

# Working Backwards

PUBLIC SECTOR HANDS-ON WORKSHOP



“Done correctly, the Working Backwards process is a huge amount of work. But, it saves you even more work later. The Working Backwards process is not designed to be easy, it’s designed to save huge amounts of work on the backend, and to make sure we’re actually building the right thing.”

Jeff Bezos

# Working Backwards

At Amazon, we start with the customer and work backwards. Begin the Working Backwards process by answering the *5 Customer Questions*. Answering these questions at the start of your project will help you apply a customer-centric focus and guide your thinking as you invent new customer experiences.

## 5 CUSTOMER QUESTIONS

1. Who is the customer?
2. What is the customer problem or opportunity?
3. What is the most important customer benefit?
4. How do you know what customers need or want?
5. What does the customer experience look like?

The following exercises will help clarify your thinking as you develop an idea. **Let's get started.**

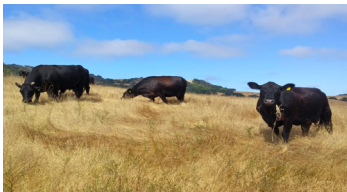
# 1 Who is the customer?

Start the Working Backwards process by establishing an understanding of who your customer is and what their needs are. At Amazon, we create products and services for many types of customers. Some examples include:

- IT Admins and software engineers using AWS services
- Readers using their Kindles
- Prime members watching original content from Amazon Studios
- Entrepreneurs and small businesses that sell on Amazon

Let's use an example and see how we use this process to identify the potential needs of a cattle rancher .

## EXAMPLE: IDENTIFY YOUR CUSTOMER AND THEIR NEEDS



"I'm never sure if all my cattle are doing okay at a moment's notice. Tracking them all is very hard"

A few needs this cattle rancher may have are:

- Identify the location of loner cows and bulls
- Saving time finding lost cattle
- Ultimately, he wants to maintain his herd

## Try It



This exercise helps you identify your customer and their needs. Think about the context of your customer. How does the time, place, and situation a customer is in affect their needs?

1. Who is your customer?
2. Write down 2–3 wants or needs your customer may have:

Consider repeating this exercise if you have multiple customers. For example, in the Kindle business, customer types include both authors and readers. Start with your end-customer, then repeat as necessary.





## 2 What is the customer problem or opportunity?

Now that you've identified a customer type and their needs, the next step is to describe current problems or new opportunities. What challenges does your customer wrestle with? What could be improved?

### EXAMPLE: IDENTIFY THE CUSTOMER PROBLEM/OPPORTUNITY

#### CUSTOMER PROBLEM

**Today** ranchers **have to** manually track and monitor their cattle in sprawling, rolling, and hilly terrain **when** in remote areas with little to no communication.



## Try It



Think about the customer type you identified in the previous activity. Complete the sentence below to describe a problem or opportunity you would like to focus on.

Today \_\_\_\_\_  
(CUSTOMER TYPE)

have to \_\_\_\_\_  
(DESCRIBE PROBLEM/OPPORTUNITY)

when \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(SITUATION)

Consider your customers' situation, motivation, and desired outcome. Remember, you are defining a problem here, not a solution.

## Activity: Generate Ideas



Now that you have an understanding of your customer and their problem/opportunity, it's time to generate solutions. List eight ideas that address your problem/opportunity statement in eight minutes.

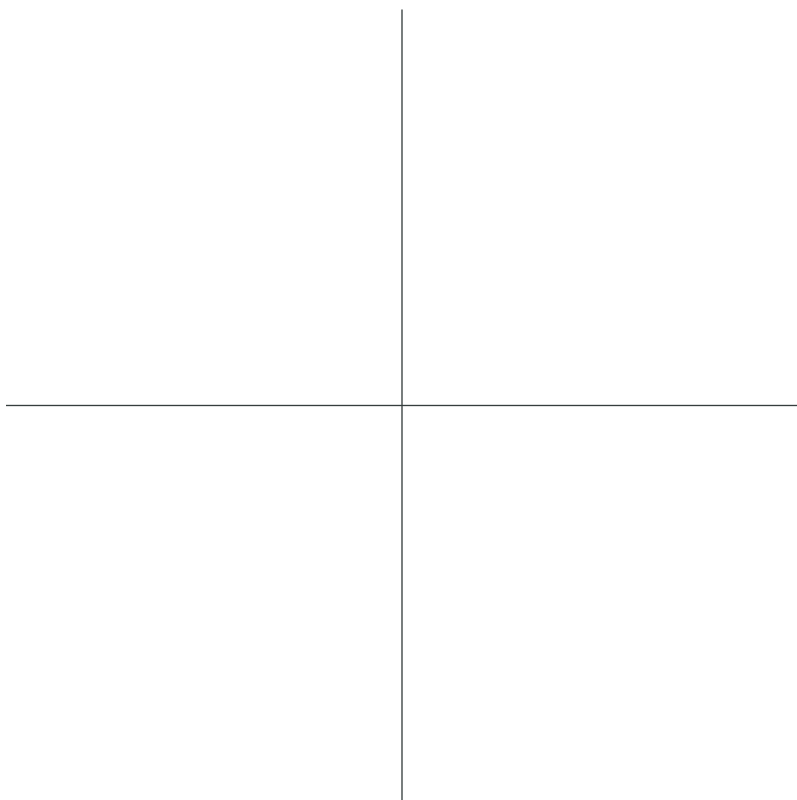
A large empty grid for generating ideas, consisting of a horizontal line and a vertical line intersecting at the center, forming a cross shape.

