



Get Smart

Brief

EIGHT SIGNALS OF A “VALUABLE PROBLEM”

MARKETING CHALLENGE: PIPELINE FILL

The cornerstone of innovation is more than a bunch of good ideas. In fact, most companies are drowning in ideas. Where they struggle is understanding which ideas to support through their innovation pipeline. An idea is a good one if (and only if) it addresses a valuable problem, or a “burning challenge” the customer faces. These burning challenges are best discovered through qualitative research. During voice-of-customer work, we can listen for and observe specific clues that shed light on the significance of the customer problem and help determine whether ideas addressing these problems are worth pursuing. Below are 8 clues you can use to help identify burning challenges that lead to breakthrough innovation.

The Problem May Be Significant if Study Participants:

1. Show more intense reactions when discussing the problem (through body language, posture, tone of voice, speech cadence, quickness to answer questions, etc.)
2. Can precisely define who will benefit if the problem is solved
3. Can articulate the outcome they hope to achieve if the problem is solved
4. Recommend that we speak to others in the ecosystem because the problem they face impacts others
5. Throw up few barriers to a potential solution and easily offer ideas (this signals they’ve been thinking about it)
6. See few internal obstacles to a solution
7. Can easily identify champions in the ecosystem who will advocate for change
8. Asks lots of questions about a potential solution even if one hasn’t been designed (knowing their thought process behind these questions is gold)



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- To learn more, take a look at this [white paper](#), which details more on best practices for managing the front end of innovation (FEI). An essential component of the FEI is voice of customer work to discover these valuable problems.

Quickly activate the front-end-of-innovation within your own organization. In a half-day workshop, create a plan and build momentum for an assignment.



Kickstart

- Scope your innovation assignment
- Decide on priorities
- Develop preliminary opportunity areas (an inventory of “valuable problems”) based on past research / institutional knowledge
- Ideate with the team
- Develop a research learning plan to validate opportunities and ideas
- Build internal momentum and team alignment on priorities
- Build organizational capability