

Ask Your Customer the Right Questions

As a follow-up to our lesson on asking customers probing questions in chat or text, this handout presents a list of probing questions you can use in your chats and two annotated chat transcripts where the customer service agent used a successful questioning strategy. My comments about why the questioning sequences worked are in red.

A list of 10 probing questions you can use in your chats

1. Could you give me an example of... ?
2. Did I understand you correctly that... ?
3. How would you prefer I help you today?
4. What outcome are you looking for?
5. How long have you been experiencing this problem?
6. Have I covered everything you would like to discuss or ask about today?
7. Why do you need to (or want to) X?
8. Would you prefer A, B, or something different?
9. What is it about X that is [confusing, disappointing, etc.] to you?
10. Would you like to do X again, or would you prefer to discuss other options?

Andrew:	Thank you for chatting with H+ Sport today. My name is Andrew and I'm happy to assist you, Jai!	
Andrew:	What kind of shoes are you looking for?	<i>Notice that Andrew didn't ask the extremely broad question, "How can I help you today?" His narrower question is more engaging.</i>
Andrew:	Hello Jai, I noticed that you're still logged in to the chat. Was there anything I can assist you with today?	<i>This is a mere reminder question, similar to "Are you there?" but more polite.</i>
Jai:	Hello, yes I am here.	
Jai:	I am looking for shoes that will allow me to walk comfortably. I have nerve damage in my foot.	

Andrew:	Okay, so you are looking for walking shoes?	<i>Andrew asks a rather narrow question here. Notice that the narrow question doesn't discourage a wider answer from Jai. She's looking for walking shoes and dress shoes.</i>
Jai:	Yes, let's start with walking shoes. I will need to replace my dress shoes too.	
Andrew:	Okay no problem, one moment please...	
Andrew:	What size do you wear?	<i>This is a simple, narrow question. It's a close-ended question, not a probing question.</i>
Jai:	I wear a size 9 or 9.5.	
Andrew:	What width are your feet?	<i>This is another simple, narrow question. It's a close-ended question, not a probing question. Asking these questions enables Andrew to use his search tools to find shoes to suggest.</i>
Jai:	Average width	
Andrew:	Okay. What key things are you looking for in a shoe?	<i>This is a probing question. Now that Andrew has the facts about Jai's size, he can ask her this open-ended question about her preferences.</i>
Jai:	Comfort, really. I have a lot of pain in the ball of my right foot.	
Andrew:	Take a look at these two pairs of shoes. I think they might work for you. http://www.H+ Sport.com/earth-white-microfiber and http://www.H+ Sport.com/a801-walker-black	
Jai:	I took a look at that Walker shoe. Does it provide extra comfort in the ball of the foot? It looks like an average gym shoe.	
Andrew:	It actually elevates the ball of your feet so that most of your weight is on your heel. It also stated something about memory foam cushioning in the insole.	
Jai:	Oh that's good to know. That is what I am looking for.	

Andrew:	The second shoe I sent you has this awesome insole technology where you can peel away squares from the bottom of your insole to relieve the pressure wherever it hurts in your feet. Here's another option: http://www.H+ Sport.com/ne-classics-gray .	
Andrew:	The third shoe, I actually have a pair in a different color design, and they are unbelievably comfortable.	
Jai:	Thanks! These options are good! Can you suggest about dress shoes?	
Andrew:	You're welcome. Sure, one moment please...	
Andrew:	What type of dress shoe are you interested in? loafer, oxford?	<i>This is another useful style of probing question. Andrew asks an open-ended question then—to help the customer—he suggests possible answers to it.</i>
Jai:	A black dress shoe with a low heel	
Jai:	Not to be funny, but I don't want to look like an old lady.	
Andrew:	What's the highest the heel can be?	<i>This is a simple, narrow question. It's a close-ended question, not a probing question.</i>
Jai:	Maybe an inch or so	
Andrew:	I honestly don't see any I would specifically recommend. But here is a search result for Black comfort dress shoes in sizes 9-9.5 with 1-1 3/4 inch heel. http://www.H+ Sport.com/women-shoes/ Style/ desc/#!/women .	
Jai:	OK, I will look at that link.	
Andrew:	Okeydokey	
Jai:	Hmm ... it's not your fault but those are some UGLY black shoes!	
Andrew:	I felt the same way, that's why I didn't want to suggest any of them.	
Jai:	I guess I have to get used to that kind of footwear.	

Andrew:	For the most part I can say that H+ footwear is an amazing comfort brand, and you can wear some of our casual shoes for dress occasions as well.	
Jai:	OK. Thank you for helping me shop.	
Jai:	Can you send me a transcript of this chat?	
Andrew:	My pleasure, anytime! As soon as you dismiss this chat you will receive the transcript in an email.	
Jai:	OK, will do.	
Andrew:	May I help you with anything else today?	<i>In some chats (where the agent hasn't really helped the customer), this question can backfire. However, this polite question works well here because Andrew truly has been helpful.</i>
Jai:	No thank you. I appreciate your help.	
Andrew:	You're welcome! Thanks again for contacting H+ Sport.com! If you need anything else, please feel free to contact us again by phone (1-800-111-2222) or chat if we may be of further assistance. Have a great day!	