



# The key to better understanding customers in 2022

## Building your customer insights capabilities from the ground up

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Do you talk to customers often but learn nothing new? Do you struggle to fill your product pipeline with good ideas or kill bad ones? Are competitors out-innovating you? Perhaps you need to refocus your team on solving the right customer problems.

To stay competitive in today's constantly changing environment, product managers, R&D scientists, engineers, market researchers and customer experience managers alike need a strong customer insights strategy. This means learning to put the customer at the center of your innovation process through an exploration of their needs. By identifying and prioritizing customer needs through systematic voice-of-customer (VOC) research, you can be sure you are investing in products that satisfy customers' unmet needs.

### What is the voice of the customer?

If you ask customers what they need in a new product, you will hear generalities – “faster,” “cheaper,” “better” – or features your competitors already offer. But that's not actionable insight and these answers don't lead to successful innovation. Successful products and services begin with a complete and detailed understanding of customer needs. Attaining actionable insights – new information that drives design

decisions – requires a voice of the customer methodology. Whether you are working on incremental enhancements to your customer experience design, designing a breakthrough new product or creating a disruptive business model, our voice of the customer process can help you find insights nobody else has, reducing your risk of failure and saving you time and money.

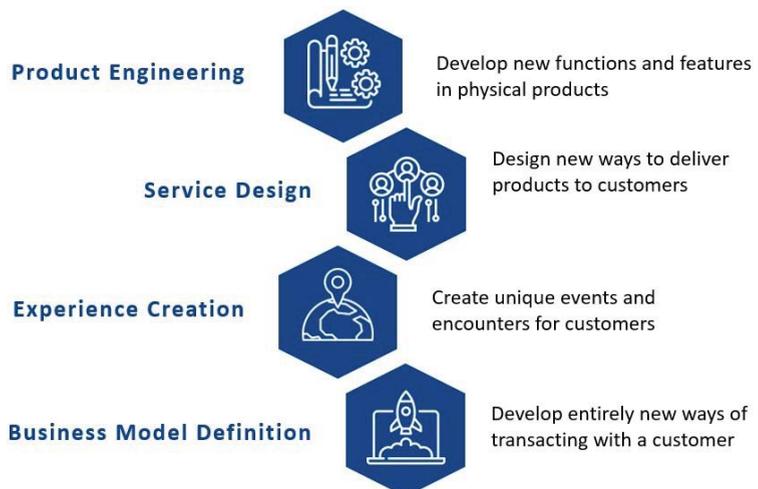
Real insight comes from examining customer experiences and understanding customers to develop a keen sense of empathy. What are customers trying

to do? How do they solve those problems today? What are their frustrations or pain points? What is their experience working with your company or with your competitors?

### Obstacles teams face when understanding customers and their needs

- **Misdefining VOC:** Many organizations use the term “voice of the customer” to describe any customer insights-gathering. Real voice of the customer research is

## VOC DRIVES INNOVATION AT EVERY LEVEL OF THE BUSINESS



not merely customer satisfaction or NPS surveys. It's not customer-demanded features, opinions of industry experts, anecdotes from sales or tech support, following the competition or conversations with a small set of only your customers. Real VOC work is a systematic understanding of the complete set of customer wants and needs, prioritized by the customer.

- **Focus:** Many teams tend to focus on finding a solution before identifying the problem. Understanding customers' needs or the benefits they seek from your product, service or experience allows you to innovate the right solution. When teams know how to focus their efforts on meeting the most important, unmet customer needs, they are more successful.
- **Alignment:** Depending on where you sit in the organization, there can be a gap between how companies interpret customer priorities. Cross-functional VOC teams with representation from product management, marketing, engineering and sales can create a common understanding across the organization.
- **Skill set:** Without the proper arsenal of insights techniques, it can seem impossible to drive breakthrough innovation. For your customer research to be worthwhile, you must invest in doing it right. Voice of the customer insights training ensures you can systematically understand customer needs and priorities in such depth that it creates competitive advantage.
- **Integration:** When VOC exists as part of current product development frameworks, such as Stage-Gate or agile, results become that much more actionable. Bad ideas are weeded out early and better ideas move forward with more promise.

When teams know when and how to solicit customer feedback, they are more successful.

### Voice of the customer training and coaching

Hundreds of professionals in marketing, product development, research and development, and related positions face these innovation challenges. As customers' needs continue to evolve, especially through major transformational events such as COVID-19, businesses with a customer-centric mind-set will come out ahead.

Customized VOC insights training and capability-building programs give teams the skills they need to become customer-centric innovators in competitive markets. Through a collaborative effort with program managers, teams can:

- Set effective strategies
- Assess capabilities gaps
- Define success
- Build momentum with key stakeholders
- Develop job aids and repeatable processes
- Increase product development success rates

With the help of custom, instructional materials and job aids, the team at Applied Marketing Science (AMS) teaches core insights and innovation skills and makes sure that implementation is successful. Our goal is to help your team innovate and win in a competitive market.

Delivered in person or virtually, voice of the customer training teaches your team:

- Why you should listen to customers
- How voice of the customer fits into the product/service design process

- What you can do with voice of the customer data
- Who to interview
- The logistics involved in customer interviewing and observation
- Writing the interview guide
- How to interview customers to get beyond the obvious
- The principles of observational research
- How to effectively analyze interview transcripts for insights
- The benefit of building a hierarchy of customer needs
- Interpreting need importance vs. performance
- How to assess market opportunities
- Strategies for acting on and implementing VOC insights

For over three decades, AMS has brought the world's innovators closer to customers. With roots in the MIT Sloan School of Management, teaching is part of our heritage. As the originators of the voice of the customer methodology, we have conducted hundreds of engagements for leading global brands. We have trained and coached thousands of product managers, R&D scientists, engineers, market researchers and customer experience managers in the techniques we use every day.

Interested in learning more about the voice of the customer and how training and coaching can help your organization? Learn more about training and coaching at [ams-insights.com/train-your-team](https://ams-insights.com/train-your-team) or contact Kristyn to discuss your 2022 research goals.

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