Note on the Voice of the Customer

John R. Hauser

We address marketing through the 4Ps and the 5Cs. The 4Ps tell us that, to achieve our marketing goals, we must coordinate the tactics of product, promotion, price, and place. How we select each of the 4Ps depends upon data. In particular, we must understand the 5Cs of company skills, customers, competition, collaborators and context.

In this note I address how we get information about customers, who they are and what they want. This information is critically important to design products that customers want to buy, to design advertising and other promotion that communicate those aspects of products and services that are important to customers, and to design the right pricing strategy so that customers feel they are getting value for the price paid. Although we call the methods "voice of the customer (VOC)," they have also been used to understand the wants and needs of an organization (voice of the employee) and the wants and needs of both the channel of distribution and the upstream

supply chain (voice of the collaborators).

The VOC is a hierarchical set of "customer needs" where each need (or set of needs) has assigned to it a priority which indicates its importance to the customer. Our first use of the VOC in 15.810 was in positioning. By understanding the dimensions of competition, we were able to identify how to differentiate our brands to achieve "local monopolies." We saw another use of the VOC in the House of Quality, where product characteristics were designed to satisfy customer needs. We will see the VOC again in advertising, e.g., the Keller, Sternthal, and Tybout reading, where the communication strategy is set to communicate both points of difference and points of parity. The VOC helps us understand the brand associations that are critical to good advertising copy.

This note is a brief summary of the material contained in a *Marketing Science* article published by Abbie Griffin and John Hauser.[1] Abbie is a former 15.810 TA who is now a professor at the University of Illinois and editor of the *Journal of Product Innovation Management*. We begin with a description of the goal – a definition of the voice of the customer.

The Voice of the Customer

There are four aspects of the VOC – customer needs, a hierarchy, priorities, and segmentation.

Customer needs

A customer need is a description, in the customer's own words, of the benefit to be fulfilled by the product or service. For example, when describing lines on a computer monitor a customer might want them "to look like straight lines with no stair-step effect." Note that the customer need is not a solution, say a particular type of monitor (XGA, Megapixel, flat screen, flat panel, etc.), nor a physical measurement (number of noticeable breaks in the line), but rather a detailed description of how the customer wants images to appear on the monitor. The distinction has proven to be

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[1] Griffin, Abbie and John R. Hauser (1993), "The Voice of the Customer," *Marketing Science*, 12, 1, (Winter), 1-27. This article won both the Frank M. Bass Award for the best dissertation and the John D. C. Little Award for Best Article in Marketing Sciences Literature.

one of the keys to the success of marketing tactics and is related to the "lens" model which states that customers see the world through the lens of their perceptions (their needs).

For example, if a product-development team focuses too early on solutions, they might miss creative opportunities. For example, a computer-monitor team might be tempted to focus on the size of the monitor or the shape. However, readability might also depend on the ambient room light and reflections, the colors that the software designer chooses, the ratio of the height of small letters to that of capital letters, and even the style of the typeface (serif or sans-serif, proportional or fixed, etc.). All of these design attributes interact with the size and shape of a monitor to affect the customer need of "easy to read text." Some may be less costly and more effective, some may be synergistic with changing the monitor's size and shape, but all should be considered before a final design is chosen for the monitor.

Discussions with customers usually identify 100-200 phrases that might be considered an articulation of customer needs. Such phrases might include basic needs (what a customer assumes a monitor will do), articulated needs (what a customer will tell you that he, she, or they want a monitor to do), and exciting needs (those needs which, if they are fulfilled, would delight and surprise the customer). It is extremely important that these customer needs be stated in the customers' own words.

Hierarchical structure

The average marketing manager cannot work directly with 100-200 customer needs. He or she needs a simpler structure that focuses both strategy and tactics. For example, the perceptual maps that we have already seen tend to have a relative few dimensions. Most of our examples included two dimensions, but perceptual maps can have as many as ten primary dimensions. The VOC structures customer needs into a hierarchy of primary, secondary, and tertiary needs. Primary needs, also known as strategic needs, are the two-to-ten top-level needs that are used by the team to set the strategic direction for marketing. Primary needs that are plotted on the perceptual map and used in strategic differentiation.

