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- Question asked by [Rishabh Saxena](#)
- [User experience](#)
- 19 replies
- 2 years ago

How do you conduct user research and collect feedback from users?

What is your take on user research? Have you seen organizations mess it up or confuse it with market research? How does your team collect feedback from users?

- Answer
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[Justin Williams](#)

Mischief & Mayhem

2 years ago

Many orgs still confuse it with market research and you will probably be fighting against this your entire career. I love the Bezos quote:

"The biggest mistake you can make is talking to your customers. The second biggest mistake you can make is not talking to your customers."

What it means is that you must build a deep understanding of your customers but your responsibility is to invent solutions on their behalf, not take what they say and implement it as a solution.

- Don't do surveys; a lot of people will be seduced by their ease and semi-quantitative nature... but they are almost NEVER the right tool. Most orgs would be better off completely discarding them.
- Understand what you want to learn upfront and then try to use a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods
- The 1:1 interview or user test remains the single best tool for qualitative learning
- The tools we have for quantitative learning are better than ever. [Fullstory](#) and [Optimizely](#) and [MixPanel](#) come to mind.
- There are a wide range of Product Discovery techniques - The Wizard of Oz, The Fake Door, The Landing Page Test, etc. Expand your repertoire if possible :)

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[Farbod Saraf](#)

2 years ago

Hi Justin, Thanks for your response. . Where can I read more about those Product Discovery techniques? Searched a bit but couldn't find a single place that describes all The Wizard of Oz, The Fake Door, The Landing Page Test...

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[Justin Williams](#)
Mischief & Mayhem
2 years ago

Drop me an email: jwillia53@gmail.com and I can describe to you my understanding to them! :)

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[Steve Johnson](#)
author, speaker, consultant. VP of Products @ Pragmatic Marketing.
2 years ago

User research is simple enough: profile the types of people you need to understand (personas) and then discuss their problems. Most product managers will use a combination of observation, interviews, and surveys to get the relevant information for defining products, personas, and stories.

Some common issues:

- Resistance from your sales force (they think they know customers and their problems)
- Adequate time (product managers are already plenty busy)
- Lack of clarity on your objectives.

As for the mechanics, I've written about how to do customer interviews in my free ebook, "Customer Interviews: A Field Guide" at <http://under10playbook.com/ebooks/customer-interviews>

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[Rishabh Saxena](#)

2 years ago

Thanks for sharing those points Steve.

Since you mentioned the issue of resistance from the sales force, I think this is something a lot of teams may have to deal with. How do you handle it?

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[Andy Trus](#)

Product Manager at WebAssign

2 years ago

Rishabh, I can share how I've solved this problem:

- Go into depth with the sales team about your research methodology. If they believe in your process, they will believe in the result
- Actually involve your sales team in the research. For any given new feature, I like to grab just a few of them for a few minutes to get their input. And then I rotate which ones are involved
- Involve them early and often. If you wait until 2 weeks before a release to share with them a design that's been in the works for months, you may not like what you hear from them

Best of luck

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[Patrick Quinlan](#)

Manager, Technical Support Knowledge Services at Citrix

2 years ago

The biggest way I've seen organization mess up user research is by not doing it. In my org, we'll use a survey to recruit users, then conduct 5 to 10 interviews (which often include users completing a set of tasks as we observe), then use another survey to validate what we think we learned from the interviews. I'm fortunate in that another team defines the personas, which we can then use to categorize respondents of the recruiting survey.

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[Keith Brown](#)

VP Marketing, Aha!

2 years ago

It sounds simple but Patrick is right on here. There are many ways to tackle user research, but do not let the uncertainty of the outcome prevent you from starting it!

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[Rishabh Saxena](#)

2 years ago

Thanks for sharing your process Patrick.

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[Grant Novey](#)

Customer ally with a focus on product strategy and UX
2 years ago

A mistake that I see often is that product managers ask leading questions. It takes some practice to frame questions appropriately. Also, check out this book: <https://abookapart.com/products/just-enough-research>

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[Rishabh Saxena](#)

2 years ago

Thanks for recommending the book Grant! I'll surely check it out.

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[Jason Leonard](#)

Product Lead

2 years ago

I'm suspecting that this might be your first user research attempt as an organisation, in which case, my advice would be as follows:

- Start small i.e. do 3-5 telephone interviews to begin with. Be prepared with your questions. Once you're complete, you're likely going to have immediate feedback that was not anyone's radar which will immediately showcase the value of research
- Share this with the team and get buy-in for more invasive qual and quant research
- Be extremely specific with your goals before undertaking research. Many companies do it simple to tick a box which can be a very expensive tick-in-a-box. For example, let's say you run an eCommerce product - if you're about to optimise your check-out process, then user research is critical to make sure you don't lose revenue. Start with benchmarking the current experience, then run designed clickable prototypes past users.
- Research should become a habitual (note, in a good way, not robotic) part of the development process where possible, to do this, it needs to become a regular feature in all meetings, sprint events etc.

