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- Question asked by [Mike Eng](#)
- [Research](#)
- 4 replies
- 2 years ago

What are some good methods for validating how pervasive a problem is in the market?

I've done some in-depth interviews with a new market and discovered some key problems they have. I'm now interested in following up to get a sense of how common these problems are within the market in order to build the business case for it. What are some good methods for finding that out?

I am thinking secondary research and surveys to fill the gaps would be helpful, but I'm not sure how to phrase the question for a survey in a way that will get useful data. Asking "do you have this problem" seems as though it would lead to confirmation bias.

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4 Replies



[Steve Johnson](#)

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

How widespread is the problem? Ask.

The first step in understanding a problem is always to interview and/or observe the people who have the problem you're proposing to solve. Once you're sure you've nailed the problem, you need to validate it with a broader audience. If you've done a good job of defining the persona and the problem, you can probably assume that most who fit your persona profile have the problem.

A survey is a good quantitative tool for measuring interest. The key is to ask only a few questions--in this case, "Do you experience this problem?" You're not trying to sell the solution; you're just trying to size it.

Begin with qualitative research; measure with quantitative.

Perhaps the best technique is to begin marketing the product as if it's already available. Set up a web page for the product idea and ask people to sign up to informed when the product becomes available. The number of signups will indicate interest. Once you're a little closer to having something to deliver, you can ask people to pre-pay for the solution.

For many services products, you can test the concept with a manual system. That is, your software doesn't have to be complete. Suppose you had an alerting service. In the short term, you could ask customers to call you, set up the alerts in a shared spreadsheet, and then issue alerts to their mobile phones using SMS. Eventually you'll want a web site for defining alerts and an app to receive them but only when the manual process can't keep up.

I've described these techniques fully in my new book, *Turn Ideas Into Products*, available from Amazon. Get more information at [TurnIdeasIntoProducts.info](#).

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[Justin Williams](#)

Are there already products/services that solve that particular problem? Do you have an idea on what the production/solution might be?

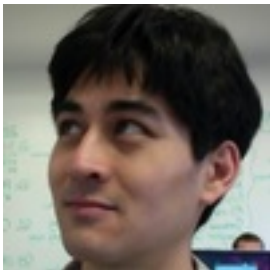
A good way might be to use a demand validation technique called "The Landing Page." The gist:

- Create a website with your pitch (what the problem is and how you might solve it) and then a call to action
- Run a Google Adwords campaign and market it to a very small number of potential users
- The call to action would take the user to a thank you page, as opposed to purchasing the product since it does not yet exist :)
- Additionally, on the thank you page, you can ask if they would like to get in touch to talk about this product
- You can assess demand by how much tracking you are getting - e.g., how many users are visiting your landing page and even better - conversions, how many are clicking the call to action

Surveys should generally be avoided as a product discovery or in this case a "demand validation" technique.

Another technique is to create a video explaining the potential solution to the problem using a prototype. Drew Houston used this technique with Dropbox. He was having difficulty explaining the concept but once users saw a video... they realized Dropbox was an amazing solution to a problem they didn't really think about.

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[Mike Eng](#)
2 years ago

Good suggestion with the landing page technique.

To your questions:

Are there already products/services that solve that particular problem?

Yes. There are a few I've found - as far as solving the whole problem, there are services that do that, but I

haven't found anyone else solving the whole problem in a more scalable way with technology. I have found technology-based solutions that don't require a full-service approach for parts of the problem

Do you have an idea on what the production/solution might be?

Yes. Of course, we need to validate it, particularly whether it's viable to take on the whole problem rather than pieces of it.

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[Jenny Slade](#)
2 years ago

Hi Mike: just to clarify, it sounds as though you are validating a *problem* in the market, rather than validating *your solution*?

In testing your problem with a broader market, you'll probably want to identify four key things:

1. Does this audience experience this problem
2. If so, how painful is this problem for them
3. How do they solve the problem currently
4. Would they be willing to pay for (or is there budget for) a solution

Posing your problem questions as relative ("Is _____ more or less important for your company than increasing revenue, or beating the competition to market?") or multiple choice ("Which of these are among your top three business problems?") can give you a better sense of whether YOUR problem is one that really keeps potential customers up at night.

As you said here, you'll get better data by avoiding leading questions. Using one or two open-ended questions gives potential customers an opportunity to share their specific circumstances with you.

As Steve notes, surveys can be an effective way to gather feedback -- especially if you keep them short and sweet. And as Justin notes, landing pages are another way to validate your solution: you might also combine a landing page with running brief ad campaign, using relevant keywords you want to test.

But if you're not quite there yet, because you're still defining the problem, there's no replacement for live customer interviews!

Here are some [ways to get customer feedback fast](#), and [some ways to think about all that feedback](#) once you

have it.

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