Each primary need is elaborated into three-to-ten secondary needs. (Secon-

dary needs are also known as tactical needs.) Secondary needs indicate more specifi-
cally what the marketing manager must do to satisfy the corresponding primary (stra-
tegic) need. For example, if clarity of a monitor is the primary need, then the secon-
dary needs tell the team how the customer judges clarity, say by the crispness of the
lines, the ability to distinguish detail on all parts of the screen, the ability to read
graphically generated text, and the ability of the user to see what he (she) will get on
hard copy. These tactical needs help the marketing team focus its efforts on those
more-detailed benefits that fulfill the strategic direction implied by the primary need.

The tertiary needs, also known as operational needs, provide detail so that en-
gineering, R&D, and, perhaps, the advertising agency, can develop detailed product
characteristics or advertising copy that satisfy the primary and secondary needs. For
example, a customer may judge the crispness of a line (a secondary need) by the fol-
lowing tertiary needs: the lack of a stair-step effect, the ability to distinguish lines
from background images and text, and the ability to distinguish among individual
lines in a complex drawing, etc.

Priorities

Some customer needs have higher priorities for customers than do other needs.
 The marketing manager uses these priorities to make decisions which balance the
cost of fulfilling a customer need with the desirability (to the customer) of fulfilling
that need. For example, the strategic decision on whether to provide or communicate
improved clarity (of a monitor) depends upon the cost and feasibility of fulfilling clar-
ity and the priority to the customer of clarity relative to the customer's other needs.
For the VOC, these priorities apply to perceived customer needs rather than product
features or engineering solutions. Although conjoint analysis methods are sometimes
used, this note will review the direct measures that are more common with respect to
perceived needs.

Customer Perceptions of Performance

Customer perceptions are a formal market-research measurement of how cus-
tomers perceive products that now compete in the market being studied. If no product
yet exists, the perceptions indicate how customers now fulfill those needs. (For ex-

ample, existing patterns of medical care serve as generic competition for health maintenance organization. Automobile and bus transportation serve as generic competition for Southwest Airlines.) Knowledge of which products fulfill which needs best, how well those needs are fulfilled, and whether there are any gaps between the best product and "our" existing product provide further input into marketing decisions.

Segmentation

Not all customers have the same needs. If there is significant variation in customer needs, in their hierarchies, or in their priorities, it is important to obtain a VOC for each segment. In practical terms, the basic descriptions of the customer needs (the phrases) are often relevant for every segment, as is the hierarchy. Segmentation, known as benefit segmentation, is often done by identifying clusters of priorities. For example, in the Tylenol case discussed in the note on defensive marketing strategy, there was a segment of the market that cared about gentleness and a segment of the market that cared about effectiveness. These segments may or may not line up with demographic variables, but they can be identified directly if we measure priorities for each and every customer (respondent) in a market research study.

Identifying Customer Needs

Identifying customer needs is primarily a qualitative research task. In a typical study between 10 and 30 customers are interviewed for approximately one-hour in a one-on-one setting. For example, a customer might be asked to picture him- or herself viewing work on a computer. As the customer describes his or her experience, the interviewer keeps probing, searching for better and more complete descriptions of viewing needs. In the interview the customer might be asked to voice needs relative to many real and hypothetical experiences. The interview ends when the interviewer feels that no new needs can be elicited from that customer. Interviewers might probe for higher-level (more strategic) needs or for detailed elaborations as in the laddering and means-ends techniques. Other potential techniques include benefit chains and repertory grids. While many applications use one-on-one interviews, each of these techniques can be used with focus groups and with mini-groups of two-to-three customers.

Focus Groups vs. One-on-One Interviews.

Many market research firms advocate group interviews based on the hypothesis that group synergies produce more and varied customer needs as each customer builds upon the ideas of the others. A concern about focus groups is that "air-time" is shared among the group members. If there are eight people in a two-hour group then each person talks, on average, for about 15 minutes.

An interesting comparison of focus groups vs. one-on-one interviews was done by two Sloan students (Silver and Thompson 1991). The product category was a complex piece of office equipment. The marketing team obtained customer needs from eight two-hour focus groups and nine one-hour interviews. (The data were collected by an experienced, professional market research firm.) The entire set of data was analyzed by six professionals to produce a combined set of 230 phrases that might be considered customer needs. The students reanalyzed the data to determine, for each customer need and for each group or individual, if that group or individual voiced that need.

