

Focus Groups – let your customers and clients tell you what they want!



What is a Focus Group?

Very simply, at a Focus Group, you or (ideally!!) an independent person meet with 6 to 15 of your clients and talk...about your business. About the service they've received. About what they like and what they're not so happy with. About what your business could do to really improve. And about what the ideal business of your type would do for them.

A Focus Group gives your clients a chance to tell you 'what's what' in an incredibly constructive environment. An environment, where, if you do it right, they will tell you lots and lots of the 'little things' you could do to make your business really stand out from your competitors.

And all you have to do? **Listen.**

It takes just one client to mention something that gives you a 'blinding flash' of the obvious. It can really make a difference to your business.

Your customers know what they want and what you could do to really offer them the best service possible...so why not hear it from the horse's mouth?

Better yet, your customers, are what you want more of, aren't they? So why not ask them what's really important to them? Why not ask them what they think about the way you do business, what you do, and then address the issues they suggest so that your business becomes the best in its field? The best in the field based not on what we think is important, but on what really matters—what the customers (the ones we want more of) really want!

Will I hear what they have to say?

Some business owners fear this idea simply because most don't know what their clients will say. Most business owners couldn't say, for a fact, whether their clients were really happy. And what if they say something bad?!

The fact is, if someone has something negative to say, probably dozens of others feel the same way. These people won't tell you they're not happy. They'll just move on to your competitors. Given

that, it's much better to bite the bullet, find out what they have to say, good and bad—and then do something about it.

This is where an independent facilitator can be very useful. Because they're not emotionally invested in the information, they can listen and then dig down to what the customer's really trying to say.

Usually, rather than negatives, your customers will simply use the Focus Group to give you some great ideas.

How do I get people to come?

For something like this, you may like to consider a written invitation, followed up with a personal telephone call.

The fact is, your clients will want to come, but they'll need to feel sure that it's going to be valuable and their time will be appreciated. For that to happen, they have to believe that you really are going to listen to them *and do something about it.*

Who should I invite?

It's usually best to invite a cross-section of your *target* customers who are all relatively happy and the type you want more of.

Some may have been clients for years, some may be new clients, some large clients, others small, and so on. Be sure to mix the group. That way, you'll get a cross-section of comments.

How many people should come and how long should it run?

You should aim for 6 to 15 people at the meeting. It's critically important that you keep the numbers small enough to ensure that the group is manageable. It's also important that each person has the chance to participate.

And the meeting should run about 2 to 3 hours.

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What kind of venue do I need?

You need to choose a venue where your clients will feel comfortable. It may be your premises (if you have the room), a hotel meeting room, or a small function room.

Use a boardroom table or a table set-up that is open, one where people can communicate easily.

Place jugs of water and bowls of lollies or something fun on the tables. You'll need a pen and name tag for each client. The names on the name tags need to be in a large font so they can be seen clearly. Again, attention to detail like this lets the clients know you're serious about listening.

How do I make sure everybody has a fair say?

Group dynamics sometimes means that 1 or 2 people will try to dominate the conversation. This can be very frustrating for those who sometimes find it difficult to talk in a group environment.

Having the key questions you're going to ask printed on single sheets of paper (creating an answer booklet) is a good way to capture everyone's opinions. It also allows people to express some opinions that, for whatever reason, they just wouldn't want to say in a group.

It's important to manage the group and make sure the conversation runs smoothly. This will mean dealing with different elements as they arise.

How do I get my clients to be honest, to tell me what they think and how they feel?

You have 2 options:

Option 1: Do the Focus Group yourself.

Option 2: Have an independent person facilitate the meeting for you.

Option two is vastly more effective. Yes, it will often mean paying someone to do this for you, but given the time and investment you're making in hosting the Focus Group, the cost of an

independent facilitator should be negligible compared to the results.

Ideally you should be there to welcome and say goodbye to your clients, but the actual Focus Group should be run by an independent facilitator. If the people you invite like you (which of course they do) then they will find it almost impossible to tell you anything negative about their experience. They'll even find it awkward to tell you how you could improve if it's to your face. This is nice of course, but a big fat waste of time and energy.

You see, it's important that what's really going on for the customers does come out at the meeting. You don't want a lot of "you're OK" or "I'm pretty happy" statements. You don't want to know so much what your business is doing right as what you could be doing better from your clients' points of view.

In that way, it's really better if you're not actually there!

What follow-up do I need to do after a Focus Group?

A thank you letter is a great way to follow up. Perhaps you can send a small gift or voucher to do business with you again. People always appreciate being thanked and they'll be even more impressed.

More importantly, you need to follow up with action. Immediately implementing some of their simple, workable suggestions is a great way to show your clients that you're committed to change for the better.

What will happen when I hold a Focus Group?

- Your customers will feel that you're paying them special attention, that you care. This makes them like dealing with you, which means they'll keep on dealing with you!
- Your customers' loyalty to the business will increase dramatically. This happens even for those people who were invited to the event and couldn't attend! Why? Because customers

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are always very impressed that you took the time to let them know you cared about their opinion. In fact, they feel involved and so want to continue working with the business. Many businesses actually receive thank you notes from the participants!

- Your customers will know you want to improve your business. That makes them want to support you even more.
- You'll find out what your customers really think—good, bad, or indifferent!
- You'll find out what's really important, even critical, to your customers...and it usually isn't what you thought!
- You'll be given specific, first-hand ideas and information that you and your team will be able to implement to improve your business.
- You'll usually hear about particular examples of the 'little things' that have gone right or wrong in your customers' dealings with you.

These 'little things' can be improved easily and quickly...and make a huge difference.

You'll stand out from your competitors. Your customers and potential customers will notice a clear difference between you and your competitors.

Given all of these facts, then, there's really no reason *not* to host a Focus Group. Hopefully this information will help get you started. And of course if you need more information or a really terrific independent facilitator, just ask us!!

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WINNER Grosvenor Securities Adviser of the Year;
WINNER Count Financial Planning Practice of the Year;
7th Place IFA National Best Practice (of more than 300 firms).