

# 10 Questions to Ask Your Customers to Identify Your Unique Brand



Brand Strong™ to Attract More Customers





Have you been having a hard time explaining what your company does or how it's unique? Do you change your elevator speech every time you give it because you just can't nail it down? Are your marketing messages different from your website to your sales presentations to your brochures?

**This is a problem.**

Your brand messages need to be clear, unique, and consistent in order to leave a strong impression. The kind of impression that helps people remember you when it's time to buy and trust that you are the one who can help them.

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To solve the problem of a weaker, inconsistent message, you need to do some work to identify your brand.

**How?**

**Interview your customers!**

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With the valuable information you collect by asking what others think your brand is, you can develop stronger brand messages that resonate with your customers or prospects that clearly explain the value you offer them and why that is unique. Sound good? Then let's do it!

## Why is it so important to ask your customers?

Your customers buy from you because you offer them something of value. So, what do they value? Why do they continue to work with you? Who do they see as your competition? Wouldn't it be helpful to know this?

Your brand resides in the mind of your stakeholders. It's how THEY perceive you that matters, not what you want them to perceive. They are the ones who will decide whether to work with you again or to refer you to others based on what value they think you provide. So, you need to know what's in their heads and that means asking them.

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Your customers form a perception of your brand based on what you have told them and their experience in working with you. Every time you touch that customer – through presentations, emails, delivering the product or service, and even billing them – you have an opportunity to strengthen or weaken your brand. So, it's important to find out what they think because if they think you stand for A and you think you stand for B, you have a brand disconnect that needs to be fixed.

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(If you are a start-up company, you have a unique opportunity to share your brand message to a new audience. You have a blank slate. They have no pre-conceived notions and are open to hearing your brand story. Your task then is to deliver on that story consistently to create a strong brand. If you are just starting, you can still interview people to get feedback on what your brand could or should be. If you are a solopreneur, get feedback on your personality, work style, and the value you provide your customers. In this case, you are your company brand.)

## Which customers should you interview?

You want to identify the customers who really understand your brand and value your product or service. In other words, your best customers. Build off of their perception of your brand because you want to find more people just like them.



You can interview one or two customers who maybe aren't your best to find out why that's the case, but you don't want to focus on what you don't do well. You want to focus on what you excel at, so that you can replicate it more often and target the type of customer who values it.

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## But who do you ask?

To get the most complete picture of what your brand is, you need to ask some basic research questions of everyone who comes into contact with your company. Customers, potential customers, employees, investors, strategic partners, suppliers, and even competitors have some idea of what your company stands for.



If you can, interview people from as many of these stakeholders groups as you can. At a minimum, interview your customers though because their perception is the most important. You want to dig into why they like working with you, what value they get from you that they can't get elsewhere, and why they would recommend you to others.



If you have different segments of customers or distinctly different target markets, try to get interviews with people in each segment. Each group may value something different, and that is a great insight.

For qualitative interviews like these I would suggest anywhere from 7–15 interviews, with 15 only in the case that you have different customer segments. In my experience after the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> interview you start hearing the same thing over and over again.

So talking with more people isn't going to get you any new insights. However, if you can only get 3 interviews, that's OK! It's still insight that you didn't have before.

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## How do you ask?

After years of helping clients identify their brand (and working on my own brand), I encourage you to conduct the interviews in person or over the phone.



Sure, you can send an email or link to an online survey using a service like Survey Monkey. While you might think that it will save you time, DON'T DO IT! It's just too hard to get people to complete a survey. We are all time strapped and it's easy to ignore an email plea. Plus, most people don't like to write. So, your email responses tend to be brief and therefore not that helpful.

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But the best reason is that phone or in-person interviews allow you to dig deeper if you don't understand an answer or want to explore a really good insight. It takes a little digging to get at something as intangible as your brand. You just can't do that with an email survey.

I recommend scheduling a time to conduct the interview ahead of time. Don't just call them out of the blue because they might not have enough time or be distracted. You can do the interview over the phone, through Skype, in their office, or go grab some coffee.

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**BRAND STRONG TIP:** If you can, conduct some video interviews using Skype or a Google Hangout. Why? Because if your interviewee says something great about you, you can ask them if you can use that portion of the video as a testimonial on your site, blog or social media accounts. Video testimonials are branding GOLD!

## What brand research questions do you ask?

To get your brand identification research started, I've put together a list of 10 questions that should help you unearth the value you provide and identify your brand. However, you know your business and industry better than I do, so if you want to swap out a question or add a few more questions specific to a service or product you provide, have at it!



