



## B2B Customer Engagement Strategy



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# Author Profile



*Michael has over 14 years experience in the areas of customer insights, research and strategy*

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For over 4 years, Michael was the head of customer research for the Wholesale division of the Telstra Corporation, Australia's largest telecommunications company. In this capacity, Michael developed and implemented a comprehensive Customer Insights and Satisfaction Program which included strategic customer workshops, an operational service tracking program as well as the design and implementation of a customer insights decision support tool.

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- 2 Introduction
- 3 B2B Fundamentals
- 5 The Fully Engaged Customer
- 7 Pre-Requisites To Becoming Customer-Centric
- 13 Creating Impact / Delivering Value
- 19 Developing A Customer Insights Program





## Introduction

The role of B2B suppliers and service providers is to understand, create and deliver value to their business customers.

This creates a win / win situation for both business'. This is more easily achieved by B2B businesses encouraging fully engaged customer relationships.

This Learning Module will take you through creating your own customer engagement strategy, so that you can realise benefits for your B2B business that include:

- Improved financial performance
- Customer loyalty
- Customer advocacy

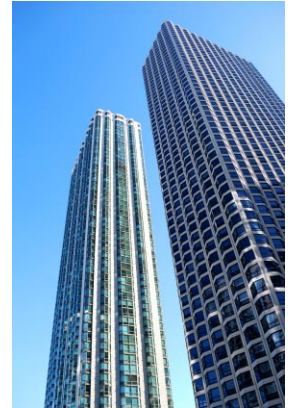


## B2B Fundamentals

### What is business to business (B2B)?

*“B2B refers to business markets in which firms, institutions or governments that acquire goods and services either for their own use, to incorporate into the products or services that they produce or for resale along with other products and services to other firms, institutions or governments.”*

(Source: Business Market Management: Understanding, Delivering and Creating Value by James Anderson, James Narus and Das Narayandas, 2009)



- B2B Includes firms that operate primarily in business to consumer (B2C) markets but also interact with wholesalers and distributors
- Some firms will operate in both B2B and B2C markets
- Examples include airlines, banks and telecommunication companies

B2B transactions apply to products (for example, aircraft parts suppliers selling components to aircraft manufacturers) and can also apply to services (for example, a technology consulting firm providing project management and systems integration services to a financial services company).

### Characteristics of business (B2B) markets

B2B markets have a number of unique characteristics:

- Complex, in terms of the deals, contracts and technologies involved
- Large dollar amounts and often risky transactions
- A small number of customers can account for a large percentage of a customer's revenues
- Suppliers and customers work closely together for an extended period of time
- The B2B buying process is comprised of multiple participants:
  - **Decision-Makers** - those who make the choice of supplier / service provider
  - **Influencers** - those who do not make the actual decision, but provide significant input that influences the decision
  - **End Users** - those that actually use the product or service provided

Note: These roles may not be mutually exclusive. For instance, in some organisations, a decision maker may also be a user. Similarly a user may also be an influencer.

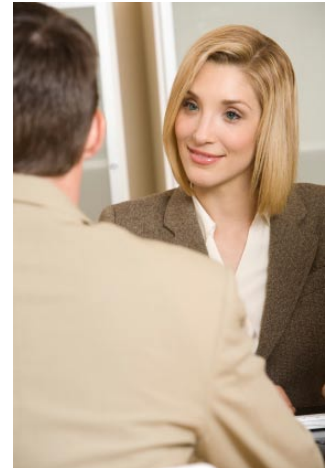
Therefore it is important to understand your customer's organisational structure and buying decision processes.

## **Creating value: The role of B2B suppliers and service providers**

The role of B2B suppliers and service providers is to understand, create and deliver value to their business customers.

In order to successfully do this requires suppliers and service providers to:

- Regularly engage with their business customers
- Obtain a deep understanding of their customers' objectives, requirements and preferences
- Respond to customer requirements where appropriate and feasible to do so



By doing so, a “win-win” is created whereby your customers obtain what they require to meet their objectives and your organisation is able to drive its financial performance by effectively attracting, acquire, retaining and growing your business customers.

