

Context

Background

Customer Development was created by Steve Blank. Listen to Steve on this topic here: [Great Entrepreneurship is Artistry](#)

Eric Ries pairs customer development with agile engineering in *Lean Startup*. Eric Ries is one of Steve Blank's former students.

Pairing these two frameworks (customer development & agile engineering) is best used to solve for unknown customer needs and unknown feature needs (pg. 20, "Startup Owner's Manual").

Why do startups use them?

- User interviews are the first step towards finding product market fit and answering
 - Have we found a problem that lots of people want to solve?
 - Does our solution solve the problem in a compelling way?
- They expose our hypotheses/assumptions/vision to reality so that no time/energy/money is wasted on producing a product no real users care about (Invalidate ideas quickly) ([CustDevLabs](#))
- Exhaustive customer feedback is the only way to make a product good enough to reach product/market fit ([Groove HQ](#))
- Customer development is a way to quickly search outside the building for a profitable business model when customer needs are unknown ([Steve Blank 2](#))
- Most of the time customers do not want, or behave, the way we expect ([Steve Blank](#))

General

- You will get more, and more valuable, information if you start by framing the problem that you're trying to solve
 - Describe why we believe it's important to solve this problem
 - Warn users that we're trying to learn how they do things, and that we will be asking dumb questions that may have obvious answers to you, but not to us. We are here to learn from you about your world.
- Some people are against incentives for interviews ([Quora](#))
 - you want to find problems compelling enough that people want to speak exactly because of that, rather than some additional incentive
 - if they're not willing to speak, the problem is probably not big enough for them to care, or they aren't an early adopter
- Do not talk about your product or feature set. If you must, wait until the very end ([CustDevLabs](#))

- Do not ask about the future. No hypotheticals, no guesses. Avoid using “would”.
 - People cannot predict their future behavior. ([CustDevLabs](#))
- Never ask what users want, 3 better questions: [Charles Liu](#)
- Signal transitions to new topics, “....great, now I’d like to move on to a totally different topic”
- Demonstrate listening by asking questions, “what else,” “tell me more”
- Ask a question, be silent
- After an answer, be silent; allow space for them to continue
- **Acknowledgements are interruptions**
- Lead the conversation, don’t participate

Step by Step

Solid Resource - [How I landed 25 customer development interviews in 2 Weeks](#)

Pre Interview

Email Template - Key Tips ([CustomerDevLabs](#))

- Short
- Customized to recipient
- Personable
- Valuable

Subject: Remote coding

Hi Sam,

I read your article on volunteering your professional skills in Guatemala – it was really inspiring. I’m looking to travel more and you’ve got me thinking about incorporating volunteering when I do!

I have a software company trying to improve remote medical record coding.

I’m not looking to sell anything, but since you have so much expertise with remote coding, I’d love to get your advice on our product so we don’t build the wrong thing.

If you’re available, I’d love to chat for just 20 minutes – Thur or Fri morning?

*Thanks for any help,
Justin*

Cold calling script ([Quora](#))

- My name is [your name]. I'm a [your role] working with [company name] on [describe the project at a high level].
- I'm in the Research stage and looking to learn more about [describe what you're trying to learn] from folks who have [describe what this user does that you're interested in learning about. ex: completed a project through the site].
- [This person] of [company name] suggested that, given your experience with [describe their experience], you'd have valuable insights on the project.
- If you're interested in talking, do you have 30 mins free on Wednesday or Thursday morning this week?

Holding the interview

For more detail 👉 [Template - Customer Development Basic Interview](#)

Interview Tips

1. Only speak to 1 person at a time ([Source](#))
2. Need to make people feel safe about being frank, ask upfront to be brutally honest ([Source](#))
3. Always record interviews (stops from taking notes, allows evidence) ([StartupClass](#))
4. Things to avoid
 - a. Do NOT talk about your product, our product, our proposed product ([StartupClass](#))
 - b. **Never include “and”/”or” in the question** ([Source](#))
 - c. **Acknowledgements (i.e. “yup,” “mmhmm”) can be interruptions** ([Source](#))
 - d. Don't participate in the conversation, just lead it ([LeanStack](#))
5. Great question starters ([Source 1](#))
 - a. Would you
 - b. Did you
 - c. Is it
 - d. What's an example
 - e. Why
 - f. When
 - g. What is the hardest/frustrating part...
 - i. How are you solving?
 - h. Tell me about the last time..
 - i. What does your ideal solution look like?
 - j. So what happened
 - k. What did you do
 - l. When you said X, did you mean Xx
 - m. What else
6. Transitions when changing subjects are important ([Portigal](#))
 - a. “great, now i'd like to move onto a totally different topic”