To have a strong brand, you need to be strong enough to ask questions and hear the answers. So, on your mark. Get set. Go line up those interviews!

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## 10 Questions You Need to Ask Your Customers to Identify your Brand

**1** In your words, what does our company do?

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The goal of this question is to see how they would describe your company in a referral, if they know all of the services or products you offer, and if they can articulate the value you provide.

## 10 Questions You Need to Ask Your Customers to Identify your Brand

**2** What value do we offer you? (Or What problem do we solve for you?)

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This is one of the most important questions. The goal is to get them to tell you why they work with you. What challenge they hired you to solve.

## 10 Questions You Need to Ask Your Customers to Identify your Brand

**3** Can you get that value from anyone else?

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If no, rock on! If yes, why do they work with you and not someone else then?

## 10 Questions You Need to Ask Your Customers to Identify your Brand

**4** What is the one thing we do that you can't get anywhere else?

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While this question may seem redundant, by asking your customers to drill it down to one thing you get to see what is most important to them.

## 10 Questions You Need to Ask Your Customers to Identify your Brand

**5** Who do you think is our ideal customer?

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The goal of this question is to see if they know WHO to refer you to. You want to make sure you will get the right referrals. A lot of times, your customers may not know everything your company can do, they only see what you do for them.













**BRAND STRONG TIP:** While some of these questions may seem a little redundant, don't panic. Ask them anyway. By asking a customer what appears to be the same question, they have to dig deeper because they want to give you a different answer. However, I have had interviews where they answered 3 or 4 of the questions in their very first answer. If that is the case and you think you have enough information, skip asking the same thing again.

## Important Interview Tips

**1** Not every customer values your brand in the way you hoped. Don't be discouraged if one of your customers can't think of the value you offer, if they don't perceive your company as you thought, or they just can't think of anything that makes you unique. Dig as deep as you can but then move on. Don't try to change their minds or explain anything. Stick to the questions! If you don't think you can be objective in the interview or you don't think your customers will really open up to you directly, then hire a brand consultant or ask a friend or peer to do the interviews for you. My customers hire me for that outside, third party objective opinion all the time. Customers may open up more if they aren't talking to someone from your company.

- 2** As we mentioned earlier, these questions are designed to mainly focus on the positive. That is intentional. You want to know what you do well, not hear everything you do wrong. You want to build on your strengths and replicate your successes, so find out what they are. If a customer is unhappy, they'll share that with you but you don't need to ask for it. This is not a customer satisfaction survey, it's brand research. If you do get negative feedback, be happy. It's an opportunity to fix things.
- 3** If there is a disconnect in what they think of your brand vs. what you want them to think, don't be frustrated. Develop a strategy to change their perception. Work on tightening up your marketing messages or being more consistent in your brand attributes so you can close the gap.
- 4** Be creative with your questions. Sometimes the more surprising the question, the better the information collected. You want the emotions and feelings the person has about your company, so keep asking, "Why?" until you get the information you need. Or don't be afraid to ask them something like "If our company were a car brand, which would it be?" Your customers will dig a little deeper to justify why they chose a particular brand and that is where you get the gold nuggets of insight.

## Now What?

Now take a look at your answers and look for patterns or a description or answer that you really like. If more than three people said a certain thing, build on it.

Start to write down the words or ideas you see over and over again. If something is mentioned a few times by different people then it must be a strong characteristic.

Come up with a list of 7-10 common insights about your company that really showcase what value you offer your clients, what makes you different, and what strong brand characteristics you display.

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Hopefully you see a lot of positive attributes that make you feel good about the value you deliver, how hard you have worked, and how there is a need for what you provide in the marketplace. This exercise is always ENERGIZING for my clients. Even if there are misperceptions or gaps in the way the brand is perceived, you now know what activities and messages need to be strengthened.

**Focus is energizing!**

Once you have your research insights, you are ready to use them to create your Brand Strategy, clearly articulating what you do, who you do it for, and why you do it better.

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If you need help analyzing the results once you have completed your interviews, I'm happy to consult. Give me a call at **847-963-1805** or email me at **[sue@brandstrongmarketing.com](mailto:sue@brandstrongmarketing.com)**.

Or register for our series of **Brand Strong™ Brand Strategy Workshops**:

Workshop One: Identify Your Brand

Workshop Two: Define Your Ideal Target Market

Workshop Three: Create a Brand that is Unique and Memorable

Learn more at **[BrandStrongMarketing.com/Workshops](http://BrandStrongMarketing.com/Workshops)**

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