## The Fully Engaged Customer

It is important not to confuse customer engagement with customer satisfaction.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT
Means the company is doing its job providing the products and services for which they are suppose to provide and nothing more!	Is the dialogue and interactions apart from the sales transaction
Is simply a starting point, as all customers expect to be satisfied	Enables the customer voice to be heard and acted upon
	Results in the customer having a bond with the organisation - which is critical to your long-term financial success

To drive customer behaviour and financial performance, your company must go beyond simply satisfying customers. You must **CONNECT** with customers on a much deeper level.

You must create Fully Engaged Customers.

### The Fully Engaged Customer

The aim of customer engagement is to create the Fully Engaged Customer who is satisfied on two levels:



## Benefits of the Fully Engaged Customer

There are numerous benefits as to why B2B suppliers and service providers want to have fully engaged customers.

- **Improved financial performance**

Studies conducted by Gallup Consulting have shown that organisations with engaged customers experience an average 23% premium in terms of:

- Revenues
- Profitability
- Share of wallet

- **Loyalty**

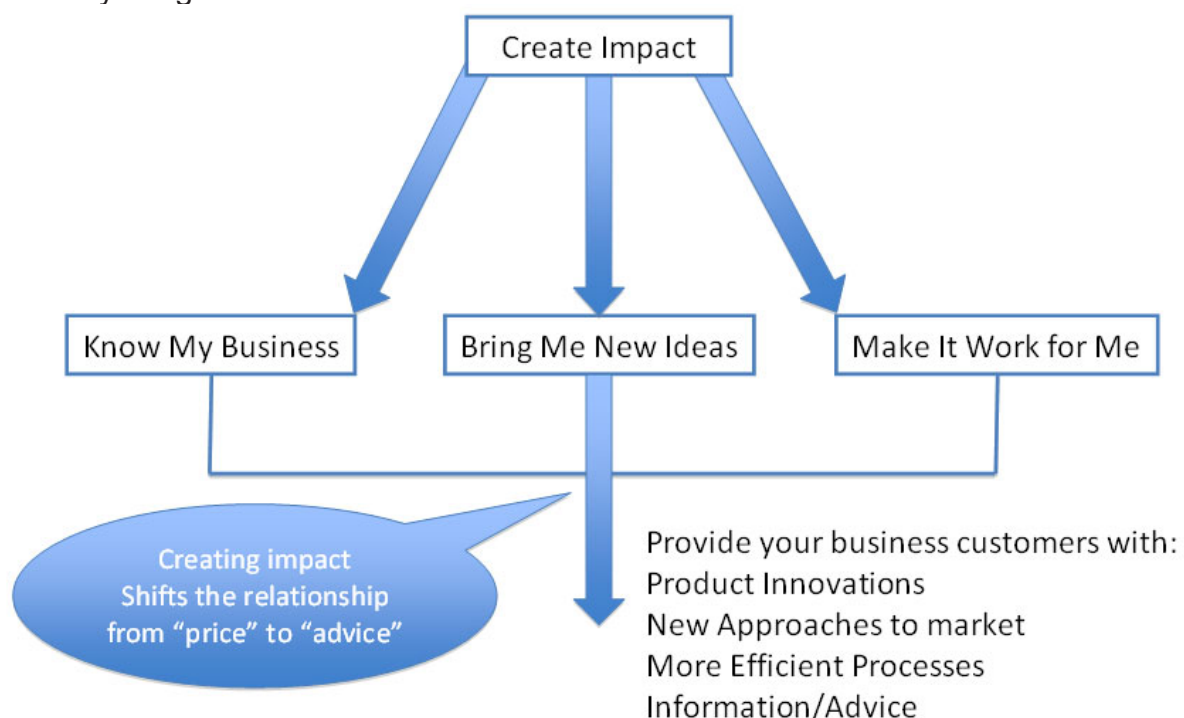
Engaged business customers will purchase more of their required goods and services from you. In some cases, even exclusively.

- **Advocacy**

Referrals and recommendations are an important part of the B2B buying decision process. 60% of B2B buyers will engage with at least one peer before making a buying decision. Therefore, creating engaged customers will help to generate the referrals and recommendations that are critical in acquiring new business.

## Creating the Fully Engaged Customer

Creating Fully Engaged Customers requires suppliers and service providers CREATE IMPACT by doing three key things:





## Pre-Requisites To Becoming Customer-Centric

In order to attract, retain and grow clients and customers, you must **continually** be **understanding** and **responding** to your customers' needs.

