

Knowing Your Customer

Understanding Your Value Proposition

- What do you provide without which your customers could not do what they do or be as good as they are?
- Identify who else is in your market; they have shown a market exists for what you want to provide. What channels do they use? What's the tone of their message? Figure out what they are doing right and wrong to hone in on what you can do better.
- Use social media to hear what people say about the product/service you already provide or want to provide.
- Use focus groups carefully. Be sure to include people who you consider ideal customers from each segment of the market you want to reach. The more effort you put into assembling this group, the more you'll get out of it.

Identifying Needs

- Figure out which sub-segment of the market you're really looking to serve.
 - Use quantitative surveys to identify one or two pain points.
 - Segment surveys answers by issues. Those become sub-segments.
 - Engage in qualitative interviews in each sub-segment to learn why respondents have *not* yet solved the problem. The sub-segment with which you best align should reveal itself.
- Study behaviors of your potential customers. Once you identify what they are buying, you can educate them on how you can improve their experience.
- Fail fast. Build a quick prototype of the product/service you think you want to sell and take it to a dozen or so customers. They'll tell you what they like/don't like and what they really need. Many people may not know what they want, but a prototype lets them readily identify what they do/don't like.
- Probe prospects to fully understand what they're doing and what causes them to stay up at night. That way, you'll be able to address their problem. Ask why they respond the way they do. Then ask why again, and again, until you get to the heart of the issue.

- Use [Respondent.io](https://respondent.io) to schedule research interviews at low cost.
- Run three or four A/B tests to learn about potential customers. [Zoominfo.com](https://zoominfo.com) is a good source for lists.
- Trade shows can be useful to identify and sell to potential customers, gain competitive intelligence, and entertain existing customers. Get to know if a particular trade show would be right for you by first attending as a participant, not as a vendor.

Understanding the Buy Decision

- Learn about your potential customer before you meet. The web has a lot of information on that prospect's company and its market. When you meet, frame what you learned as, "So as I understand it..." The prospect will correct you as needed, providing you with insight that's hard to get elsewhere.
- Understand where your prospect is in his/her life cycle, e.g., someone who is two years from retiring is less likely to buy a product/service that changes the way they do things.
- Since the buying decision is often complicated, don't be shy about asking early on how it will be made, who will be involved, who has veto power.
 - Use LinkedIn to learn about the different players in the organization you'll be speaking with.
 - Ask, "Is there anything to prevent us from moving forward today?" The answer will tell you who else needs to be involved.