Figure 1 plots the data. On average, a single one-on-one interview identified 33% of the 230 needs. Two one-on-one interviews identified 51% of the customer needs. The average is taken over all combinations of two interviews.
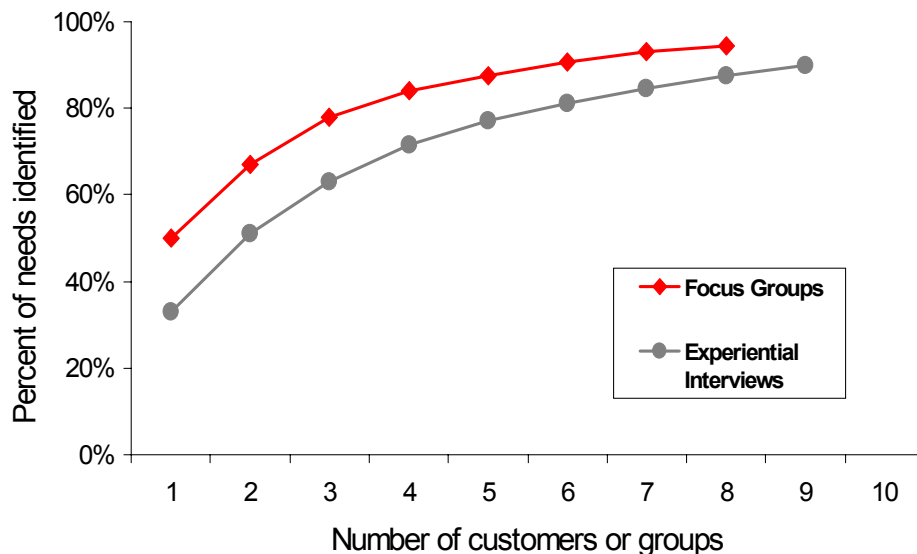
Figure 1. Comparison of Focus Groups and One-on-One Interviews

The data in Figure 1 suggest that while a single two-hour focus group identifies more needs than a one-hour one-on-one interview, it appears that two one-on-one interviews are about as effective as one focus group (51% vs. 50%) and that four interviews are about as effective as two focus groups (72% vs. 67%). As one manager said when he examined the data, an hour of interviewing is an hour of interviewing independently of whether it comes from a one-on-one interview or a focus group. If it is less expensive to interview two consumers for an hour each than to interview six-to-eight customers in a central facility for two hours, then Figure 1 suggests that one-on-one interviews are more cost-efficient. At minimum, Figure 1 suggests that group synergies do not seem to be present in this data.

How many customers?

We would like to know how many customers need be interviewed to identify most of the customer needs. Besides intellectual curiosity, there are many reasons to seek an answer to this question. First there is the monetary cost. While the field costs per interview are moderate, analysis costs are quite high. It is typical for some managers to observe each interview and for four or more team members to read each transcript. One major US firm estimates that the typical out-of-pocket costs for 30 interviews are only $10-20,000 but that the implicit team costs include over 250 person-hours to observe the interviews, read the transcripts, and summarize the customer needs. Even based on a low estimate of $100 per person-hour (fully-loaded) for professional personnel, this means that the total costs per interview are in the range of $1-2,000. If you multiply this by 5-10 segments (typical in a complex product category) and 5-10 major product lines within a firm, then the cost savings of setting a policy of 20 customers per segment rather than 30 customers per segment can be substantial. Firms seek to balance the cost of additional interviews with the benefits of identifying a more complete set of needs.

Abbie Griffin, as part of her Ph.D. thesis, interviewed 30 potential customers of portable food-carrying and storing devices (coolers, picnic baskets, knapsacks, bike bags, etc.). The interviews were transcribed and each interview was read by seven

analysts. The needs were merged across analysts and customers and redundancy was eliminated to obtain a core list of 220 needs. She recorded which customers and which analysts identified each need. Naturally, some needs were mentioned by more than one customer. For example, 38 needs were identified by one customer out of thirty, 43 needs were identified by two customers out of thirty, 29 needs by three customers out of thirty, etc. One need was identified by 24 of the thirty customers.