Use the following worksheets to help in identifying and ensuring adequate resources for a customer-centric culture:

### CULTURE AND SENIOR LEADERSHIP

To be a customer-centric organisation, you must appoint a Senior Leadership Champion/s that will support and commit to ensuring that all decisions, strategies and operations are heavily driven by customer requirements and preferences.

To achieve this, the senior leadership team must:

- Engage with customers directly so they have first hand knowledge of their issues, priorities and requirements
- Create and foster a culture of cross-functional collaboration and information sharing
- Must make their management teams accountable for working towards creating a customer-centric culture
- Must implement key performance indicators and compensation schemes to working in a customer-centric manner



**IN YOUR CUSTOMER-CENTRIC ORGANISATION:**

**Who could be appointed as your Senior Leadership Champion/s?**

**Do they have adequate time away from existing responsibilities to engage directly with customers and drive culture change? If not, what will have to change?**

**Are there existing channels that can be used for cross-functional collaboration and information sharing? If not, what will need to change to make this happen?**

**How can your management team/s be held accountable? What KPIs will keep them accountable for acting in a customer-centric manner?**

**How can you connect your compensation schemes to these KPIs? Note some preliminary figures here.**

## ANALYTICAL CAPABILITIES

To become customer-centric, your organisation must possess strong capabilities in analysing the following kinds of data:

- Market
- Customer
- Competitor
- Financial

These skills are critical in order for your organisation to be able to:

- Understand market and customer requirements
- Identify opportunities, financial impacts and potential competitive responses
- Determine your organisation's strategic priorities



### IN YOUR CUSTOMER-CENTRIC ORGANISATION:

**Who has the capabilities to analyse market, customer, competitor and financial data?**  
(May be more than one person)

**If you don't have these capabilities at the moment, what will you do to meet this need?**

## STRATEGIC CAPABILITIES

Your organisation must also possess the capabilities to:

- Develop strategies to attract, acquire and grow clients / customers
- Identify, execute and manage projects to address identified customer needs

Effective execution requires:

- A customer-centric culture
- Cross-functional collaboration
- Sharing of information and resources



### IN YOUR CUSTOMER-CENTRIC ORGANISATION:

**Who has the capabilities to develop strategies, identify, execute and manage projects?  
(May be more than one person)**

**If you don't have these capabilities at the moment, what will you do to meet this need?**

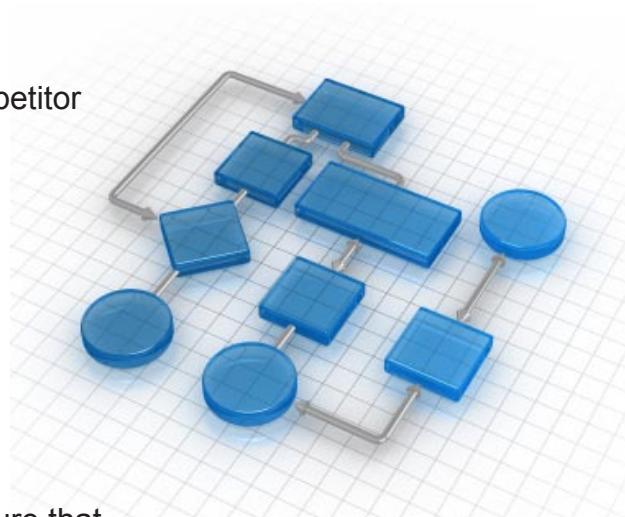
**How will you support effective execution? What resources are already in place? What will need to change to meet this need?**



## DEFINED PROCESSES

Defined processes are needed to:

- Analyse industry, market, customer and competitor data
- Integrate insights into business planning processes
- Create and manage projects / initiatives
- Communicate insights to management and stakeholders



Processes should be developed cross-functionally to ensure that they take into account the considerations and requirements of the business units / teams that will be involved in such activities. It will also help ensure buy-in that the processes are adhered to.

### IN YOUR CUSTOMER-CENTRIC ORGANISATION:

**Do those you've nominated have the capability and authority to define cross-functional processes?**

**If they don't have these capabilities / authority at the moment, what will you do to meet this need?**

## KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

In order to function in a systematic, cross-functional, customer-centric manner, your organisation must have a central repository that can be accessed by all relevant parties - in short, a Knowledge Management System (KMS).

