

B2B Organic Growth Newsletter



New Product Blueprinting by Dan Adams

Growth strategies for companies that supply businesses - not consumers

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Getting Customers to Agree to a VOC Interview

We began teaching clients how to conduct B2B New Product Blueprinting interviews in 2005... and at first we focused on how to build our clients' interviewing abilities. Deep listening skills, new methods of probing, unique idea-triggering tools... by golly, we armed them to the teeth.

Then we noticed: If you don't get the right customers in the room for the interview, you've got a problem. You can have a world-class interview team... but if only the customer's summer intern shows up, it's *not* going to be a good interview. In some cases, our clients told us their customers declined altogether. They heard responses such as...

- Why should we help you develop a product for the whole market?
- Sorry, but we're just too busy for this.
- We'll call you when we have something for you to work on.

Worse were the unspoken objections: "I'm afraid this is a thinly veiled attempt to sell me something," or, "You might whip out a questionnaire and bore... me... to... tears." And can you really blame these customers? How do *you* feel when someone with a clipboard shows up on your porch asking to conduct a survey? And at work, you have even less free time, right?

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So why would any customer agree to an interview with suppliers? Let's put ourselves in the shoes of customers and ask the age-old question "What's in it for me?"

When we do this, we find two things determine a customer's willingness to be interviewed: 1) How interested are they in the subject? 2) How confident are they the supplier can help? Let's look more closely...

Q1: How Interested Are They in the Subject?

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New Product Blueprinting at DuPont



Read how DuPont implemented New Product Blueprinting through TEAM e-MMERSION™ ([PDMA Visions, Oct. 2010](#)).

There are actually two parts to this question... the first concerns the topic, and the second the customer contact. Let's say you make jet engines and you're calling Boeing for an interview. Are they interested in jet engines? I'm guessing... yes. Now imagine you're a leading supplier of paper clips: You're just not going to pack the room with interested interviewees, are you?

If you're in a paper clip type of business, you should think about broadening the scope of the interview... perhaps to "office productivity," and look for new ways to help customers. And perhaps engage an outside service to set up the interviews... because it still may take many calls to get each "yes."

Frankly, we don't have many "paper clip" clients: Most can make a significant impact on their customers' processes or products. The trick is connecting with an interested contact. Here are some tips...

1) If the target company is an existing customer, begin with the strongest relationship between your two companies. If your sales rep has a good relationship with someone, she should ask *that* person for help contacting the interview target. This goes more smoothly once someone "inside" is helping.

2) What if you're trying to interview companies in a completely new market? First, hire and interview a recently retired expert from this industry (using sources—e.g., www.intota.com). Then ask this expert to help you open doors. *Extremely* effective.

3) People love to know how their opinions compare to others in their industry. You can pique customers' interest by promising them the summarized results of your "industry research"... perhaps sharing some results from your quantitative Preference Interviews.

Q2: How Confident Are They the Supplier Can Help?

Your customer needs confidence you'll be able to take what you learn and do something that helps them.

You've found the person in Boeing most interested in next-generation jet engines. Wonderful. But Boeing has never heard of your company. And actually, you've only been

thinking about making jet aircraft engines. Good luck with that. Your customer needs to have confidence that you'll be able to take what you learn from them and do something that

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Today's Quote

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."
—George Bernard Shaw

sure to take what you learn from them and do something that helps them. Here are some ways to boost this confidence...

- 1) Make it clear that your company plans to develop or acquire technology. You can't promise a specific end result, but make sure they know this is a serious project for you.
- 2) Tell them you will be bringing one of your top technical experts... so they can understand customers' needs *before* beginning serious development work.
- 3) Explain there will be no selling taking place during the meeting. The sole purpose is to understand the "outcomes" or end results the customer desires. This is the customer's chance to tell your R&D what to work on.

Practical Tools

There are three more practical things you can do to boost your success rate in getting the right interviewees in the room. First, for difficult situations, consider asking face-to-face... perhaps during a sales visit or at a trade show. It's much harder saying "no" in person. Our clients conduct hundreds of interviews annually in Asia, and find this is especially useful in some situations there.

Second, send an agenda. When you call your customer contact, probably half of what you're saying sinks

Half of what you're saying sinks in, while the other half sounds like "wah, wah, wah, wah..."
Other half sounds like "wah, wah, wah, wah..."
Then your contact invites his colleagues and half of what he says to them is "wah, wah, wah, wah..." That's a recipe for people showing up at the interview asking, "Now what's this all about?" If you're an existing Blueprinting practitioner, be sure to click the "Job Aids" button on your Blueprinter software home page and download the "Discovery Interview Agenda Template."

Third, we have a brand-new tool you can use. Send this link to prospective interviewees:
www.haveyoubeendiscovered.com. Many companies pursue "open innovation"... finding new *external* technology from universities, start-ups, etc. But then they completely overlook their best source—their own suppliers, whose R&D staff is already dedicated to innovating for them. This new website makes this point and answers 12 common questions about New Product Blueprinting Discovery Interviews.

Perspective...

Many of our clients work in industries where interviews are

Many of our clients work in industries where interviews are easy to come by. Others have to work really hard at this. If you find yourself in the latter category, don't be discouraged. Your competitors are in the same boat... but *you* can use these tips to gain a competitive edge. To learn more about Discovery Interviews, visit www.newproductblueprinting.com or download a free chapter on the subject at www.newproductblueprinting.com/book.html (See Chapter 11).

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