To calculate how many needs we would have expected to obtain from interviewing fewer customers, she considered all possible orderings of the thirty customers and determined the average percent of non-redundant needs she would have obtained from n customers for $n = 1$ to 30. (Note that we are temporarily defining 100% as that obtained from 30 customers. We address missing needs below.) Because the number of possible orderings, 30!, is a very large number, she randomly sampled 70,000 orderings. The results, plotted in Figure 2 as "observed," show that interviewing 20 customers identifies over 90% of the needs provided by 30 customers.
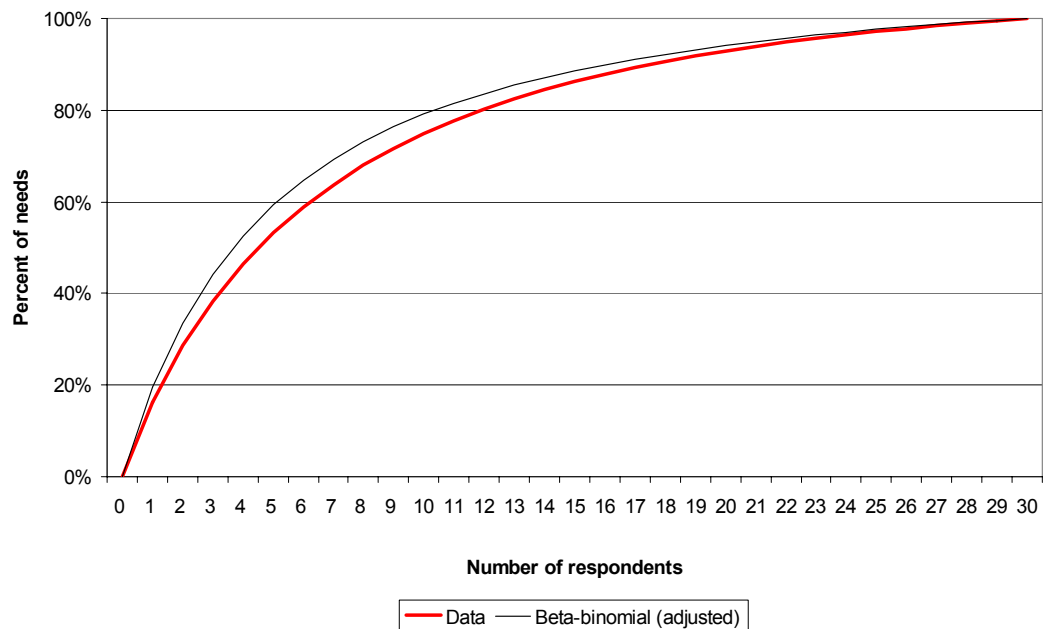
Figure 2. Percent of Total Needs Identified that Were Identified by *n* Customers

To generalize to more than thirty customers we need a model. The model is used widely in marketing. It is called the "beta-binomial model" and is used primarily

to summarize probabilistic consumer behavior. For example, in triangle taste tests the beta-binomial model is used to compare actual data to the data that would have been obtained had respondents simply guessed.[2] Basically, we use the beta-binomial model to estimate how many needs would have been obtained had we interviewed infinitely many respondents. As Figure 2 indicates, the beta-binomial model, adjusted so that 30 respondents imply 100%, fits the actual data quite well. Figure 3 plots the beta-binomial model for the data suggesting that thirty consumers were sufficient to identify over 90% of the customer needs.

Figures 2 and 3 were based on early VOC applications. Subsequent applications developed more efficient interviewing methods and the interviewers became better are drawing out customer needs. With today's interviewing methods, twenty respondents should be sufficient in most product categories. Indeed, we have see some durable product categories where ten respondents articulated almost 98% of the customer needs. It is amazing how much we can learn from in-depth interviews with so few customers.

Naturally, these results apply to each segment in the market. If the segments are quite different, we may need 10-20 interviews per segment.

