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Ask a question

- Question asked by **Natalie Hirsch**
- Research
- 6 replies
- 3 years ago

What are best practices for win/loss analysis?

In particular for loss analysis, does anyone have any helpful language that they use when asking a lost opportunity for their time in conducting the interview? I want to make sure they understand that my goal is to objectively learn, and that we're no longer pursuing them as a sales lead.

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6 Replies

[Steve Johnson](#)

Helping teams apply the best practices of product management. Author, speaker, consultant, guitar player.
3 years ago

"Hello, I'm a product manager for <company>. I'm not a sales person and I'm not selling anything. You recently looked at< product> and I'd like to get your advice on how we could improve it."

Win/Loss analysis is a powerful research technique that should be used by product managers to get insight on product and used by product marketing to get insight on promotion. Sales people don't know why they lose. Nor do they know why they win. They listen to sell; they don't listen to learn. After all, their job is selling, not learning.

Questions for product management:

- What are the key features that you liked?
- What capabilities were missing?
- What did you choose and why?
- What were some of the things you liked about my competitor's products?
- What one thing could we do to the product to make it more attractive for future buyers?

Questions for product marketing:

- How did you find out about the product?
- If you were looking for this product today, what search terms would you use?
- What should I know about you and your approach to buying products?
- Can you recall your response to our promotional materials?
- Can you recommend some areas where I should coach my sales people?

Before embarking on a win/loss program, consider what you want to know and build a set of questions that will give you guidance.

You can learn a lot from a client in a face-to-face meeting but I've found that win/loss interviews are more effective on the phone. It's like customers forget they're talking to a vendor after a few minutes and they really open up. Once a customer said, "I want to change my answer to that first question again," and proceeded to tell me an amazingly insightful story. Seems he learned to trust me after about 10 minutes.

For more on interviewing, see my free ebook [Customer Interviews: A Field Guide](https://www.under10playbook.com/ebooks/customer-interviews) at https://www.under10playbook.com/ebooks/customer-interviews

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[Natalie Hirsch](#)
3 years ago

This is great, thank you Steve!

- Comment
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[Daniel Kuperman](#)
Product Marketing and Sales Enablement at MindTickle
3 years ago

Awesome framework, Steve. I would also add another 'section' if you will: Sales. It might be important to ask questions such as "How would you compare your sales experience between all the vendors you evaluated?" or "Was there anything in our way of handling the sales process that stood out to you (good/bad)?". Especially useful in Enterprise deals where not just the product, but the how you handled the sales process can make a huge difference on winning or losing.

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[Steve Johnson](#)
Helping teams apply the best practices of product management. Author, speaker, consultant, guitar player.
2 years ago

I agree that you need to learn about selling as well as product, company, and marketing issues. Be careful though: many (most?) in sales think that win/loss is a witch hunt to embarrass or blame the sales team. Win/Loss is a huge political hot potato. I tried to soften it somewhat with the question "Can you recommend

some areas where I should coach my sales people?"

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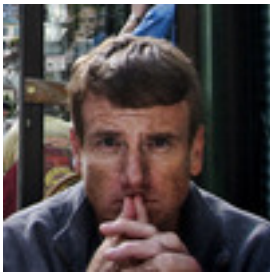
[Geoffrey Anderson](#)
over 20 years in the Product Management trenches in HW, SW, and services
3 years ago

Steve has a good plan, however, I would recommend using a consultant. One company I was at, we had a process very similar to what Steve outlined, and we thought we had good *accurate* results from our phone surveys with customers, and opportunities that went to competitors.

However, the folks at corporate hired a big name in consulting to talk to some of the same customers we talked to, and wow, were we surprised by how much more accurate, and biting the commentary was.

There is something to having an independent 3rd party doing the interviews.

Of course, one place I worked, the powers that be just had the sales team do the Win/Loss analysis. You can guess the results...

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[Steve Johnson](#)
Helping teams apply the best practices of product management. Author, speaker, consultant, guitar player.
2 years ago

> "Consider this: most high school sports teams spend more time and money on win/loss analysis than most companies." — Steve Johnson, *Turn Ideas Into Products*

Sales people are terrible at win/loss interviews and analysis. First of all, it's not their job; second, customers lie to them so they won't try to reopen the deal. Nowadays, I prefer using a third-party simply because of the

politics of it all. I wrote an article about [win loss and the buyer's journey](#) with links to two companies who specialize in win/loss analysis.

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