

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CUSTOMERS

Researching your customers is a skilled job, and it is vital that it is done professionally, not only to ensure that you are collecting and analysing the data accurately, but also to make sure that your business is being represented in a good light. There are three good reasons for building customer research into your organisation:

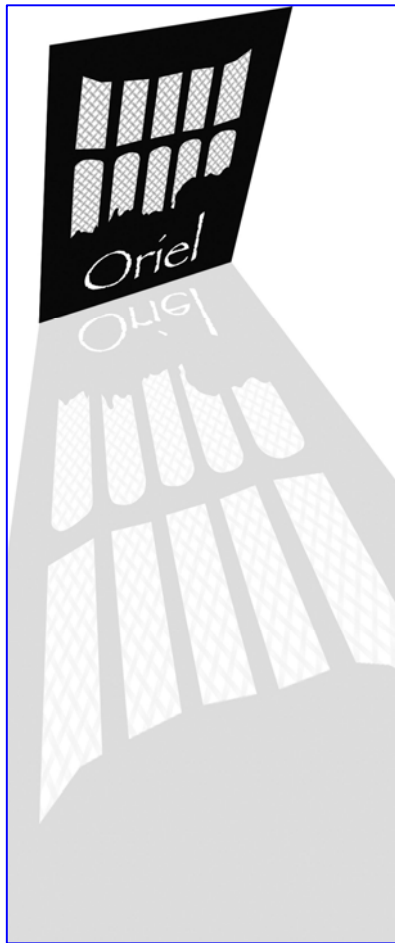
- **To understand your customers' motivations and needs**
- **To build your reputation for being customer focused**
- **To measure and track standards of service**

All three have their place, and it is important to be clear at the outset what you want to achieve, so that you get the results that you need.

In summary, researching **customers' motivations and needs** gives you valuable insight into how your market operates, what your competitors are doing, opportunities for product development and potential pricing strategies. Done well, the results of this can change your business.

Building **a reputation for customer focus** is best done through a variety of feedback mechanisms, and gives you the reassurance of knowing that you have your finger on the pulse. This should be part of every organisation's operation, but in many cases, is done poorly or not at all.

Using research to **measure and track standards of service** is relevant to every business, so that you can deliver the level of service that customers expect. This often feeds off the other two areas, as you gain a better understanding of what your customers want, and how well you are delivering.



SO HOW DO WE DO IT?

There are a variety of techniques used to research customers, depending on exactly what we need to investigate. Some can be used in parallel, and it is usually best to start by getting good understanding of what makes your customers tick. Here are some of the common techniques that we use on a regular basis.

To understand your customers' motivations and needs

- Structured group discussions
- Individual telephone interviews
- Self-completion questionnaires (paper/on-line)

To build your reputation for being customer focused

- Informal events e.g. Open Days
- Feedback form on your website
- Dedicated phone line for feedback
- Newsletter inviting feedback

To measure and track standards of service

- Mystery shopping (most appropriate in consumer markets)
- Key account meetings to establish expectations
- Regular customer satisfaction surveys

RULES OF THUMB

- In order to get an unbiased understanding of what motivates your customers it is essential to use a professional researcher.
- In a business to business situation, individual interviews are often more appropriate than group discussions.
- Invite feedback at every stage, and be prepared to take action on the findings.
- Make sure you have a process for dealing with the resulting comments.

**If you need to understand what makes your customers tick
call Oriel Marketing on 01252 727625**

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