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[2] In a triangle taste test, respondents are given three samples and asked to identify which of the two samples are the same. Only those respondents who can identify a difference are asked for their preferences. Such taste tests are well-known because of the Pepsi-vs.-Coke cola wars.
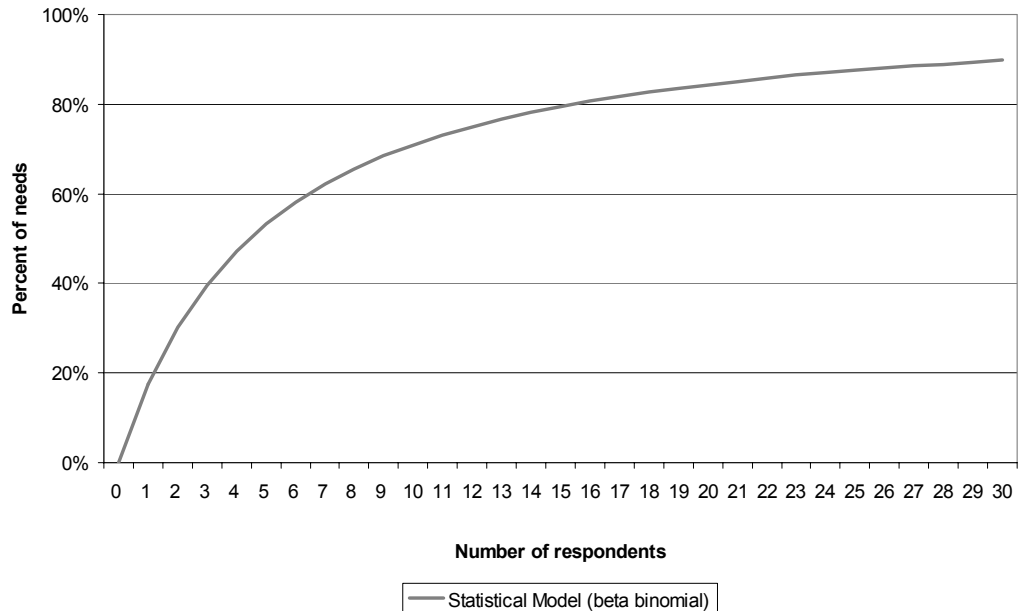
Figure 3. Predictions from Statistical Analysis

How many analysts?

There is a beta-binomial curve for analysts just as there is for respondents. On average, a given analyst cannot identify all of the customer needs that are contained in a set of transcripts. It appears to be a truism that we all see the world (and respondent transcripts) through different perspectives. Thus, today, it is important that more than one analyst (usually at least three analysts) read and summarize the customer needs. It is just too easy for a single reader to miss some critical points.

Structuring Customer Needs

The key decision in terms of developing a hierarchy of customer needs seems to be whether the hierarchy can be developed entirely by the marketing team or whether the customers themselves need to participate in providing data with which to infer the customer-need hierarchy. We demonstrate the two alternative approaches by discussing group-consensus processes and customer-sort processes.

Group Consensus Process

The group consensus process uses the marketing team to impose structure on the customer needs. The advantage of a consensus process is that it assures group

buy-in to the structure; the disadvantage is that there is no assurance that the team's structure represents how customers think about their needs or make decisions. For example, one consensus process is know as "affinity charts."

To create a affinity chart each team member is given a roughly equal number of cards, each card bearing one customer need. One team member selects a card from his (her) pile, reads it aloud, and places in on the table (or wall). Other members add "similar" cards to the pile with a discussion after each card. Sometimes the card is moved to a new pile; sometimes it stays. The process continues until the group has separated all the cards into some number of piles of similar cards, where each pile differs from the others in some way. The team then structures the cards in each pile into a hierarchical tree diagram with more-detailed needs at lower levels, and more-tactical and strategic needs at the upper levels. To select a higher-order need, say a secondary need, to represent a group of tertiary needs, the group can either select from among the tertiary needs or add a new card to summarize the group of relevant tertiary needs. Throughout the process the team can rearrange cards, start new piles, or elaborate the hierarchy.

Customer Sort and Cluster Process

In a customer-sort process, customers are given a deck of cards, each bearing one customer need. They are asked to sort the cards into piles such that each pile represents similar needs and differs from the other piles in some way. The number of piles and the exact definition of similarity is left unspecified. After completing the sort, each respondent is asked to choose a single need from each pile, called an exemplar, which best represents the customer needs in the pile. From the sort data we create a "co-occurrence matrix" in which the i-j-th element of the matrix is the number of respondents who placed need i in the same pile as need j. We also label each need with the number of times it was chosen as an exemplar.