A KMS will enable your organisation to:

- Gather and store customer insights
- Share information across the organisation for use by management, project teams and business units
- Link projects to specific segment or customer needs
- Track projects as well as internal/customer communications



Benefits of using a KMS include:

- Enables management and business units to have access and visibility to the information
- Assists organisations in executing initiatives to deliver the outcomes sought by its customers

### IN YOUR CUSTOMER-CENTRIC ORGANISATION:

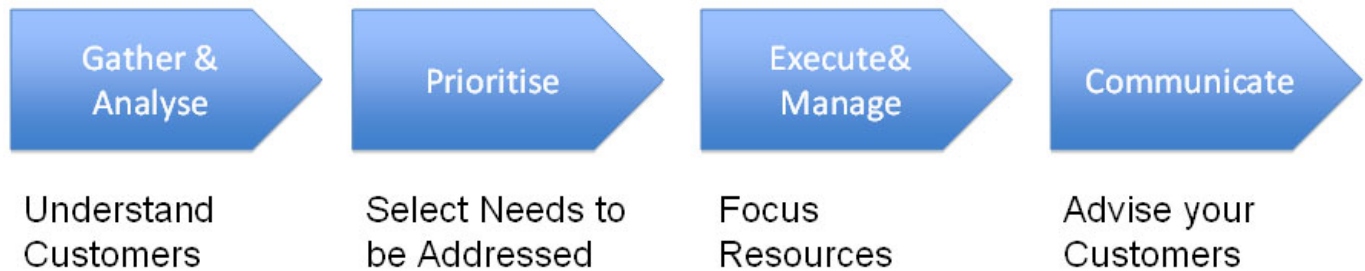
**Do you have an existing KMS? If so, will it meet your requirements? Does it need to be updated, upgraded or replaced?**

**If you don't have a KMS at the moment, what will you do to meet this need?**

## Creating Impact / Delivering Value

Creating impact and value for both your organisation and your business customers requires that your business undertakes a planned, strategic approach.

### The value based action oriented approach



Customer engagement and action **MUST** be an ongoing process!

### Step 1: Gathering business customer feedback

A deep understanding of customer needs is obtained through analysis of diverse sets of data that have the potential to significantly impact business performance.

However it is important to remember that in B2B, customer feedback can be obtained from two levels: Decision-Maker and End Users.

Depending on the size and structure of the organisation, an individual may occupy more than just one of these roles.

The following chart outlines some types of customer feedback mechanisms that can be used at each level of the organisation:

AUDIENCE	TYPE OF FEEDBACK	MECHANISMS
<b>Decision-Makers</b>	Executive-level insight on key company objectives, priorities, requirements, industry direction	Strategic customer discussions Executive customer advisory panels Executive forums
<b>End Users</b>	Product or service improvements	Strategic customer discussions Surveys Focus groups User groups Social media networks

It is critical that you obtain customer feedback from the executive level to ensure that your organisation has an understanding of the implications of industry shifts, globalisation, disruptive technologies and competitive landscape.

## Step 2: Analyse business customer needs

To understand your business customers needs, you must analyse:

### What customers say

- Customer feedback on requirements, preferences, desired improvements obtained from surveys, strategic customer discussions (eg. Interviews, customer visits, customer advisory panels)
- 3rd party research / industry reports

### What customers actually do

- Sales data
- Operations data (eg. Orders, inquiries, service calls, complaints)
- Campaign data (Responses, purchases, click-throughs)
- Online behaviour (Participation, downloads, click-throughs)



### Business demographic information

- Location, size, products / services offered, key markets, strategic objectives / priorities
- Segment profiles

### External environment data

- Information on economic, industry or regulatory trends
- Technology developments
- Competitor data

### TIPS ON CONDUCTING ANALYSIS

- What is the business objective?
- What insights are required to meet the business objective?
- What questions must be answered to meet the business objective?
- What data is required? How can this data be obtained?



### **Step 3: Prioritise**

Once you have gained an understanding of your business customer / client needs, the management team must decide as to which customer needs will be addressed.

