

Robert Lee

415-608-4633

robert@labzero.com

Robert is an office manager for multiple businesses, including Lab Zero. We know that one of his responsibilities is acquiring hardware for San Francisco startups. Since he works with modern technology firms, he almost exclusively purchases laptop computers.

Robert has some technical understanding--he has built two computers and thus has a working knowledge of the components within a computer. His considerations for hardware recommendations are less focused on the details of specific components (example: cores, MHz of a processor) but he's informed enough to be able to reference a summary of those details (like an i3 versus an i5 processor).

Learning Goals

For our early interviews, we are most interested in gaining a better understanding of a Requester's high-level approach. Particularly how they **think about hardware** and how they **relate to their customer**, the Employee.

Throughout the conversation, we will be listening out for (and probing when appropriate) to learn:

1. How does the Requester describe the lifecycle of an engagement with serving an Employee (within the context of hardware/software)?
 - a. How does the Requester come to understand what an Employee needs?
 - b. What happens when the ideal product cannot be acquired?
 - c. How does the Requester know they did a good job?
2. How does the Requester perform their research for solutions?
 - a. How does the Requester think about hardware? (is their criteria based on detailed technical components or simplified concepts?)
 - b. How does the Requester balance features vs price?
 - c. What sources do they trust, and why?

Take-Aways

1. Even technically-minded Requesters desire simplicity
 - o **"Now, Apple has simplified so much. It's so helpful, you don't have to change much, you don't need a lot of options. The basic offerings are good enough"**
 - i. The better the group understands its customer segments, the more targeted its offerings can be.
 - ii. When many options are available, the Robert had to assess more criteria to make the right decision: "[PCs have] Too many variables, I have to look at price sometimes to understand the level of machine's capabilities"
 - o Robert perceives roughly two options at each decision point:
 - i. General power/portability: Air vs Pro
 - ii. Screen size: 13 vs 15"
 - iii. Storage: 256gb or more
2. Over time, Robert has developed a framework to understand the need
 - o What is the employee's role?
 - o When is hardware needed?
 - o Any special needs (extra storage, etc)?
 - o What screen size is preferred?
3. In the current hardware landscape, speed is paramount

- While the tasks performed dictate the level of hardware power needed, Robert no longer orders the lowest-end computers.
- In the past when he has ordered the lowest-end computers, users who do not have complex or hardware-intensive tasks complained about “lag” negatively impacting their experience.
 - i. “I wouldn’t recommend getting an i3 or something...I’d go for an i5”

Open-ended Discovery Interview Script

Thanks, general icebreaker discussion, then remind that today the focus is how the interviewee supports their employees with hardware/software.

Tell me about your level of technical understanding.

- Built his own computer, “easier the second time”.
- First time, ordered bad ram “cheaped on the ram” causing random errors.
- Take-away was “invest in quality”, recurring problems aren’t worth it

How would you describe the minimum useful computer for a general user (like in sales or marketing)?

- “Don’t want them (employees) to waste time for things to load--make sure they have a little more power than you might think they really need.”
- “Wouldn’t recommend getting an i3 or something, too low end, wouldn’t last long enough.”
- “If the person’s annoyed & waiting based on lag, they’re not going to be as effective. Waiting for things to load.”

Could you tell me about a time an employee needed a new computer and how you were involved in fulfilling the request?

- “They...[the business] asked me to get a new computer for a new hire, with 2 weeks warning. They didn’t give any help on the specifics...‘just the standard MBP’ they said”
 - Robert had to ask probing questions discerning the real need
 - “Employee role?”
 - Software Engineer, this tells Robert a dedicated video card is likely unnecessary
 - “When do you need it by?”
 - Computers must be in with extra time to set up (“shouldn’t arrive on hiring day because there is work involved in setting the computer up for use”)
 - “This new hire had to use a loaner computer on day one because the computer I ordered arrived on his start day”

How do you understand what the employee needs?

- “Luckily, mainly working with MacBooks so it’s pretty standard”
- “I think about their role (dev, design, whatever)”
 - “This helps define the level of power they need”
 - “Like, Designers need dedicated video card”
- “I ask about screen preference/size preference (many people don’t always like 15” laptop, may want something smaller)”
- “Extra storage space...but not a crazy amount, nobody needs 1TB these days”
- “Get solid state for speed...it helps out so much”
- “Now, Apple has simplified so much it’s so helpful, you don’t have to change much, you don’t need a lot of options. The basic offerings are good enough”
- “It really helps when the company limits the choices”

We haven’t talked much about software, why’s that?

- “Don’t usually help with software, usually the team already has those things set up (like adding a new user in Adobe Creative Suite)”
 - This is in-line with a move in software toward more SaaS/subscription models. Some of the most important software may already be set up under agreement and all you have to do is add a user.

Do you use any tricks or resources (like apps or tools) to help you get this done?

- “If they need it fast, contact Apple Store business team, get it same day--Apple help him set up a site so that it will ship ASAP. Also, SF Apple Store helps a lot if there’s a last-minute request of a powerful machine.”

What do you like about these [tricks/resources]?

- "Speed of fulfillment"
- "Try to get computer ASAP even if not needed for 2 weeks" - get it under control, don't have risks like shipping etc
- "It's easier because Apple simplifies"
 - I generally look at...
 - HD
 - Processor
 - Dedicated video card or not
 - How fast can it be fulfilled

Does anyone help you get this done today?

- "No, it's all me"

What do you feel takes too long today?

- "I didn't realize how long it takes for non-standard models (like a larger HD)"
- "SF Apple store actually has non-standard on hand which is a huge help!"

If you could wave a magic wand and do anything you can't do today, what would it be? Don't worry about whether it's possible.

- "If my business people gave me a standard for each role"
 - "If you're a developer, you can choose Air or Pro & screen size"
 - "If you're a designer, here's the build, your option is screen size"
- "If I have 2 options to give them, like screen size, they're happy"

Is there anything else about ordering technology that I should have asked?

- "For some reason, no one seems to touch Windows devices"

What would be different if you had to do Windows ordering?

- "They have too many options. Too many choices"
 - "Too many manufacturers...I'd lean toward Lenovo, Dell XPS and forget the rest"
 - "And hybrid (pc/tablet)...why?"
- "Too many variables, I have to look at price sometimes to understand the level of machine's capabilities"

Thanks again...ask if interested in further discussions/testing product in the future.

- Robert is interested in testing concepts we develop