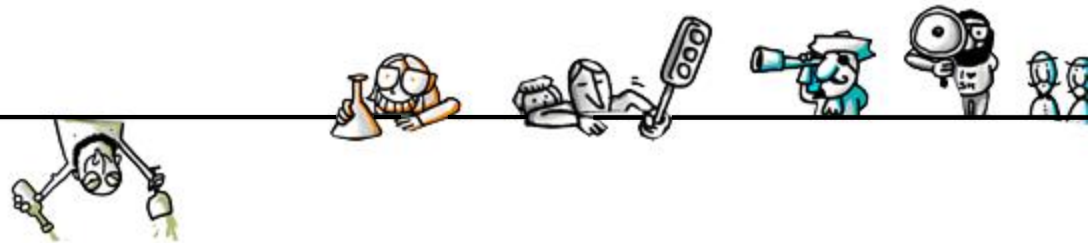


15.390 NEW ENTERPRISES



Primary Market Research for Startups: Frequently asked questions

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Is it a good idea to start an interview with an “on a scale of 1-10” question?

- *No. To get the most learning out of an interview, use open ended questions to get open ended responses.*
- *Closed end questions requiring yes-no answers or multiple-choice answers will cut the conversation short and reduce the potential learnings from the interview.*
- *As a general rule of thumb, face to face conversations should involve open-ended responses, so the subject can tell you what you never would have thought to ask. On-line surveys should involve close-ended responses so you have a good way to tabulate responses.*

How do you run a good detailed interview?

- Read [Talking to Humans](#) by Giff Constable – free PDF download (also available on Amazon)
- Use words like this to run the interview
 - “Tell me about the last time...”
 - “Tell me the story of...”
 - “You said X. Tell me more...”
 - “Why?”
 - “Why not?”
- Go in pairs so one person can focus 100% on the person while the other person take notes.

How do you build/use a discussion guide for a detailed interview?

- Think about what you want to have learned at the end of the conversation
- Back out the topics and questions to ask and write them down so they fit on one page. 3-5 topics will do.
- Memorize it. Then don't bring it.
- At the interview, use open ended questions and active listening to let the subject lead while guiding them through any content they didn't cover on their own.

What if the interview subject simply won't talk?

- First, check your technique. Is everybody not talking to you or is it just one or two people?
- If it is just one or two people, perhaps they are shy or naturally reticent. Spend a little more time up front breaking the ice and building rapport. Give them a little more time to respond. Avoid filling in all their silences with words. Embrace pauses.
- If it's everybody you need to check your technique. Role play with a friend then get some feedback.
- Sometimes if the subject is otherwise talkative but you can't keep them talking about the subject matter it may mean they don't have any pain points in that area. That is important data you should take into account.

How do you recruit subjects?

- If B2C and you and your friends can be buyers/users:
 - Directly recruit friends of friends (so they don't know you)
 - Post the request on your social networks and your friends' social networks
 - Where applicable, put up signage with a landing page URL at the watering holes where your target users hang out (e.g. at a preschool if recruiting parents of young children)
- If B2B or you/your friends aren't buyers/users:
 - Reach out into your network to see if you know someone who knows someone
 - Use LinkedIn to find suspects (and how you are connected)
 - Tap into alumni networks of your affiliated universities
- You can also use a research service who can recruit subjects for you (works better for B2C). This costs money.
- Stopping people in the mall or putting up flyers in the local library is generally not a great way to recruit subjects.

How do you get a company to give you access to its people for a B2B project?

- #1 requirement is to have contact with a high ranking person who can get you time with others in the organization.
- First way is via old fashioned networking straight to the high ranking person
- Second way is via networking with someone else in that organization who may be able to introduce you to a next person, then a next person. It may take 4-5 introductions to get to the right person.
- In some cases you may have to violate good technique in discovery research and share what you are working on to get access. Do what you can with what access you have.

How do you gauge purchase intent in an interview?

- What you should *NOT* do is ask them “Would you buy it?” especially not “Would you buy it for \$xxx?”
- What you can do is ask them what they have done to solve the problem you are talking about. For example, did they spend \$\$ in the past 12 months to buy some product or service that solves some aspect of this problem? That is a good indication that there is a real pain that they will pay money for.
- You should *NEVER* do pricing research in person. Always do it via one of the standard survey vehicles, quantitatively. See PMR primer for details.

How many interviews do you need to build a good persona?

- If you don't know what a persona is: Read ["Flat Stanley doesn't live here" by Jennifer Doctor](#).
- If you don't have a good first guess: Cast a wide net and have many short (15 minute) conversations with many more people (30-50) to help you come up with a tighter target.
- Once you have a tight target: Interview 20-30 for each unique persona
- For B2B you will need to interview many people with the same role per company as you will be able to get into many fewer companies than 20-30.

What if you keep hearing the same thing over and over?

- Congratulations! You have found your persona and each conversation is validating the knowledge you have built.
- If you have more than 10 or 15 interviews, you can stop now and build your persona.
- If you have only 2 or 3 down, don't stop. This can be sampling error.

What if every conversation with an interview subject is a whole new conversation?

- What this means is that your targeting isn't tight enough. This often happens in the beginning of trying to identify the persona.
- Step back and ask yourself how else you can sub-segment your target market to tighten it up. See if you can have lots of short conversations with lots more people to help you sub-segment.
- You will probably end up having several tighter targets, each sharing more nuanced attributes with each other. Now you can recruit a few people per target and look for the sweet spot.

End

Questions?