Hope this helps!

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[Rishabh Saxena](#)
2 years ago

We have done a few user interviews and usability tests earlier, but the more pressing issue we're facing is getting a buy-in from the end user. To give some context, we're in the B2B SaaS space and more often than not, the person of contact who signs off on subscribing to the product is not the actual user interacting day in day out with the product. So getting feedback from them is proving to be the issue.

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[David Singer](#)

Looking for interesting product opportunities
2 years ago

Moderately off-topic, as this isn't quite the answer you're going for (I think), but make it easy for users to give you feedback at any time. I know many answers might be surveys and such, but a really basic example from me would be: if you have a website, make your contact form one-click away at any time. Don't bury it. After getting some feedback, and you will -- categorize it. Tag it. Respond to it. Re-tag it. Over time this will give you the most honest feedback data possible, skewed to those who have issues (as opposed to your content users hopping along like bunnies -- they're good, just don't take away their carrots).

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[Rishabh Saxena](#)

2 years ago

Thanks for sharing those points David. :-)

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[Erin Jacobs](#)
UX/UI Designer
2 years ago

I think it's not only important to conduct user research but also stakeholder research in tandem, whether it's an external client or internal leadership in a product company. Doing both provides huge benefits—whether it's validating, or not, stakeholders business goals and vision, finding new insights from users to share back to stakeholders on new and different directions to take that can guide roadmaps and design, to providing the team with a set of tenets or key themes to refer back to when doing design or evaluating new features.

I have always found a guided conversational format in one on one interviews to be most valuable, as it can get you the information you are looking for but also potentially uncover new insights depending on where the conversation goes. You start with a script of questions that hits the points you are looking to cover, starting with the highest level moving to more specificity. You may not always follow it verbatim and the key is when you hear an opportunity to get someone to expand on a point, to ask them to tell you more or ask them WHY they feel a certain way and then LISTEN.

Another great way to do easy research is to use a platform like Intercom, <https://www.intercom.com/> , to ask users for feedback in context of your product while they are performing key tasks that you want to know about. They provide simple feedback mechanisms like thumbs/thumbs down to more robust input fields that enable users to give you more detailed feedback.

If you use methods like focus groups or group interviews, you risk participants influencing each other or not being as straightforward as they might be on their own and that's where you get off track.

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[Kent McDonald](#)
Product Manager and Writer
2 years ago

I'm in the midst of improving my attempts at user research and collected user feedback. What I've done so far:

- I'm effectively the help desk for the system and website for which I'm product manager (it's for a non

profit) that gives me insight into what people are having difficulties with.

- I intercept questions to submitted to our contact form in part to accomplish what I described above.

Next steps are to perform some more substantial user research with attendees at our conference.

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[Nicholas Lea](#)

Global Product Manager

2 years ago

I especially like this comment from Kent. Great feedback comes from people who are having trouble and submit a support request. Usually during these conversations you can solicit some extra feedback, particularly if you built up some trust by solving their problem.

The other thing that is challenging as you mention is getting to the right people / the actual product users themselves in a B2B environment. I personally use a few techniques for this:

1. If you have access, check your registered users database and pick a few names. (Not all orgs have this capability due to security)
2. Ask your sales team for some key contacts at the organization that bought your software. Sales people often know lots of people from the sales process so they could certainly get you in touch. If another company is reselling your software, call them up and ask to tag along with their sales people.
3. Generally you have an idea what department your users belong to within a company. Try calling the receptionist at a customer company, explaining who you are, and simply asking for her to transfer you to someone in that department.

The "scary" part here for a lot of people, especially in software, is that a lot of user research can't be done through a keyboard. You often need to pick up the phone, tag along with sales people, or get on a plane and go talk to people. A lot of context and customer emotion gets lost in email or on-screen surveys. User satisfaction is an emotional response which means you need human interaction to understand it.

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[Roger L. Cauvin](#)
Director of Products
2 years ago

Observe or interview prospective customers and users to understand the "jobs" they do on a regular basis, what the desired outcomes are, and what challenges they face along the way. Do so by inquiring what they actually do and not by posing hypothetical questions.

Avoid these [five pitfalls of prospect interviews](#).

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