

How to Conduct Purposeful Stakeholder Interviews

A guide to getting everyone on board for digital transformation

Companies considering new or updated digital solutions face an uphill battle. Typically these projects require large investments in time and resources and a failed project loses more than just the hard costs.

Whether you are developing a digital commerce strategy or undergoing digital transformation these projects require the coordination of many different internal departments and external partners. Excluding any of these stakeholders in the construction of the strategy or technology will result in complications or outright failures.

With this guide, you will have an understanding of:

- The time and energy needed to complete in-depth stakeholder interviews.
- How to conduct a purposeful interview.
- What this data means and how to use it moving forward.

Planning your stakeholder interviews

Stakeholder interviews are one-on-one conversations with key individuals or groups to elicit insights, opinions and wisdom to help structure a thoughtful and informed strategy for the next phases of the project.

Identify your research goals

To get the most out of your interviews make sure you have a clear directive outlined as to the information you need and want from the stakeholder. Be certain that you are getting what you need from them the first time you meet with them. Going back to stakeholders multiple times is not a good use of time.

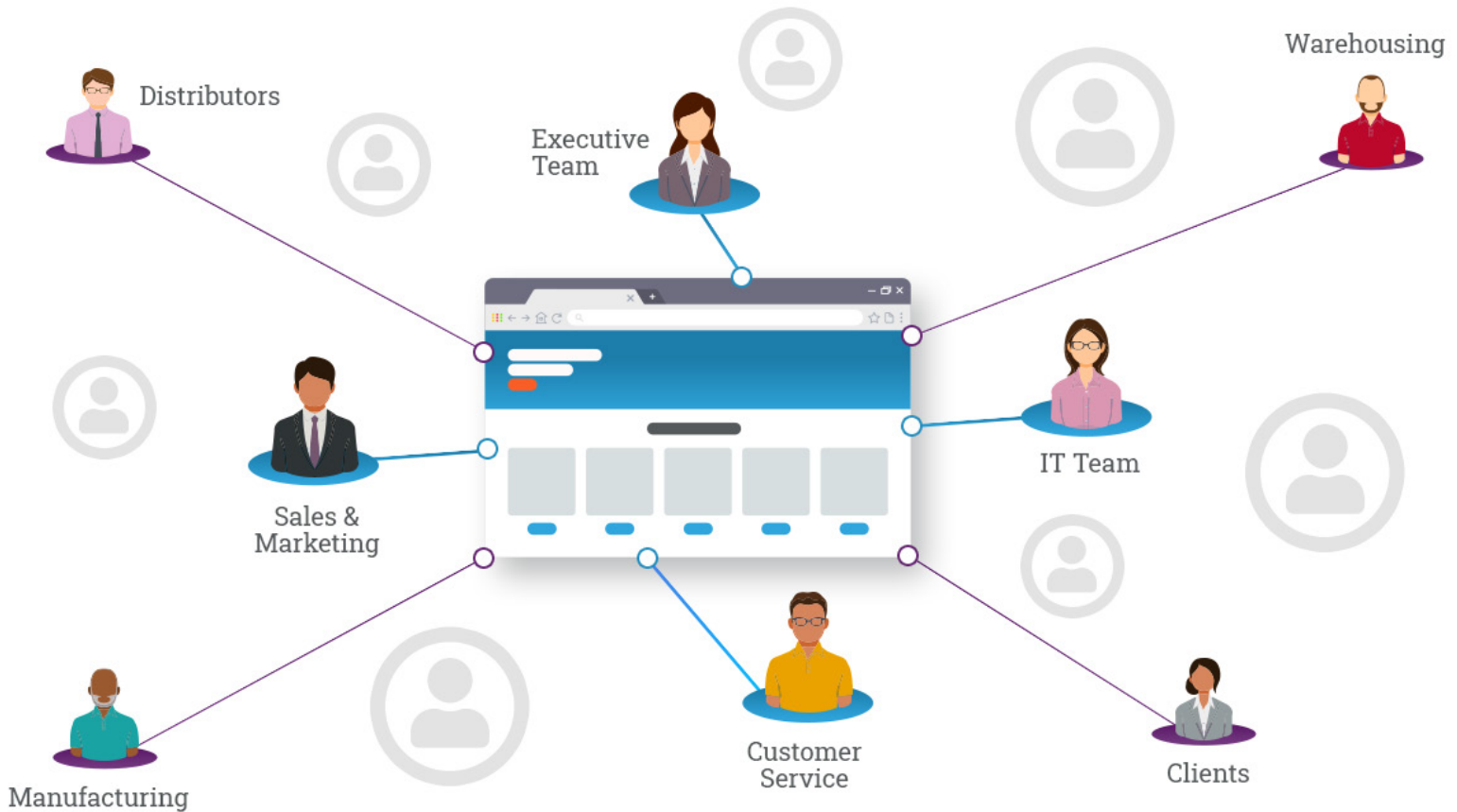
Pro tip: Have a clear outline of the proposed project so that the stakeholder has an understanding of how it can/will/should affect their department.

