

KOMODO

MAKE USER RESEARCH MORE EFFECTIVE WITH OBJECTIVE SETTING

A user experience focused workbook around the area of making user research more effective with objective setting.

— WORK BOOK
USER EXPERIENCE

WHAT’S IN THIS WHITEPAPER

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Estimated reading time: 15 mins

01 — INTRODUCTION

WHY BOTHER READING THIS?

Most businesses are failing their customers. Over half of consumers feel brands fail to meet their standards — in the UK, 66% said: “I don’t remember when a brand experience exceeded my expectations.”

Why? Your user research isn’t good enough.

Sorry — but that’s almost certainly true. Most of our customers think they understand research, but few bother with it, for a few reasons:

COMMON USER RESEARCH CHALLENGES

PRODUCT OWNERS

Like the concept of user research, but it’s too low a priority and they lack the time to perform it.

DESIGNERS

Want to build better research into their UX, but don’t know where to begin — or are too accustomed to certain techniques.

MARKETERS

You’ve already done market research — you know your audience, so why bother investing further?

01 — INTRODUCTION

These issues show one clear problem: user research is sorely misunderstood by almost every business in the UK — even some of the world's largest brands.

The reason is simple: most of us don't understand what user research actually is. If we did, we'd prioritise it in every project. Instead it's a topic where assumptions overtake facts — where brands think they already know their audience simply because they interact with them.

But that's not enough. Thinking you know your users is very different from actually understanding them. By performing real user research, you'll know their behaviours, motivations, challenges and goals.

80%

success rate when the Nielsen Norman Group structured an e-commerce site around user research on customers' mental models — versus just 9% built through internal thinking.

We'll focus on two key areas

01

How to set business objectives that user research can fulfil.

02

How to write user research questions that support those objectives.

USER RESEARCH IS NOT WHAT YOU THINK IT IS

(Unless you already agree with all of the points below — in which case, you're right.)

Market research isn't the same as user research

Most businesses confuse the two. Market research shows how users behave within a market; user research identifies how people experience products or services within it. Market research deals in large-scale quantitative information, while user research is more focused on one-to-one feedback.

A market research project runs at scale out of necessity — analysing visitor numbers, bounce rates, conversion rates, market size. User research works in far smaller samples: input from a few users offers genuine, qualitative feedback on how a product is used, where the frustrations are, and how a user might overcome them.

02 — WHAT USER RESEARCH IS

It requires a redefined way of thinking

Where market research aims to offer products or services that answer perceived market behaviours, user research is more about understanding what people need, want, or find useful.

Before rolling suitcases, travel companies were pressured into creating 'lighter' luggage. But as cases got lighter, the same demands continued. Only when travellers were actually interviewed did companies discover it wasn't about 'weight' at all — it was about convenience. (The anecdote is unsourced, but it captures the point: what a market 'wants' isn't always what users need.)

MARKETING ISN'T THE BEST TEAM FOR IT

Marketing teams may be good at market research, but marketing activity has no real bearing on how a product actually functions for users. It's the product owner — the person driving change — who should own the user research.

02 — WHAT USER RESEARCH IS

User research is critical to user experience

User research is interchangeable with UX research. UX designers know its value — it's the 'how' a user interacts with a product that should shape design, rather than the 'who' established through market research.

93% of user researchers start before design begins. It's a field designed to ideate, not validate — 43% say their favourite part of the role is making better decisions based on better evidence. In a Forrester report, visits-to-lead conversions were 400% higher on sites offering superior user experiences.

IT DOESN'T COST THE EARTH

You don't need a huge sample. Jakob Nielsen estimates testing a site with just five people surfaces 80% of usability issues. Not investing at all usually costs more — remember Google Glass? Well-built, but users saw no need for it and were put off by the design.

02 — WHAT USER RESEARCH IS

Experience is everything

While measuring the ROI of user research accurately can be challenging, the statistics support digital products that prioritise strong experiences over advertising.

73% of customers say experience is an essential factor in purchasing decisions. 65% of US customers found positive brand experiences more influential than advertising.

Most crucially, customers are more inclined to pay a price premium when they feel they've had a good experience. Spell that out: invest in user research, implement the findings in your design, and your customers will spend more — and stay loyal to your brand.

02 — WHAT USER RESEARCH IS

How to get it right

So we know what user research is, the impact it can have and why it's vital in your UX process. So how do you start getting it right? Most research means interacting with consumers and asking questions — so how do you define the 'right' ones? It depends where your business stands in the product journey:

LAUNCHING A NEW PRODUCT

Before you even have a product to show or test, how can you extract information that's both genuine and useful to your business?

EXISTING PRODUCT

If you already have a product and want to improve it, how do you ask the right questions without influencing users through existing bias — and how do you leverage the data already available to you?

02 — WHAT USER RESEARCH IS

Understand research methods

Research is too broad to fit into one document. But before we talk about setting objectives and writing questions, it's worth knowing the standard methods — and seeing that where many businesses fear the cost of surveys and focus groups, few realise they already have research tools in place.