To develop a structured hierarchy from the customer-sort data, market researchers use a statistical method known as "Wards' cluster analysis" to cluster the co-occurrence matrix. The exemplars then provide the names of the clusters. The details of Wards' method are available in most statistical packages such as SPSS or

SAS. (MIT has a site license for SAS.) The basic idea is that similar needs are placed together into a tree structure. The primary needs are at the top of the tree, the secondary needs are further down, and the tertiary needs form the roots of the tree. Exactly where to cut the tree, that is, when a division of a primary need becomes two secondary needs rather than two new primary needs, requires judgment combined with information from the statistical analyses. The exemplars provide valuable guidance in making these judgments.

Table 1 compares the top levels of the group-consensus-chart and customer-sort hierarchies for food-carrying devices. Abbie first considered the number of secondary and tertiary needs and the number of exemplars within each primary grouping. The customer-sort technique provide a more even distribution. Usually, an even distribution makes it easier to assign responsibilities. Abbie next considered whether the exemplars provided the labels naturally or whether new labels had to be created. Such labels summarize the categories but are not directly from the customer-need phrases. Twenty-seven labels were added to the group-consensus chart by the development team (247 total needs) while only ten labels were added to the customer-sort hierarchy (230 total needs). This means that more of the customers' semantics are used directly in the primary and secondary levels of the customer-sort hierarchy.

Customer-sort Diagram	Team-sort Diagram
attractive, good-looking	
convenient	container utility
works well	convenient
right size	physical characteristics
maintains food temperatures	container price
carries many things	thermal characteristics
easily movable	

Table 1 Group-consensus vs. Customer-sort Food-Carrying-Device Hierarchies

The most interesting comparison is based on qualitative impressions. The two hierarchies were shown to executives at firms which use the voice of the customer in their product-development and marketing processes. In all cases, including the team that did the consensus chart, the managers judged that the customer-sort hierarchy provided a clearer, more-believable, easier-to-work-with representation of customer perceptions than the group-consensus charts. Only one of the five group-consensus primary groupings is specific to the category (not generic), while four of the seven customer-sort groupings are specific to the category. The qualitative reaction from the managers seemed to be summarized by: "The group-consensus chart is a good systems-engineering description of the problem while the customer-sort hierarchy is really the customer's voice."

This comparison is typical. Customers tend to sort customer needs into hierarchies that represent how they use the product. Whenever we have done internal sorts, the teams members usually sort the needs to represent how they build the product or how the firm is organized. It is hard to quantify the advantage of a customer-based hierarchy, but if you really want the voice of the customer, it appears to be important that customers be involved in the sorting process. While this may seem obvious, I continue to be amazed at the number of firms who use team-sort processes as short cuts to customer-sort processes.

One argument that has been advanced in favor of the team-based consensus charts is that they result in greater team buy-in to the hierarchical structure. Recent applications of customer-sort and customer-consensus structures have addressed this issue by having the team complete the customers' task in parallel with the customers. As the marketing team sorts the cards, each members begin to ask him- or herself: "I sort the cards like this, but how would the customer sort the cards?" Indeed, while the customer instructions state that there is no right or wrong answer, the marketing team begins to realize that for marketing strategy and tactics there is a right answer -- how the customer sorts the cards.

Measuring Or Estimating Priorities

One of the most-studied issues in marketing science is the methods by which firms can estimate customer priorities. We do not review all of these methods here, but rather demonstrate examples of the types of measurements that are used success-fully when identifying priorities with respect to <u>perceived</u> customer needs. For a brief review of conjoint analysis, a method focused primarily on design characteristics rather than perceived needs, you may download an article from mitsloan.mit.edu/vc/GreenTributeConjoint092302.pdf.

Example Methods

We illustrate three methods with data collected by one of the largest and most-sophisticated consumer products firm. The consumer-products firm measured or es-timated customer's importances for 198 customer needs using three different methods:

- 9-point *Direct-rating* scale in which customers answered for each need "How important is it or would it be if: ...?".

