

Sample Discussion Guide – Customer Interviews

The following discussion guide serves to outline the subject areas we envision covering during the interviews. It does not function as a script. While our trained interviewer will make an attempt to approximately structure the discussion, the ultimate order in which respondents bring up subjects is unpredictable and will vary from individual-to-individual. Broadly speaking, however, all of the following topic areas will be addressed by the conclusion of the interviews.

Introduction:

- Respondent introduction
- Explain confidentiality and rules of the road

Industry Dynamics:

- What do you think are the major marketplace trends that are impacting IT/business consulting firms today?
- What do you think are the critical issues these firms are facing?
- What do you think they must do to remain successful in the future?
- Ultimately, where do you think the industry is going over the next 5 years?

Important Needs:

- For what types of problems/issues would you turn to an IT/Business consultant for help?
- What qualities do you look for in IT/business consulting firms that you are considering as a partner? (Interviewer: once all qualities are mentioned ask respondent to prioritize them in terms of importance) Which of these are common to most firms, and which are differentiators? Why so?
- What do you look for in the relationship with an IT/Business Consultant? What are your expectations?
- What are some of the typical problems that arise during the course of an IT/Business consulting project?
 - Why do they come up? How are they dealt with? How do you feel in a situation like this?
- In your view, what attributes and characteristics does a consulting firm need to have to be a leader in the IT/business consulting arena today?
- Do you see the attributes of a leader shifting as the marketplace changes in the next 3-5 years?
- And how would you define an ideal relationship with an IT/business consulting firm? Why is that? (If different from above, probe for specific reasons).
- In an ideal case, how would you like to feel:
 - During a successful IT/Business consulting project?
 - After the completion of a successful IT/Business consulting project?

Brand Perceptions:

- What are the major companies competing today in the IT/business consulting arena? How familiar are you with these firms?
- Please create categories within the IT/business consulting industry and place these companies according to their similarities. (e.g. by breadth of product offering, culture, reputation, by type of clients - pure play IT, general consultants, direct sellers of equipment and solutions, etc)
- In your view, which 3 firms are the leaders in the industry? What makes these firms the leaders?
- Which 3 adjectives would you use to describe each firm? (Probe sequentially for each): Why did you choose these adjectives? What is the meaning of each word? Are these adjectives unique to (firm names) or could you use them to also describe the other leaders?
- In what ways are these firms similar, in what ways different?
- How would you describe each of these top firms' relationships with their clients?
- Is there one firm you would consider "the gold standard" in its relationships with clients? What sets it apart from the competition?
- If new needs arrive, do you use your current vendor? Why or why not?
- Have you ever decided to switch providers? Why?

Attribute Exploration

Some people have mentioned the following attributes as being important when selecting service providers/ IT/Business consultants. As I read each one, please tell what it means to you. Is it important? Why/Why not? Which companies would you say deliver on this?

1. Ability to deliver
2. Product/technology knowledge and expertise
3. Understanding clients' needs
4. Integrating best in class solutions
5. Timeliness
6. Skills and expertise of employees
7. Building long-term relationships, partnering
8. Being a niche player
9. Innovative
10. Global

Familiarity with [OUR BRAND]

(USE QUESTIONS TO SUPPLEMENT PREVIOUS SECTION AS NECESSARY)

- (If not mentioned above) How familiar are you with [OUR BRAND]?
- When you think of [OUR BRAND] what comes to mind? What else? In what markets is the firm a player? In what markets is it a leader? In which of the categories that you named earlier would you place [OUR BRAND]?
- Which 3 adjectives or descriptive words would you use to describe [OUR BRAND]? Why did you choose these words? Are these words unique to [OUR BRAND] or could you use them to also describe other firms?

- In what ways is [OUR BRAND] similar to the firms you named as the top 3 players in IT/business consulting, in what ways different?
- How would you describe the firm's historical strengths...emerging skills...vulnerabilities?
- (For clients) What is it like to work with [OUR BRAND]? How do you typically feel/what are your thoughts when working with [OUR BRAND]? How about after the completion of a project?
- Where do you think the firm is heading in the future?
- What are the key things [OUR BRAND] must do/avoid to be successful in the future?
- If you were to create an ad for [OUR BRAND] what would it say (what would be the main thing that you would promote about the company?) What imagery/pictures would it have? What about sounds or music?

Final Question:

- Any final comments? Anything that was missed?