EXAMPLES OF EXISTING ASSETS FOR USER RESEARCH

CUSTOMER REVIEWS

If you have a live product, analysing reviews and turning them into actionable changes is a free way to gather useful feedback.

ANALYTICS

Existing customers leave a footprint of activity on your site or product. Studying how they behave helps answer research objectives.

CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Got a support line or service desk? Talk to them — gather insight directly from the people who field complaints.

02 — WHAT USER RESEARCH IS

Design Thinking

At KOMODO we use the Design Thinking methodology to frame project phases. It breaks the design process into five steps — Empathise, Define, Ideate, Prototype and Test — helping us choose the right research methods at each stage while keeping research aligned with our wider UX strategy.



Photo by Solen Feyjssa

Define your goal

As Jakob Nielsen's '5 users' example shows, good research needn't be time- or resource-intensive. Like any project, it's about a framework: know the goal of the research — launch a new product for X users? Reduce negative reviews on an existing one? From that goal you can set objectives and choose the methods to gather what you need. Let's get started.

03 — SETTING OBJECTIVES

SETTING OBJECTIVES TO MAP USER NEEDS TO BUSINESS GROWTH

To formulate your research questions and choose techniques, first define business objectives that research can support. For user research, objectives are all about problem-solving — your questions and methods are then specified to meet them.

ESSENTIALLY, YOUR TASK IS TO

- 01 Define a research goal.
- 02 Establish objectives for that research.
- 03 Attribute research techniques and questions to meet the objectives.

03 — SETTING OBJECTIVES

UberEats — understanding global tastes

Before we walk through how to do this, look at an example set by one of the biggest digital brands in the world — using user research to build practical experiences around unique taste preferences on a global scale.

An objective is easier to define when you have an existing product. UberEats attributes much of its success to a user-experience mindset: updates focused on making it easier for restaurants to sell, drivers to earn income, and customers to get food on time.

As they grew, problems cropped up — cultural and geographical challenges in markets where taste, cooking techniques and delivery infrastructure varied wildly. They used research to solve them and stay confident their solutions worked.

03 — SETTING OBJECTIVES

THEIR OBJECTIVES WERE DEFINED AS

- 01 How can our product meet the challenges of operating across a diverse range of cities and countries?
- 02 Develop an understanding of the different food cultures our restaurant owners, drivers and customers operate in.

How did they meet these objectives?

UberEats used two methods — interviews and ethnography (observing users in their natural setting). They sent employees to target cities to understand the food culture and interview restaurant owners, drivers and consumers, and shadowed users operating the product in real time to spot pain points and positives.

The lesson: UberEats defined a clear goal (improve the existing service and launch well in new markets), outlined objectives to achieve it, and chose research methods to meet those objectives and iterate on the product.

03 — SETTING OBJECTIVES

Objective setting ideas

Taking the UberEats example, how would you define your own business objectives? First, define your research ‘goal’ — the broader business goal your digital product is meant to support.

EXAMPLES COULD INCLUDE

01 We want to know how people buy property online in the UK. (New product launch)

02 What challenges do people have when banking on their phones? (New product)

03 How can we make our platform’s sign-up page convert more? (Existing product)

04 Can we reduce the number of complaints made about our app? (Existing)

05 How can we speed up user conversions when interacting with our site? (Existing)

Take one of these goals, then outline your objectives, research methods and questions — with questions tied to each method. Let’s look at some examples before trying it ourselves.

03 — SETTING OBJECTIVES

Objective Setting — Example 1

App development project

RESEARCH GOAL — PROBLEMS WE'RE SOLVING

Develop an app that lets people see all their investments across different apps and wallets in one place. Here the research goal aligns directly with the business aim — a fresh launch of a new app in a competitive space.

OBJECTIVES

- 01 Understand what functions and features led users to their current stock/crypto apps — objectives can centre on current usage and problems.
- 02 Learn more about the people the app is aimed at — demographics and genuine motivations — to build a stronger, more inclusive app.

METHOD & QUESTIONS — ONLINE SURVEY

Surveys quickly collect demographic information and let us challenge our assumptions about what leads users to stock or crypto apps.

- 01 What features led users to their current stock or crypto apps?
- 02 Are availability and live updates more important than overall experience?
- 03 What demographic audiences should we target?
- 04 What are the investment goals of retail investors in the UK?

03 — SETTING OBJECTIVES

Objective Setting — Example 2

Existing site improvements

RESEARCH GOAL

Improve our website's efficiency so users can set up and pay for council bills and fines faster — we've had several complaints about the current site.

OBJECTIVES

01 Understand the current pain points in our user journey — the 'why' of users' frustration with the existing platform.

02 Assess the usability and efficiency of a prototype of our new payment system.

METHOD & QUESTIONS

Semi-scripted user interviews (objective 1) to explore issues in detail and identify whether pain points are system-wide or flow-specific. Usability testing with remote software (objective 2) to confirm the new system resolves the previous problems.