Identify stakeholders

Depending on the project you are working on, the stakeholders may be on different levels of an organization: management, engineering, marketing, sales, technical support, etc.

Every single person whose job will be affected by the product is a stakeholder. In some instances, you may need to consider external stakeholders as well.

Define a timeline



Depending on the size of the project and the number of stakeholders, time may be a huge limitation. Do not try to save time by cutting the stakeholder interview phase short. Without sufficient stakeholder interviews, you risk missing key strategy & technology insights and a failure to develop team buy-in. This results in major communication breakdowns and ultimately an increase in project costs (time, energy, resources).

Considerations for your timeline:

- Allocate enough time for each interview (as mentioned - avoid going back a second or third time).
- Provide your stakeholders with project information & interview questions beforehand so

they can be properly prepped and ready for the discussion.

- Ensure there is time post stakeholder interview to gather your insights and share them back with the person so they can review and ensure their thoughts and feedback are expressed fully.

Preparing stakeholder questions

Each project and product requires typical questions and answers but you should also tailor your interview questions to the role and/or seniority level of the interviewee.

General questions

The following are typical "generic" questions that you could ask all stakeholders.

- What's your role in the organization; in this project?
- How would you personally define success for this project?
- What problem should this project solve?
- What are your biggest concerns about this project?
 - » What's the worst thing that could happen during the project?
- What should this project accomplish for the business?
- How would you like to be involved in this project?
- Anyone else we should talk to (not on the list)?

Specific questions

By asking more specific questions tailored to their job role you allow the stakeholder to draw from their field of expertise and their tasks within the organization to give deeper insight into specific parts of the proposed project. These questions help uncover undisclosed needs that may not have been initially considered in the proposed project details.

Some example questions for different stakeholders:

Technical

- Are there any processes or tools in the current technology that you need for your role, but that could be more efficient?
- Which departments (marketing, digital, sales, customer service, accounting, etc.) do you need your system to connect with? and in what way? (functionality)

Marketing

- How does this project fit into the overall marketing strategy?
- How do you expect to differentiate your product/offerings?

Sales

- When you lose sales, what are the most common reasons?
- Why do customers buy your product/service?

Customer Service

- What problems do you see most often (internally, or from customers)?
- Where do customers get most confused or frustrated?

Executive Team

- What do I need to know that you don't think other members of your team have said?

Keep communication going & maintain alignment

Each of your stakeholders will take precious time and energy to provide you with useful insights. It will be important to maintain a connection with the stakeholders and ensure they feel heard and that their time was not wasted or in vain. Keep them in the loop by sharing the information gathered in this phase and communicating how it will be used to shape the proposed project.

Document, analyze & next steps

The purpose of stakeholder interviews is to gather data to be used by the project team to prioritize needs. The records of your interviews are data and they're not of much use until they've been analyzed.

Consider writing up a formal report that summarizes each interview and identifies patterns in feedback. Your objective is for anyone on your project team, even those who never spoke to any of the interviewees, to have full access to everything the interviews have taught you efficiently.

What's next?

Now that you have completed your stakeholder interviews the question is "what do we do with this information now?". Depending on how you have structured your project the answer may differ for everyone. In an Acro Commerce project our typical next steps:

- > Go back to the proposed project and update the requirements based on the feedback from stakeholder interviews (and other discovery conversations).
- > Move on to a strategy phase
 - » Technical specifications outline
 - » Information architecture
 - » Solution prototyping
- > Develop a project roadmap that outlines the MVP (minimum viable product) launch and the ongoing development phases.

More information

Acro Commerce helps companies plan and execute successful digital transformation. We add expert guidance through the discovery & strategy phases that provides a complete understanding of project requirements, ensures stakeholder buy-in, and creates a comprehensive development roadmap. For more information, visit acrocommerce.com

About Acro Commerce

Acro Commerce is a full-service digital commerce agency, solving complex ecommerce problems with open source platforms. Our solutions enable companies to invest in their technology as a business asset, capitalize on digital commerce as a revenue generator and confidently move through digital business transformation.

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1.877.763.8844