Generate a few other subordinate questions that help give context to the project.

BOILING OCEAN...
PLEASE CHECK BACK
LATER, MUCH LATER...

2

CASTING A WIDE NET OF CUSTOMERS TO TALK TO. In concert with No-No #1, you want to have a laser focus on the target personas you wish to hear from. While your product may have many of customers, really think about who the right people to talk to are (e.g., product users, product buyers, business leaders, etc.). If your product is sold to other businesses (B2B), then also draw a tight circle around the segment of customers to focus on (e.g., small medical supply companies, global aerospace companies). Even if you don't have a ton of relationships with your target personas, you should put in the effort to find them and recruit them for your research.

3

INSISTING ON FACE-TO-FACE CONVERSATIONS.

Though Zoom and Skype are now more-standard due to the Covid-19 pandemic, some people may not prefer to be seen on video. Even when the pandemic ends, people may be more-inclined to just speak over the computer or phone. For VOC interviews, this is totally okay and often preferred, as you can gain just as much or more information during a phone call. You also save time and money not travelling to meet in person.

4

GOING INTO VOC INTERVIEWS UNPREPARED. Even with a governing question and a tight definition of your target personas, there's still a lot to prepare before conducting the interviews. Create a formal interview guide with your main questions and a set of drilldown questions, and share those main questions with the customer in advance. Also, do some research on the customer: check out their profiles on social media, understand the company/organization they work, and find out their history of being a customer of your product.

5

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW LIKE A SURVEY. The point of a VOC interview is to get the customer talking, to hear their emotional responses to questions, and have them share anecdotes and stories. If you want answers to multiple choice, true/false, or ratings scale questions ... you're better off using SurveyMonkey or Google Forms.

6

ASKING A LOT OF "YES/NO" QUESTIONS IN AN INTERVIEW.

Along with No-No #5, try to avoid asking a lot of questions that will simply result in a "yes" or "no" answer. To help with this, phrase your questions in the interview guide with "How do you...?" or "Why do you...?" versus "Do you ...?" and "Have you...?" (Note: You will sometimes ask yes/no questions, for example, when you want to confirm something the customer said, you'd likely ask, "Did I understand you correctly when you said ...?")

7

TRYING TO WRITE DOWN EVERYTHING THE CUSTOMER SAYS.

While it is tempting to want to capture everything the customer tells you, it is unrealistic to try to write down or type it in real time. (It would actually look weird if you were face-to-face, and the customer rarely saw you make eye contact since you just typed on your laptop the whole time.) What's better is to ask for permission to record the interview, ensuring the customer that you won't share the recording with anyone. You can then focus on listening to the customer and steering the interview to be efficient and effective. You can go back to the recording later to listen to the interview and document the key points.

8

LETTING ONE QUOTE FROM ONE PERSON DRIVE CONCLUSIONS.

Sometimes you'll hear a customer say something that agrees 100% with your opinion, so you let that voice be the leading conclusion from the project. This is not necessarily accurate, if no other customers express the same thing. Take time to review all of the interview notes, and look for things that came up multiple times to identify real trends and the "loudest" voices. (Remember: two points make a line, three or more points make a trend.)

9

KEEPING YOUR NOTES AND INFORMATION TO YOURSELF.

After you have interviewed customers and identified the main voices of the project, don't keep the data to yourself and make product decisions in a vacuum. Create an executive-level report (document or presentation) that summarizes the main learnings from the research, lays out recommendations for actions to take, and share it with your team, peers and supervisors. Gaining consensus on the go-forward strategy/plans should be easier since you're armed with data from the customers!

Conducting VOC interviews and projects can be very rewarding for product leaders, as they help bring an outside perspective to problems and questions your product faces. Avoiding the nine No-No's will ensure you don't strike out, but instead hit a home run!

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