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Help Your Students Test Initial Ideas Through Customer Discovery

What is Customer Discovery?

Customer discovery is a process by which entrepreneurs come to understand people's reaction to their ideas.

It's all too easy to fall in love with your own ideas, and your ability to step back and critically analyze your work diminishes the longer you spend on a project. This is why it is so important to invest time in customer discovery early on.

Rather than looking for evidence to support your initial idea, customer discovery seeks to uncover the assumptions you have made about your audience. These assumptions can only be found by interacting with that audience. Interactions can unfold in many ways, but often take the form of a written survey, structured conversation or demonstration.

By understanding the end user, entrepreneurs are able to adjust their initial idea to make it more compelling and valuable.

Why is it Valuable?

Some of the largest barriers to effective research are the assumptions that we bring to our work. A customer discovery approach guards against this because:

- It seeks out information that challenges rather than supports what the researcher already knows.
- It gathers, compares and learns from multiple perspectives on the same topic.
- It promotes resilience in research by revealing the value of identifying and correcting our assumptions.

VIDEO RESOURCES

- Twenty One Toys founder Ilana Ben-Ari discusses what she learned about her customers in a video titled "Adapting Your Value Proposition."
- Revelo Bike founder Henry Chong talks about his experience with "Customer Validation."

Both videos are [located in the Research & Discovery section](#) of the Entrepreneurial Thinking Toolkit.

Customer Discovery in Your Classroom

Introduce a research assignment with the short activity on the back of this page.

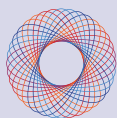
- This activity demonstrates how easy it is to make assumptions in our research, and provides helpful techniques to guard against doing so.

Include a customer discovery component in a research assignment.

- Introduce a project by asking: "Who is the intended audience for this project?" and "What do we know or assume about what this audience finds important?"
- Have students conduct a short interview with members of the target audience. Then, have them record the assumptions they uncovered about this group, and how they modified their approach to correct those assumptions. [CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD A CUSTOMER INTERVIEW TEMPLATE.](#)

Refine your lesson plans and assignments by applying the customer discovery approach.

- Interview your students about their reactions to the assignment they are working on.
- Making small changes to your approach based on these interviews will model the customer discovery approach and will empower your students as contributors to the form of their education.



Entrepreneurial
Thinking Toolkit by
For Educators



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Class Activity: Identifying Our Research Assumptions

Activity Time: 10-20 minutes

A Milkshake Conundrum:

A local restaurant approaches you to help them increase the sales of their chocolate milkshakes.

You realize that in order to increase sales, you need to consider why people are buying milkshakes in the first place.

Class Ideation:

In groups, students consider the following:

1. Describe a typical milkshake consumer.
2. What value does a milkshake offer these customers?
3. How might this value be increased?

Activity Video:

(5 mins)

Harvard business professor Clayton Christensen describes what he discovered about milkshake customers through a process of customer discovery.

This video is named "Understanding the Job" and is [located in the Research and Discovery section](#) of the Entrepreneurial Thinking Toolkit.



Video Debrief:

1. What assumptions did you make about milkshake customers? Why do you think you made these assumptions?
2. What would have happened if you had created a marketing campaign based on your assumptions, rather than on customer data?
3. As a student, who are your "customers"? What value do you offer them? What assumptions might you be making about them?

What Success Looks Like

Students identify and describe the source of their assumptions

- This activity is meant to reveal how easy it is to make assumptions based on our experiences.
- Students should be able to describe the importance of gaining access to fresh perspectives that run counter to their assumptions.

Students make connections between Christensen's example and their own work

- Students pose and support creative answers to the question "Who are your customers?" This may include, but is not limited to, their teachers, coaches, mentors and anyone else to whom they submit work.
- Students discuss the value that they assume they are producing for these customers, and consider how they could test these assumptions.