7. 4 tactics ([Portigal](#))
 - a. natural language: talk like subject talks; mirror words they use back
 - i. Do not correct pronunciations/phrasing (i.e. if they say lawsuit loan, we say lawsuit loan)
 - b. questions without answers: don't put your answers in the questions
 - c. silence 1: ask question, and be silent
 - d. silence 2: after they've answered, be silent; people speak in paragraphs; more silence encourages more talking
 - e. Silence during, after a question is a tool ([LeanStack](#))
8. Types of questions to use ([Portigal](#))
 - a. Sequence: Walk me through what you do when...and what next?
 - b. Peer Comparison: Do others do it this way too?
 - c. Quantity: How many X fall into that category?
9. General how-to ([Pragmatic Marketing](#))

General interview questions to draw from

1. Very concise list of Cust Dev Qs ([Mike Fishbein](#))
2. Another list of People/Problem/Solution Qs ([Jason Evanish](#))
3. Problem Presentation
 - a. State top 3 problems
 - b. Ask customer to prioritize problems and identify any higher priority problems
 - c. Have customer describe how they solve the problem today
4. Interview Structure ([Source](#))
 - a. People
 - i. Role? How would you describe your role as a [x]?
 1. what does success look like for you?
 2. what's the hardest part about achieving that?
 - ii. How do you discover new products for work?
 - iii. Have you tried anything new recently?
 - iv. What is a typical day like at your job?
 - v. How much time do you spend doing [task]
 - b. Problems
 - i. Top 3 challenges in your job
 - ii. What is the hardest part about xX? ([CustDevLabs](#))
 1. when was the last time it happened?
 2. why was it hard?
 - iii. How are you currently dealing with this task/problem? ([Cindy Alvarez](#))
 1. Who else is involved during this process?
 2. What do they like about the current solution?
 3. What do they wish they could do that isn't possible?

- a. how would this make their lives better?
 - iv. What is most frustrating about Yy today? [Product Plan](#)
 - v. What have you done to solve this problem? ([CustDevLabs](#))
 - 1. what don't you love about the solutions you've tried?
 - vi. Would they use your solution if it were free?
 - vii. Would they pay \$X/yr?
- c. Solution
 - i. What could be better about what you're trying to get done? ([Link](#))
 - ii. if we wanted to put a solution to this problem in place, who else would we need to get buy-in from?
- 5. Wrapping up
 - a. "Who else should I talk to?" ([Slideshare](#))
 - i. "I'm trying to understand this problem from a wide range of perspectives, do you know 1-2 other people who are struggling with this problem?"

Post Interview Follow-up

- 1. Commitment to a next step is best signal ([Slideshare](#))
 - a. permission to contact again
 - b. asking about meeting again
 - c. asking to see/use product
- 2. Customer advisory board
- 3. I'm exploring a solution to this problem, can I contact you if we find a viable solution?

Additional Resources

[The Four Steps to Epiphany](#) - Steve Blank [book]

[The mom test](#) [book]

Google Ventures 16 Tips: [Here](#)

Google Ventures User Research/Product Demo outline (77 slides): [Here](#)

5 Steps to Create Good User Interview Questions - [here](#)

- 1. Write problem statements
- 2. Reframe the problem statements
- 3. Build a list of questions
 - a. Don't ask leading questions.
 - b. Ask about specific incidents in the past, when possible.

- c. Ask more open-ended questions.
 - d. You can ask more than one question to find out the same thing.
 - e. Don't ask if they'd buy your product.
- 4. Paraphrase each question 2-3 times
- 5. Give the whole list of questions a structure.
 - a. Intro
 - b. Warm up questions
 - c. Main body questions
 - d. Wrap up