

## TRY BANNING THESE CUSTOMER NEEDS!

Here's a short list of customer needs: *attaining peace of mind, feeling secure, saving time, being easy to use.* Sound familiar? That's because they crop up in just about every brainstorm session and, in the guise of insights, in many research reports. Are they important needs? Definitely. Should your product or service strive to meet these needs? Almost certainly. Should you be paying good research money to discover these needs? We think not. As customer or



user needs they are not remotely surprising or even very interesting because they are true of all humans everywhere, and they are not going to change any time soon. What's more, every company designing every kind of product or service knows about them. Here are some more customer needs that you don't need to spend money discovering: *customers need to get their job done, they don't want your product to make them feel stupid, they want to avoid making mistakes, they want to be in control, they want to impress the boss or their friends, they want to be informed, they want to learn something new, and they want to enjoy what they are doing.* Don't spend research dollars "discovering" these needs, and raise a skeptical eyebrow or three if you see these needs recurring in your company's customer research reports. The problem is widespread. According to Harvard Business

School's Rohit Deshpande, 80% of all market research serves to reinforce what companies already know, not to test or develop new possibilities. So, how to prevent this from happening on your project? Here are two techniques that Blueprint uses to make sure our user requirements research goes beyond the obvious. First, we use methods of direct observation, and we focus on what people actually do as they carry out their work or activity, not just on what they say they do. We focus on behaviors that people often cannot describe because they are not aware of them. This ensures that the needs we report are related to the users' main goals, and it returns specific findings that designers can get creative with. Second, in ideation and innovation workshops, we have found it helpful to effectively "ban" discussion of patently obvious needs such as peace of mind, time saving, ease of use and so on. When we do this we find that ideation teams have an easier time seeing the issues that really matter to customers - issues that concern what the user is actually trying to accomplish in the context of a specific job or activity. This simple technique allows the ideation spotlight to focus on issues that can genuinely inform innovation and design, and prevents thinking from spiraling off into that nebulous "upper right corner" of the PowerPoint slide (appropriately, almost always depicted by a cloud) that is typically labeled "peace of mind". (Thanks to Ali Vassigh of Microsoft for inspiring an earlier discussion on this topic).

## GOING UP ...

The US is growing. Upwards. In the past 100 years the US population's average height has increased by almost four inches (adding an inch in just the last 10 years).

Feet are getting bigger too. According to Tim Long of the Chicago Historical Society, a shoe from the 1750's can fit inside a shoe of the early 1900's, and that shoe can fit totally inside a shoe of today. Not surprisingly, these growth trends have consequences for design - from bathtubs to production-line machinery. A reminder to designers: check that your people-size sources are up to date!

## BOWLED BY A GOOGLY

With the help of over 1000 translators, *The Times* newspaper recently identified the world's most untranslatable word. It is *ilunga*, a Bantu word referring to a person who is ready to forgive any abuse for the first time, and to tolerate it a second time, but never a third time. In English the most untranslatable word was *googly*. It's a term



used in the sport of cricket to refer to an almost unplayable "off break" ball that is bowled (pitched) with a "leg break" action. Or is it the other way round?

## HOW CUSTOMER FOCUSED ARE YOU?

In a recent survey of 362 firms, carried out by Bain & Co., 80% of companies claimed to deliver a "superior experience" to their customers, and 95% claimed to be customer

focused. This is very impressive. At least it would be if the customers of these companies actually agreed. Alas, the customers of only 8% of the companies agreed with the claims. Clearly a large "delivery gap" exists between reality and what many companies believe about their level of customer focus. According to Bain, companies that *achieve*, rather than simply *believe*, understand the needs of their customers across a wide range of customer "touchpoints" and they design products and services to specifically meet them. So, just how customer focused is your company's design process? You can find out by taking a quick test at this link:

<http://www.blueprintusability.com/topics/tool/customercentreddesign/test1.1.xls>

The link will download a 40k Excel file that contains a simple test based on ISO 13407, the international standard for user-centered design. Why not invite your colleagues to complete the test as well. The results will make for a great team discussion.

## NOTABLE QUOTABLES

"If I had asked my customers what they wanted, they would have asked for a faster horse."

Henry Ford

## "NOT MANY PEOPLE KNOW THAT!"

- ◆ The first web domain name was symbolics.com. It was registered on March 15, 1985.
- ◆ The "S" in Harry S. Truman, the 33rd President of the USA, did not stand for anything.
- ◆ The Honda 50 motorcycle is the biggest selling motor vehicle of all time with over 60 million sold. It also does 340 miles to the gallon! Hmmm ...