

The conversation continues. If it's going well, I would raise the topics of whether she ever thought to look for recipes on the iPad or for cooking videos on YouTube.

Overall, your mom can't remember the last time she had such an enjoyable conversation with you. You were so interested in her life for once! You thank her for the lasagna, pet the dog, and head home. You've learned that building an app and waiting for people to find it on the App Store probably isn't a good plan. But you've got some good insight about your customer segment and a few promising leads to look into. That was a useful conversation.

A useful conversation

The measure of usefulness of an early customer conversation is whether it gives us concrete facts about our customers' lives and world views. These facts, in turn, allow us to improve our business.

Our original idea looked like this: old people like cookbooks and iPads. Therefore, we will build a cookbook for the iPad. It's generic. There are a thousand possible variations of this premise.

With an idea this vague, we can't answer any of the difficult questions like which recipes to include or how people will hear about it. Until we get specific, it always seems like a good idea.

After just one conversation (with our mom, of all people), we have a higher fidelity vision. We now see that there are at least 2 specific customer segments we might serve, each of which needs a slightly different product. We've also identified some major risks to address before we commit too heavily.

1. We could offer niche recipes (ethnic, diets) which experienced cooks may not already know. Our biggest question is how to reach them when they don't search for apps. We have a possible lead with newspaper and magazine PR.
2. Alternately, we might make generic recipes for younger cooks who are easier to reach via the App Store and who haven't memorised all their

favourites yet. We haven't talked to any, so we have loads of questions, but one big one is whether a customer segment who isn't already in the habit of buying expensive cookbooks will pay a premium for ours.

The first conversation gave us rope to hang ourselves. The second gave us actionable insight. Why? What was different about the second conversation?

Mom was unable to lie to us because we never talked about our idea.

That's kind of weird, right? We find out if people care about what we're doing by never mentioning it. Instead, we talk about them and their lives.

The point is a bit more subtle than this. Eventually you do need to mention what you're building and take people's money for it. However, the big mistake is almost always to mention your idea too soon rather than too late.

If you just avoid mentioning your idea, you automatically start asking better questions. Doing this is the easiest (and biggest) improvement you can make to your customer conversations.

Here are 3 simple rules to help you. They are collectively called (drumroll) The Mom Test:

The Mom Test:

1. Talk about their life instead of your idea
2. Ask about specifics in the past instead of generics or opinions about the future
3. Talk less and listen more

It's called The Mom Test because it leads to questions that even your mom can't lie to you about. When you do it right, they won't even know you have an idea. There are some other important tools and tricks that we'll introduce throughout the rest of the book. But first, let's put The Mom Test to work on some questions.

Rule of thumb: Customer conversations are bad by default. It's your job to

fix them.