#### **Presenting analysis to the Senior Management Team**

Convey the findings to the senior management team in a compelling manner, not simply a “data dump” but rather provides them with:

- Recommendations as to possible courses of action
- Implications on business impact

When presenting data, consider using:

- Simulations, scenarios, pilot projects / trials, management briefings
- Pictures and visuals where possible to convey complex ideas
- The “Rule of 3”:
  - Storytelling
  - Simplicity
  - Appealing to emotion and senses

Set criteria should be used to determine which customer needs to be actioned. Both the criteria and the customer needs should have cross-functional agreement.



### PRIORITISATION CRITERIA

Use the following criteria as a starting point for prioritising which customer needs will be addressed in your customer-centric organisation:

<b>Proposed customer engagement initiative:</b>	
<b>Is the initiative in alignment with the business' strategic intent?</b>	
<b>What, if any, risks are involved?</b>	
<b>What are the financial impacts? (Investment required, revenue generation)</b>	
<b>What will be the impact on the company image and reputation?</b>	
<b>How many and what type of customers will be impacted (and their strategic importance)?</b>	
<b>What will be the impact on the customer relationship? The likely customer response?</b>	

#### Step 4: Execute and manage

STEPS TO EXECUTION		YOUR NOTES
<b>Define Projects</b>	Determine scope of work to be undertaken to meet customer requirements	
	Assign accountability to a member of the senior management team for execution and completion	
<b>Mobilise Resources</b>	Identify and obtain resources (eg. Staff, data, equipment)	
	Assign project roles and responsibilities	
<b>Commence Work</b>	Develop project plan	
	Obtain project plan sign off	
<b>Manage Project</b>	Manage initiatives to defined project plan	
	Provide regular updates to senior management on progress, issues and exceptions	
	Update customers on key developments	

## Step 5: Customer communication

While it is important that you obtain customer feedback regarding their requirements, preferences and priorities, it is also **crucial** that you convey back to your customers the following:

- What insights were gained from the strategic discussions
- How insights will be used
- What the organisation WILL DO (in responding to customer needs)
- What the organisation WILL NOT DO (in responding to customer needs)

A variety of methods can be used for the customer communications:

- Formal correspondence
- Newsletters / e-Newsletters
- Client / customer meetings
- Online (eg. via website, blogs)
- Face-to-face (eg. Customer meetings, executive briefings)



The choice of communication medium should be based on the intended recipients (eg. Decision-Makers or End Users) and the mechanism that is most appropriate and relevant for them:

Communication Medium	Decision-Makers	End Users



## Developing A Customer Insights Program

### Additional sources of B2B customer insights

In addition to the customer feedback mechanisms already mentioned, other sources of insight of your business customers requirements, preferences and priorities include:

- Customer advisory councils
- Executive summits
- Segmentation studies
- Focus groups
- Relationship surveys
- Operational surveys
- Call / contact centre feedback



### SETTING UP A CUSTOMER INSIGHTS PROGRAM

Determine what your organisation's key strategic priorities and objectives are:

What insights are required?	
How / where can these insights be obtained?	

Identify the following in your customer base:		
Key Customers	Strategic Customers	At-Risk Customers
Those that account for a large % of your revenues	Those “high growth / high potential” customers that you seek to obtain a greater share of their business	Those customers who are likely to switch to another provider

## START WITH WHAT YOU KNOW: CUSTOMER INSIGHTS AUDIT

Decide on a representative scope (which customers, how many). Gather all existing sources of customer research / insights. Analysing this data, answer the following:

What are your customers' requirements and value drivers? (Note: You need to understand those of Decision-Makers - not just End Users)	
What are your customers' objectives and priorities?	
What are your customers' key issues?	
What are your customers' buying criteria?	
Are there any gaps in your understanding of specific customers or customer types?	
How will these gaps be filled?	

**DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING A CUSTOMER INSIGHTS PROGRAM**

<b>What types of customer feedback mechanisms will be used?</b>	
<b>How frequently will you obtain customer feedback?</b>	
<b>Who are the recipients and users of customer insights?</b>	
<b>Who will have responsibility for keeping your Customer Insights KMS up-to-date?</b>	

Below is an in-depth look into one of the available mechanisms, the “Strategic Customer Discussion”.