- *Constant-sum* scale in which customers allocated 100 points among the seven primary needs, then allocated 100 points to each set of secondary needs within each primary-need group, and finally allocated 100 points among each set of tertiary needs within each secondary-need group.

- *Anchored* scale in which customers allocated 10 points to the most important primary need and up to 10 points to the other six primary needs. Similarly up to 10 points were allocated to secondary needs corresponding to each primary need and to tertiary needs corresponding to each secondary need. Figure 4 provides an example of an anchored scale. (These primary needs are illustra-tive only and are disguised relative to the true product category.)

When thinking about choosing a laundry detergent, how important is it that the laundry detergent satisfies the following needs:

Cleans your clothes well	[ ]
Is safe and gentle for synthetic fibers	[ ]
Is good for the environment	[ ]
Clothes are ready to wear after drying	[ ]
It is easy to do the laundry	[ ]
My clothes smell fresh and clean	[ ]
Good value for the money	[ ]

Figure 4. Example of an Anchored Scale

Questionnaires were mailed to 5600 randomly selected consumers (1400 for each method plus 1400 who rated products on the customer needs). Response rates were very good (75-78%). (All recipients of the questionnaires were given a $5 incentive. Those that responded in a week were entered in a lottery for $100.) In addition, the constant-sum questionnaire was mailed to an additional 1400 consumers from a national panel. The response rate for that sample was 90%. The rank-order correlation of the importances as measured by the random sample and the panel sample was 0.995.

To test whether the importances made sense for setting priorities among product-development programs, the professional product-development team in the consumer-products company created seven product concepts. Each concept was created to emphasize one of the primary customer needs while stressing that the other six customer needs would not be any better or worse than existing products. The concepts went through two pre-tests with actual consumers and were modified until the firm felt that they did indeed "stretch" the consumer needs. (The actual concept statements are proprietary. The winning concept ultimately led to a highly successful product.) Consumers were asked to evaluate the concepts by expressing their interest and preference for the concepts. Interest was measured by a 9-point scale. Preference was a

rank ordering of the seven concepts. Table 2 indicates that consumers' interest and preference is highly correlated with the self-stated measures of primary needs.

	Anchored Scales (max = 10)	Constant Sum (sum to 100)	Directly Stated (1 to 9 scale)
Correlation with preference for concepts	0.93	0.93	0.89
Correlation with interest in concepts	0.96	0.96	0.96

Table 2. Comparison of Three Methods to Set Priorities for <u>Perceived</u> Needs

The direct, anchored, and constant-sum measures give similar rank-order results and each correlates with interest and preference. These results are typical. The scientific data to date suggest that any of the three scales could be used to measure importances for <u>perceived</u> needs. However, other data, not shown here, suggest that conjoint analysis is the better method when decisions are being made with respect to product features or physical characteristics rather than perceived needs.

Is frequency of mention a surrogate for importance?

It is a reasonable hypothesis that customers will mention most those needs that are most important. If this were true, then we could save time and money by using frequency of mention as a surrogate for importance. Alas, the data do not support this hypothesis. High priority needs do not seem to be mentioned more often that low priority needs. It appears to be the case that we need to undertake formal market research surveys (or conjoint analyses) to provide priorities for the customer needs.

Segmentation

Once data on priorities are obtained for each respondent, these priorities can be "clustered" to identify different "benefit" segments in the market. For example, a

clustering of the customer needs for the laundry product might identify one segment that cares primarily about cleaning clothes, another that cares primarily about clothes being ready to wear without much effort, and a third that puts a high priority on product that are safe for the environment. Marketing managers can decide to target any or all of these segments.

In some cases, priori to undertaking a VOC, the marketing team might already have identified the segments of the market that they wish to serve. If marketing managers can identify segments by other means, they can then collect a VOC for each identified segment.

Today's Practice

When VOC methods were first being developed, most product-development teams and most marketing teams felt that they needed detailed information on all levels of the customer-need hierarchy. Experience over the last fifteen years suggests that such detail is not necessary. Today, card sorts often begin with 100 needs rather than 200 needs and they focus on the primary and secondary levels of the hierarchy rather than all three levels. Teams tend to drill down to the tertiary level only for one or two high priority secondary needs. This focus greatly reduces the measurement burden on respondents and lowers the cost and time of marketing research. It appears to represent a reasonable tradeoff between completeness and feasibility.

