

Congratulations. You've made it to the final module. We've learned about how to create personas, how to identify user needs and plan a product, how to get buy in for those products and how to create a product roadmap.

Now, we're going to talk a bit on how to deliver the right product and iterate on it over time.

The best way to make sure that your product resonates with your audience is through testing.

Trying to build your product without audience research is like trying to walk down a tunnel without a flashlight. You could do it, but it won't be pleasant and there will likely be lots of backtracking.

I want to highlight four of the most common ways from Montague Research to conduct audience research for your organization and some of the benefits and considerations of each.

These four research methods include Secondary Research, Surveys, Interviews and focus groups.

Let's talk first about secondary research. This is a great first step when working on audience research. This method is simply examining existing data from third parties to understand your audience. This could include white papers, academic reports, information disclosed in social media profiles, or even census data. The data can be quantitative like income level, gender, zip code, or qualitative like interests, hobbies, behaviors.

While secondary research can be valuable on its own, it is most fruitful, however, when used to inform and design future primary research, which goes directly to the source to gather new data, such as surveying your own customers.

By first getting a baseline understanding of your audience, you can garner the most actionable insights in subsequent research efforts.

The biggest advantage of this research is that it is relatively affordable and easy to gather. However, with an endless supply of information on the internet, much of it will inevitably be inaccurate. Be sure to investigate your sources carefully.

Next is surveying. Surveying is the most well-known and widely used method in primary research. Surveys come in various forms – written, online, over the phone, in person – and involve a series of questions to understand what people think or feel about a given topic.

The common goal of all surveys is to measure something specific. You could ask your users their thoughts on your app from a scale of one to five. Or even what they think of your reporting and storytelling or even a review of your newspaper delivery service.

Surveys are more often quantitative than qualitative, but can also be used to solicit valuable, open-ended feedback.

The biggest advantage here is that surveys deliver direct audience feedback. Often anonymous, they give your readers a chance to speak honestly, in their own words, and without judgment. Surveys are also scalable. You can send them via email or even social media and you can reach a wide number of your audience without much additional effort.

The biggest consideration here are the questions that you ask and how you ask them. This can greatly affect the validity of survey results. Make sure you aren't asking biased or leading questions in order to remain objective. In addition, be conscious of sample size and diversity. If you're trying to understand how a city of one million people feels about your coverage, a sample size of 100 citizens from one zip code won't yield the most accurate result.

The next type is interviews. Interviews explore an issue in depth through a conversation between moderator and participant. The format of interviews should follow their function. They can be structured around a series of specific questions or be free flowing. The moderator can guide the interview in whatever way is necessary to gain a full understanding of a readers' expectations, emotions or experiences.

Interviews can be used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, but the information sought is often specific in nature. Researchers might ask about a single topic in different ways to gain insight into customer problems, psychological motivations and underlying perceptions.

The advantage of this method is that interviews enable researchers to guide the data collection process. If phrasing a question one way doesn't elicit the sought-after response, you can try asking it again in a different way. Your interview subjects also have the opportunity to offer clarity and dig deeper.

However, interviewers should be sure not to ask leading questions or press too hard on a topic. In addition, arranging and conducting interviews also require a significant investment of time and money.

Lastly is focus groups. These are like interviews but with more participants. Focus groups are small group conversations led by a moderator. They aim to gather qualitative information on user thoughts.

The advantage here is that focus groups are more efficient and cost-effective than interviews and offer direct feedback.

However, to make the most of focus groups, participants need to be familiar with the topic of conversation. Asking what someone likes about your newsletter won't yield many insights if they haven't read it. In addition, self-consciousness, group influence and personality dominance can also adversely affect the outcomes of focus groups.

Audience testing is vital to the success of your products because it allows you to see what performs best with your target audience.

These types of user research are great to perform once you create your MVP, or minimum viable product.

So what is an MVP? It's a culmination of all of the things we've discussed in previous modules. It's the final creation of your product in its smallest, least featureful way that has just the basics.

Businessman Eric Ries defines the MVP as the version of a new product that allows a team to collect the maximum amount of validated learning about customers with the least effort.

Once you have an MVP, you can begin to test, design and ultimately deliver the final product.

Remember, the idea of product thinking and product management is that you will continue to build out features for the products after continuous feedback with stakeholders and users along with data collected on the way.

The MVP is a great way to figure out what works, and what doesn't. And many times, things don't work. And that's okay. Like I mentioned about the product roadmap, you can always tweak or pivot away from a feature. Doing this during the MVP stage is much better than when your project is fully launched because you are able to save time and resources.

As a review, it's important to remember that you'll need to determine the scope of your MVP. Refer back to the product vision board from the previous chapter for the things you want in your MVP and any key performance indicators, or KPIs that get you close to those goals.

Remember to also track feedback and data from your MVP to help determine tweaks you need as you get closer to a full launch of your product. Remember, that this feedback loop, along with keeping in contact with your stakeholders is vital for the success of your product. Iterating on your product doesn't stop after you reach your final complete product phase.

You should always be measuring and iterating and adapting to meet both the needs of your organization and your users. Remember, as product thinkers, we are always measuring and analyzing and looking for the next feature to fill the needs of our audience.