## STRATEGIC CUSTOMER DISCUSSIONS

**Definition:** *In depth discussions that B2B suppliers and service providers have with their customers*

Strategic customer discussions provide a deep understanding of customers/clients' requirements and preferences. They also generate more detailed insights than can be obtained by other methods, such as surveys.

Strategic customer discussions enable organisations to:

- Tailor current products and service offerings
- Develop new or improved products and service offerings
- Gain new customers



There are numerous variations of such discussions including:

- In-depth interview
- Customer workshop
- Customer visit

### Characteristics of strategic customer discussions

Effective strategic customer discussions include the following:

- Conducted by the supplier firm itself
- At a minimum, conducted with all key strategic customers at least annually
- Ideally you want a representation from across the customer base. In other words, key accounts/customer groups, segments
- Cross-functional and Decision-Maker level participation by both supplier and customer
- Typical business units involved include Products, Key Practice or Industry Groups, Marketing, Service and Operations
- Sales team participation is critical as they have the relationship with the customer and are effective in engaging the customer in discussion and providing follow-ups
- Uses a discussion guide as a starting point

## Benefits of strategic customer discussions

- Ensures that latent or un-articulated needs are captured. Customers are better at stating what they are trying to achieve
- Ensures insights gathered are relevant among all customers
- Helps organizations move from a transaction based relationship to a deep, longer term relationship due to increased understanding of customer's needs and perceptions of value

## VALUE BASED DISCUSSIONS - FROM THE CUSTOMERS' PERSPECTIVE

**For your strategic customer discussion to be successful, there must be value in the discussion from the customers' perspective. Ensure that your discussion is focussed on obtaining an understanding of:**

- Customer's key issues, priorities and value drivers
- Activities/tasks customer seeks to complete
- Outcomes to be achieved
- Quantified Value impact (eg. on generating revenues, reducing costs)

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR STRATEGIC CUSTOMER DISCUSSIONS

**The following questions that can be used as a discussion guide to initiate strategic conversations with business customers.**

Note: These questions merely serve as a starting point. Issues need to be probed and discussed as they arise.

- What are the critical issues facing decision-makers as they evaluate our product or service?
- What do you expect from us in a deeper, competitively- differentiating relationship?
- What are the areas you value about our company and where would you like to see us invest / focus more in the future?
- What value attributes really set us apart from the competition?
- What makes one company's offering better or worse than another? Why?
- What characteristics describe the ideal product or service offering?



**A “STRATEGIC CUSTOMER DISCUSSION” PROGRAM**

<p><b>Which customers will you choose to have discussions with?</b> (Note: Remember the 3 customer types)</p>	
<p><b>Who will the participants of the discussion be? Who needs to be involved?</b> Salesperson? Senior Leadership Champ? Account Executive?</p>	
<p><b>What is your basic plan of how the discussion will progress?</b> What will you address first? What can be left off if you run short of time? What are the key priorities?</p>	
<p><b>What additional questions, apart from the sample questions above, will you ask?</b></p>	
<p><b>What will your pre and post discussion activities be?</b> What will be the customers' incentive to participate? Will you send a hand-written thank-you note? Email? Gift?</p>	

## CUSTOMER INSIGHTS CHECKLISTS

Use the following checklists to determine what sources of customer feedback you are using and from which level are you gaining this feedback from your customers.

Consider:

- Are you getting feedback from both Decision-Makers and End User levels?
- What mechanisms are you using to get strategic insights from Decision-Makers?
- Do these mechanism enable your company to obtain detailed insights at the executive/strategic level?

Source	Decision-Makers	End Users
In-Depth Interviews		
Customer Advisory Panels		
Customer Visits/Workshops		
Surveys		
Focus Groups		
Market Research Studies		
Social Media		

Use this checklist to determine what kinds of customer feedback tools you are using for your different types of customers. Consider:

- What kind of approaches you are using with the different customer types?
- Are you getting the strategic level insights your company needs?

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK MECHANISM	Surveys												
	Focus Groups												
	Customer Advisory Panels												
	Executive Forums												
	Customer Visit / Workshops												
	In-depth Interviews												
CUSTOMER TYPE	"At-Risk" Customer												
	"Strategic" Customer												
	"Key" Customer												
	Customer Name												



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