## Try It

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Think big, think differently, and don't be afraid to write down silly ideas. Use a mixture of words and pictures to help unlock new ideas.



Which solution is your favorite?

### 3 What is the most important customer benefit?

While you may have eight breakthrough ideas or game-changing solutions, you won't have the resources to build all of them. This question forces focus – challenging you to prioritize, select, and define a specific solution.

#### EXAMPLE: THE SOLUTION AND CUSTOMER BENEFIT

##### THE BIG IDEA



Using a cost effective, Low Power Wide Area Network (LPWAN) and off the shelf sensors, the solution allows ranchers to apply tracking technology to each cow by using a collar that tracks both location and body temperature.

##### MOST IMPORTANT CUSTOMER BENEFIT



This solution allows ranchers to track their animals over the entirety of their ranch at a low cost point.

## Try It

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1. The Big Idea is:
2. The most important customer benefit is:

Does your solution address the customer problem previously identified?

## 4 How do you know what customers need or want?

Customer data comes in many forms. Ask yourself, what are the best signals to inform the customer experience?

- **Behavioral metrics** are quantitative measures of what customers are doing with current products or experiences, which you can measure at scale or collect through direct observation.
- **Qualitative feedback** includes verbal feedback from customers, which is critical to understanding why a customer does what they do, as well as qualitative observations of what they are doing and how they are doing it.
- **Subjective metrics** are quantitative measures of the subjective customer experience that can be assessed with any closed-ended rating scales or existing standardized instruments.

## Try It

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How do you know what customers need or want? What data do you have to support your hypothesis? (If you don't have data yet, write down a plan for how you will collect it).

Validate your hypothesis of what customers need and what their problems are.

“Every anecdote from a customer matters. We research each of them because they tell us something about our processes. It’s an audit that is done for us by our customers. We treat them as precious sources of information.”

Jeff Wilke





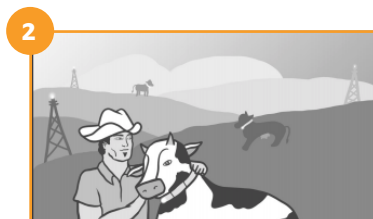
## 5 What does the customer experience look like?

Sketching is a fast and frugal way to communicate the end-to-end customer experience. Everyone can do it.

### EXAMPLE: VISUALIZE THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE



Gerald, a cattle rancher, has difficulty tracking and monitoring his cattle. Losing cattle leads to economic losses.



He uses the CowTracker app and installs a few antennas on the hills of his ranch and puts collars on his cows.



Using CowTracker, Gerald is able to be alerted that a cow is in distress and knows where to go to her and help.



After using the system for a year, he is pleased with managing his herd and land more effective, and saving money as well.

## Try It

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Sketch out a visual to represent your customer experience.

The fidelity of your visuals should match the maturity of your idea. When your idea is rough, your drawing should be rough.

## Press Release – Customer Quote

Before you start building anything, draft a fictional quote to imagine how your customer will feel and what they would say once they try your solution. While the quote is fictional, it should be specific, believable, and use customer-centric language. Use the testimonial to reinforce why a customer cares about what you're launching.

### **EXAMPLE: SMART COWTRACKER APP**

“This new sensor system helps me keep track of my cattle wherever they are on my property.” Said Gerald, a 30-year rancher whose family has been ranching their land since 1893. “I recently had a pregnant heifer wander off into a shrubbed area that was hard to reach. All I had to do was look at my CowTracker app to see where she was. It sent me a text alert when her body heat spiked so I knew she was in labor. The vet came out and we were able to deliver the calf without losing the heifer. That translated to money in my pocket.

## Try It

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Write your own customer quote.

Does your quote sound specific, believable, and use customer-centric language?

# Press Release – Heading & First Paragraph

Complete the following to finish your mini press release.

- **Headline:** Short, compelling description.
- **Byline:** One sentence describing what is launching and the most important benefit the customer will receive from the solution.
- **First Paragraph:** Assume a reader will not read past the first paragraph, so summarize the most important parts. Include a date you expect the solution to launch to customers.

## EXAMPLE: COWTRACKER APP

### Introducing CowTracker, a new way to track your cattle

*College students develop a new, cost effective livestock sensing platform for rural ranchers in California.*

SAN LUIS OBISPO TRIBUNE, CA — Jan 20, 2020 — Today a group of agriculture and engineering students released CowTracker, a low-cost and easy to maintain cattle tracking and health monitor solution for remote cattle ranchers. The system is composed of low-cost sensors that track an animal's location and body temperature so ranchers can monitor the cattle throughout the year and during critical moments during the breeding and birthing season. This provides the ranches with the certainty they need to streamline operations, reduce costs, and maximize the economic benefit of their herd.

## Try It

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Write your headline, byline, and first paragraph.

**HEADLINE:**

**BYLINE:**

**FIRST PARAGRAPH:**

Keep it simple; this is your elevator pitch.

# Notes





# Notes

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# Notes





Great products  
and services  
come from deeply  
understanding  
customers.

**We are Customer Obsessed, please share your thoughts.**

**Please either scan this QR code with your smartphone, or go to this link to fill out a short survey: <http://bit.ly/CIC-Event-Survey>**



**Learn more about digital innovation in the public sector on AWS  
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