01 Are certain payment journeys causing more pain points than others?

02 What are the primary pain points in the current payment system?

03 Can users navigate from landing page to payment as intended?

04 How long does it take users to get through the new payment system?

03 — SETTING OBJECTIVES

Objective Setting — Example 3

Investigating subpar lead generation

RESEARCH GOAL

Our website gets a high volume of landing-page hits, but these aren't converting to the number of business leads we'd expect.

OBJECTIVES

01 Determine whether our product is aligned with the needs of potential end-users — even the best sites won't convert if users don't need them.

02 Convert more website hits into qualified business leads.

METHOD & QUESTIONS — USER WORKSHOP

A workshop where users test our website and answer follow-up questions — employing tactics from several methodologies in one session to assess both how the site is used and the real needs of users.

01 Can users navigate from the landing page to the 'request a demo' section?

02 Have users had a better experience on a competitor's site? What differed?

03 Our service is technical — do users understand what we offer?

04 Does the subscription price offer the value users expect?

05 What pain points are typical for a service like ours — can we position as the solution?

04 — EXERCISE

OBJECTIVE SETTING EXERCISE SHEET

You've seen our examples — now have a go yourself. Whatever stage your product is at, use this sheet to define your research goals and get your project off the ground.

RESEARCH PROBLEM — STATE YOUR RESEARCH GOAL

OBJECTIVE 1

OBJECTIVE 2

RESEARCH METHODS

RESEARCH QUESTIONS — STRUGGLING? KEEP READING.

05 — WRITING QUESTIONS

TIPS ON WRITING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

We can't cover the whole process here — but we can help you become more goal-oriented, so your questions and methods focus on fulfilling business goals. Asking questions is easy; asking good ones is the challenge. Keep these in mind:

BEWARE OF LEADING QUESTIONS

Does your question prompt a certain response? 'Do you have any problems with this software?' leads more than 'Describe the process of using this software.'

AVOID SHALLOW QUESTIONS

Yes/no questions give little UX value. If you give easy ways out, you extract far less from interviewees and other techniques.

DON'T TAKE SOLUTIONS AT FACE VALUE

Users aren't designers. If someone says 'make the checkout button bigger', read the implication — it's hard to find. Follow up: 'why is that a good solution for you?'

05 — WRITING QUESTIONS

Anatomy of a good research question

SETUP

The start of a question gives context — the what, why, how and where. In “When you’re looking for homes for sale online, what process do you follow?”, the setup is “When you’re looking for a home for sale online”.

AREA OF INQUIRY

What you want to learn from the question — in the example above, “what process do you follow”.

CLARIFYING / LADDERING

When a response creates a ‘why’, plan how you’ll follow up. When writing questions against your objectives, also draft the follow-ups you’ll use in your chosen methods.

GETTING USER RESEARCH DONE BY MAXIMISING YOUR UX MENTALITY

You've made it this far. Good. You now hopefully see the value of well-structured user research – and that without objectives and a framework, research becomes too broad and potentially too costly.

This workbook has been about focusing on what you want to extract from your users – how their feedback guides your product's growth and creates experiences users love and return to. But remember: user research has to be packaged with design to truly fulfil user needs. Your design team must be champions of the process – designing not just on what they think is good, but on what they now know is useful. Ready to launch your own research and get design in from the get-go? It's quite the challenge – so why not outsource? Your project will be:

UNBIASED

Detached from internal bias and prior assumptions.

DESIGN-LED

Done with design influence and buy-in from the beginning.

EXPERT-RUN

Managed by expert researchers who know methods and question-setting inside out.

At KOMODO, our User Research lead is Dr Shaun Jerdan, whose public-sector research experience brings real depth to our UX team. Define your goals, set your objectives, then work with us to gather actionable insight.

OUR PROCESS

OUR PROCESS

All our product ideas come from a user-focused approach. Work with us and we'll guide you through a structured process to define success – with user research built in from the start:

01 Understand

We gather the data needed to understand who your users are and what they want.

02 Define

We define the project through that understanding, setting scope through real, justified needs.

03 Ideate

We explore creative ideas to solve your user needs before committing to a direction.

04 Create

We build the product to a defined timescale.

05 Reflect

Our work is never really finished — we iterate and update as needed to help your product succeed.

OUR SERVICES

OUR SERVICES LIST

Looking for help creating a digital product that captures customer attention? Work with KOMODO and discover our expert-led services — from app and web development to captivating design.

User research

Interviews, testing and analysis to understand what your users actually need.

Digital Design — UX & UI

Experience and interface design that turns research into intuitive, on-brand products.

Web Development

Fast, accessible and scalable websites and web apps, built to last.

App Development

Native and cross-platform mobile apps designed around real user behaviour.

GET IN TOUCH

LET'S GET YOUR RESEARCH OFF THE GROUND.

We understand you're busy — so book our team to run an audit for you. Conducted rapidly and cost-effectively, it'll help you find opportunities to improve your current software and get ahead with your product roadmap.

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