

Customer interview script

A short script and a notes page for talking to real customers before you launch or change a product or service.

What these conversations are for

Use them to understand a problem the way the customer lives it: what happened, what they did about it, what it cost them and which words they use. A few conversations cannot show how many people will buy or at what price. Treat what you hear as material for a decision, not as proof of demand.

Who to invite and how many conversations

- People who met the problem recently and can describe a specific occasion.
- People who already spend time or money on it: a competitor, a freelancer, a spreadsheet, their own evenings.
- People who started using your service or a competitor's and then stopped.
- Fewer friends and relatives: they tend to be kind rather than accurate.
- A first round is a handful of conversations. Stop when the answers start repeating. If every conversation brings a different story, narrow the group and continue.

How to ask for the conversation

EXAMPLE INVITATION

Hi Dana, I run a small bookkeeping service for freelancers and I am rethinking how I help clients at tax time. You mentioned that you filed on your own last spring. Could I ask you a few questions about how that went? About 20 minutes by phone, whenever suits you. I am not selling anything: I want to understand how people actually handle this before I change the service.

Rules of the conversation

- Ask what the person did the last time, not what they would do.
- Do not pitch. If they ask about your idea, say you will tell them at the end.
- No leading questions: do not put the answer inside the question.
- Let silences run. Count to five before you speak: the person may add more.
- Ask for the story first, then for details: when, how long, how much, who else.
- Ask permission before you record, and say what the recording is for.

Questions and notes

Person, date, how you found them

A first name is enough.

The decision this round of conversations should inform

One decision. Example: which service to offer first.

1. Tell me about the last time this came up. What happened?

When, where, what set it off. The whole story first.

2. What did you do then, step by step?

What they actually did, not what they “usually” do.

3. What did it cost you in time or money?

Example: two evenings and \$60 paid to a freelancer.

4. What else have you tried, and why did you stop?

Tools, services, people. The reason for stopping matters most.

5. What do you use now, and what annoys you about it?

Write the annoyance in their words.

6. Who else is involved when you decide on this?

Partner, accountant, manager, the person who pays.

7. What would have to happen for you to switch from what you use now?

Ask what kept them from switching before.

8. How do you pay for this today, and which part would be worth paying for?

Start with what they pay now. Note “I would pay” as an opinion.

Weak question, better question

Weak question	Better question
Would you buy this?	What did you do the last time this happened?
Do you think this is a good idea?	How do you handle this today?
How much would you pay for it?	What do you spend on this now, in money and in time?
Don't you find it annoying when...?	What was the hardest part the last time?

Weak question	Better question
Would you use an app for this?	What have you tried so far, and what happened?
Do you usually compare several providers?	How did you choose the last time? Who else did you look at?

Closing

Who else should I talk to about this?

Names and how to reach them.

May I come back to you with a draft?

Yes or no, and the preferred way to get in touch.

Right after the call

- ☐ Write down the quotes you remember, word for word, without tidying them up.
- ☐ Mark each note: fact (did, paid, used) or opinion (thinks, would do).
- ☐ Note what surprised you or went against what you expected.
- ☐ Decide one thing to change, or to check in the next conversation.
- ☐ Thank the person and note what you agreed on: a draft, a second call, a contact.

Personal data. Ask for consent before you record and say who will hear the recording. Keep notes without details you do not need: a first name or a number is enough, no surnames, addresses, or health and family matters. Delete recordings once your notes are done. This is practical caution, not legal advice. If your topics are sensitive, check the data protection rules of your country.