

10 Customer Interview Questions

That Actually work

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Most founders do not need more feedback. They need better signal. This interview guide is designed to help early-stage founders stop collecting polite encouragement and start hearing what customers actually do, what they have already tried, and what is costly enough to change. The asset is positioned in the editorial calendar as the lead magnet for Post 2, and it is intended to be a formatted PDF interview script based on The Mom Test framework.

How to use this guide

- Interview one person at a time.
- Ask about a specific recent moment, not opinions about the future.
- Stay on their workflow, pain, spending, and tradeoffs.
- Do not pitch your product during the interview.
- Take notes on concrete facts: frequency, cost, tools used, workarounds, delays, and stakes.
- If an answer becomes vague, ask, “Can you walk me through the last time that happened?”

What good signal sounds like

- Specific past behavior: “Last Thursday we exported the data into Sheets and spent two hours fixing it.”
- Clear pain: “If this slips, it delays billing by a week.”
- Existing spend or effort: “We pay for two tools and still do half of it manually.”
- Workarounds: “We built a workaround because none of the tools fit our process.”
- Urgency: “This happens every week, and it is getting worse.”

What bad signal sounds like

- Hypothetical praise: “Yeah, I would totally use that.”
- Courtesy answers: “That sounds cool.”
- Strategy talk with no evidence: “I think teams probably need this.”
- Problem inflation after your prompt: “Now that you mention it, that could be useful.”

The 10 questions

1) “Can you walk me through the last time you dealt with this problem?”

Why it works: It forces the conversation into real events instead of abstract opinions.

Listen for: sequence, timing, trigger, people involved, and where the friction actually appears.

Red flag answer: “Usually we just kind of handle it.”

Follow-up prompts: “What kicked it off?” “What happened next?” “How long did that take?”

2) “What are you doing today to solve it?”

Why it works: real alternatives reveal whether the problem is active enough to deserve attention.

Listen for: manual work, spreadsheets, internal hacks, agencies, existing software, or no solution at all.

Red flag answer: “Nothing really, but I would love something better.”

Follow-up prompts: “Show me the current workaround.” “Who owns it?”

3) “What have you already tried?”

Why it works: past attempts show motivation, failed substitutes, and how educated the customer already is.

Listen for: previous vendors, abandoned tools, trial periods, internal builds, or process changes.

Red flag answer: “We have not really looked into it.”

Follow-up prompts: “Why did that not work?” “Why did you stop?”

4) “What is the hardest part of the current process?”

Why it works: the sharpest pain point is often narrower than the founder's original idea.

Listen for: bottlenecks, handoffs, error-prone steps, approvals, rework, and emotional language.

Red flag answer: “It is all kind of annoying.”

Follow-up prompts: “Which part breaks most often?” “Which part do people complain about?”

5) “How often does this happen?”

Why it works: frequency separates an inconvenience from a recurring operational problem.

Listen for: daily, weekly, monthly, seasonal, or event-driven patterns.

Red flag answer: “Not that often, but when it does it is bad.”

Follow-up prompts: “When did it last happen?” “How many times this month?”

6) “What does this problem cost you today?”

Why it works: cost creates urgency, and urgency is closer to buying behavior than interest is.

Listen for: lost revenue, delayed work, headcount time, customer churn, compliance risk, or reputation damage.

Red flag answer: “Mostly just frustrating.”

Follow-up prompts: “How much time?” “Whose time?” “What happens if it is not fixed?”

7) “Who else is affected when this goes wrong?”

Why it works: it uncovers stakeholders, hidden buyers, blockers, and downstream consequences.

Listen for: managers, ops, finance, customers, executives, or external partners.

Red flag answer: “Just me.”

Follow-up prompts: “Who notices first?” “Who feels the impact most?”

8) “How are decisions made about buying or changing tools like this?”

Why it works: a painful problem still dies if the buying path is unrealistic.

Listen for: budget owner, approval chain, procurement friction, security review, and decision criteria.

Red flag answer: “I am not sure; someone else handles that.”

Follow-up prompts: “Who signs off?” “What would need to be true for a switch to happen?”

9) “Have you budgeted money or time to solve this?”

Why it works: budget is stronger evidence than enthusiasm.

Listen for: line items, active vendor evaluation, internal projects, or informal but recurring effort.

Red flag answer: “No, but if the right thing came along we would consider it.”

Follow-up prompts: “What did you spend last year?” “What is the internal priority level?”

10) “If nothing changes, what happens over the next 6 to 12 months?”

Why it works: consequences reveal priority, urgency, and whether the pain compounds.

Listen for: risk accumulation, missed goals, rising costs, broken workflows, or leadership pressure.

Red flag answer: “Probably nothing major.”

Follow-up prompts: “What gets worse?” “What gets delayed?” “Who starts caring when it grows?”

Interview rules that keep you honest

- Ask for stories, not opinions.
- Ask for examples, not guesses.
- Ask about money, time, and consequences.
- Do not rescue vague answers; sit in the silence and let them clarify.
- If you hear yourself explaining the product, stop and go back to the customer’s current behavior.
- End every interview by writing down only observed evidence, not your interpretation.

Simple scorecard

Signal Area	Strong Evidence	Weak Evidence
Problem frequency	Happened recently and repeats often	Rare or hard to place in time
Pain severity	Causes delay, cost, risk, or stress	Mild annoyance
Existing effort	Clear workaround or spending already exists	No action taken
Buyer reality	Clear owner and decision path	Buying process unknown
Urgency	Consequences grow if ignored	No real downside to waiting

Notes template

- Interviewee role:
- Company type/stage:
- Date:
- Problem discussed:
- Current workaround:
- Last occurrence:
- Frequency:
- Cost of problem:
- Tools currently used:
- Buying owner:
- Priority level:
- Quote worth saving:
- Go / no-go insight:

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