

Steps to Organizing a Customer Listening Session

Be explicit about the corporate goals the listening session is meant to support, e.g., growth, margin, line expansion, service offerings, locations, market positioning, etc.

Select a representative cross-section of customers: new and established, large and small, active and former, happy and disappointed.

Plan to have 6-12 participants. Invite two to three times as many customers as you want to attend.

Use an independent, experienced facilitator.

Choose a location and schedule convenient for your customers. A meal and a tangible gift are important expressions of appreciation.

Send invitations at least two weeks prior to the group. Send via postal *and* email; follow-up with telephone calls.

Have a script and timeline for the event.

Allow plenty of opportunity for the participants to talk with each other. They will create memorable value by exchanging tips and ideas. They will also speak freely when talking to each other, although you are listening.

Prepare and test questions in advance. Questions should be open-ended, intended to promote frank discussion. A focus group is not a survey.

Welcome each participant personally and thank each customer for taking the time.

Begin and end on time.

Say good bye and thank each person.

Summarize the results of the session as quickly as possible, while the experience is fresh.

Send a follow-up “Thank You” note.

Let participants know of any changes made at your company as a result of the session.