

A Guide to Design Research

How to set-up and get the best results

Research is the best way to find new inspiration that will help you solve unforeseen problems and develop your service. When it comes to gathering insight, there really is no better alternative than getting out there and speaking to real people.

Key principles for success

- Involve other people from the start
- Make the work visible (in sight, in mind :)
- Synthesise all the time, as you go
- Share your stories with the wider community
- Have Fun!

1. Write a Brief

Sit down as a group and discuss what you want to learn and which respondents might give you insight into these new areas. Think about **'who'** you want to speak to and **'how'** you want to conduct the research. Work out how many people you can interview in the time available and what kind of variety you want to include in your sample. It can save time to speak over the phone but you'll learn a lot by meeting people in-person in their own environments. Create a list of profiles describing the people you'd like to meet and the time you have available in the diary. This will inform you throughout the recruitment phase.

2. Recruit

Recruitment can be done in a variety of ways:

1. Select a range of contacts - send them the same email - follow-up by organising meetings with the people who show interest. (Using a plug-in for Gmail like Yesware can really help when using this approach)
2. Email specific people personally. A targeted approach with personalised emails from your own email address is often the best way. Don't be afraid to pick-up the phone if it helps.
3. If you don't have a contact for a specific profile, post an ad for the profile using social media. The response is often surprisingly positive. Alternately send a company-wide email to discover what contacts your colleagues have.
4. Use an external recruitment agency if you want to speak to generic segments.
5. You can always try guerilla mini interviews with people on the street and in shops. They're usually more up for it than you might expect!

As respondents start to confirm meetings, put the dates into your diary and invite your colleagues to join. It's best to do interviews with a minimum of two people. Much of what you will learn from each interview will happen in the conversation that follows, so you'll need someone with a second perspective to chat with afterwards.

3. Build a discussion guide

Have a brainstorm as a group. The best way to get buy-in to the final results is to involve stakeholders right from the beginning. This process will also help you to work out what the most pertinent questions are. Many brains are better than one.

1. Encourage people to come up with open questions in simple language. Questions with 'yes'/'no' answers will be of little use.
2. Create a Google Doc and organise the questions you have gathered into relevant sections. Share the Google Doc with the wider group and allow everyone to build their thoughts into it.
3. Make a list of 5 or 6 key questions at the start of the document that you can remember by heart.
4. It's important not to follow the discussion guide too closely during the actual interview and to go off-piste. You will be wanting to explore new ideas with your respondent so make sure you give yourself the opportunity to let that happen.

4. Conduct the fieldwork

In some circumstances you may need to ask the respondent to sign a consent form. You may also want to give them a gift or incentive if promised before starting. Remember to turn your dictaphone on at the start if it helps you to share material with other colleagues.

Put your interviewee at ease. Explain what you are doing and mention that it will just feel like a chat. There are no right or wrong answers, you're just keen to hear their most honest stories and opinions.

If the interviewee feels comfortable, it's a good idea to take a photo of them. It will help you remember the stories they've told at a later date. It also brings their character to life when sharing with colleagues later.

It often helps to have one person leading the interview and to maintain a train of thought while others chip-in with extra questions. It's OK not to use your discussion guide in the interview, though the process of writing it will have helped you to develop the key questions you want to ask and arm you with material to explore when and if the conversation dries up.

Start broad: Ask the respondent to tell you about themselves and give you context for the more specific questions which you want to ask. This should get the interviewee feeling relaxed and more comfortable to open-up. Pick-up on little things that people say: Often interviewees might say something as a throw away comment that actually might lead to a deeper insight. Don't forget to ask, "Why do you do that?" or "That's interesting tell me more about that." Asking, "Why?" in a polite and considered way regularly throughout the interview while covering your chosen subject areas will allow you to discover the new insights you need. It's also good to ask for stories and examples wherever possible so that you have material to substantiate a point that has been made.

Get more specific with the questioning as you go through the interview ending concluding with the most important things that you want to know. Having chatted through the context, the interviewee is also likely to give their best answers at this stage.

Look out for the things the respondent says as you leave. Sometimes people give you their best information once the dictaphone is switched off as you're walking out the door.

5. Download and Synthesis

Chatting with your colleague in a cafe or back in the office, discuss the things that interested you most about the conversation you've had, you might discuss, stories, quotes or comments that the person made. You may feel excited about some of the things you've learned. You will feel tired after each interview and it's easy not to bother downloading - however, it's well worth its while and doesn't take long.

Take some Post-its and a Sharpie each. Write down your top 5 learnings. This exercise forces you to start synthesising. Think of the things that surprised you most and why. This is the kind of information that will help you to develop insights. Share your top 5 with each other and play it a bit like a game of snap. Write down any additional insights that crop-up during this chat.

Continue the synthesis process as you write-up your notes. Create a capture sheet, which you can print out and have it to hand during or after the Download. Divide your capture sheet into sections such as; Character Description, Key Behaviour, Quotes, Priorities and Insights. You should tailor the capture sheet according to what you'd like to learn for the project.

6. Visualise and Storytell

Stick your Post-its, notes and photos on a board, to make your work visible. It's a great way to create a buzz around the project and share the work with your colleagues. Arrange a storytelling session with your colleagues to play back the people you've met and the stories you've heard. Set a timer of a few minutes or more to chat through each person. Involve everyone who's been in the interviews. Continue the synthesis process at this stage by handing your colleagues post-its to capture things they hear as surprising or relevant while they listen.

7. Collate & Package

After you've completed your interviews and played back the stories, you will have multiple insights. Force yourself to continue synthesising at this stage. In a group, ask people to write their five biggest insights/opportunities they've heard on post-its. Allow people to stick these up on a board and cluster accordingly. Look at the main areas of gravity as clues towards the main learnings that you would like to take away from this project and write a more articulated description of each. Use stories from the people you've met to back up the final points/insights that you want to make. The best way to present insights is with three or more real customer stories to support each. Document your learnings so they can be shared with a wider group of stakeholders.

Please get in touch with any questions. I love chatting about this stuff.

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