Discussion And Summary

The voice of the customer is critical to setting both marketing strategy and marketing tactics. Measurement is both feasible and practical. Today's methods excel at identifying customer needs, sorting these needs into a hierarchy, and providing priorities for the customer needs.

Scientific data and practice suggest interviews with 10-20 customers per segment should identify enough of the customer needs (in a customer segment) for marketing analysis. Both one-on-one experiential interviews and focus groups seem to effective at identifying needs. Alas, group synergies expected from focus groups are often not present. Multiple analysts (at least 2-3) should analyze the transcripts.

While group-consensus charts are a popular method for obtaining a hierarchical structure, scientific data and experience suggest that different structures are obtained by analyzing customer-sort data. The customer-sort hierarchies seem to group the needs to reflect how the customer uses the product while team-consensus charts group the needs to reflect how the firm builds the product.

There are many means to identify priorities for perceived needs. Most measurement scales, if implemented carefully, are accurate in terms of predicting both preference and interest in potential product concepts. These priorities are valuable for product design, for selecting the advertising message, and for setting differentiation (segmentation) strategies.

Final Note of Interest to Sloan Students

We have just completed another successful redesign of the Sloan core. Over the past decade Sloan has been focused on the successive renewal of the core design to serve our customers more effectively. This process have been aided by research done by Sloan students who used VOC methods to study our many customers, including students, recruiters, and alumni. This process is ongoing as we continually collect data to make the core as responsive to your needs as feasible.

For your interest I have provided the customer needs that were measured in 1992 at the end of this note. You may want to compare these customer needs to the customer needs that you perceive in 2004. Which have changed? Which priorities are changed? What is missing for today's environment? What is different about today's environment? Why?

Sloan has changed and improved over the last twelve years. I think that you will find it interesting to look around you and notice many of the little things that are done to satisfy the needs expressed in these lists. Naturally, Sloan will continue to improve and you can help. These lists, when updated, may give you even more ideas for improvement.

Should you choose "the Sloan School" as your focus for the final project, these customer needs provide a start. However, be sure to do your own interviews to bring the data up to 2004.

If you are interested, some of the Sloan theses are:

Cooper, Leslie K. (1992), "The Structure of Recruiter Need at the Sloan School of Management: A Quantitative Assessment," Master's Thesis, Sloan School of Management, M.I.T., Cambridge, MA 02139 (June).

Griffin, Abbie (1989), "Functionally Integrated New product Development," Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Sloan School of Management, M.I.T., Cambridge, MA 02139 (June).

Roberts, Jill W. (1992), "M.B.A. Recruiters' Needs: Voice of the Customer Analysis," Master's Thesis, Sloan School of Management, M.I.T., Cambridge, MA 02139, (June).

Ross, Lisa Gayle (1992), "A Voice of the Customer Analysis of M.B.A. Schools: The Student Segment," Master's Thesis, Sloan School of Management, M.I.T., Cambridge, MA 02139, (June).

Silver, Jonathan Alan and John Charles Thompson, Jr. (1991), "Understanding Customer Needs: A Systematic Approach to the `Voice of the Customer,'" Master's Thesis, Sloan School of Management, M.I.T., Cambridge, MA 02139, (June).

Yie, Sandra (1992), "The Core Curriculum at Sloan: Establishing a Hierarchy of Needs," Master's Thesis, Sloan School of Management, M.I.T., Cambridge, MA 02139, (June).

STUDENTS NEEDS
(Priorities are indicated by a score between 0 and 100 and are shown in parentheses.)

Develop a well rounded set of managerial styles, analytical tools, and frameworks and learn how to apply them. (98.3)

Understand a more complex world (73.4)
Place to discuss things other than school
Sort out things I had put of hold before
Improve my existing skills
Effective writing skills
Learn to give presentations
Networking skills
Learn project management skills
Learn how politics relate to business
Understand the role of corporate culture in an office
Understand office politics
Understand change in an organization
Understand difficult organizational behavior experiences
Taught what I need to know in the future
School with a good reputation in terms of putting out business leaders
Courses that require me to figure out what tools are important to apply
Figure out what I am best at
Self awareness to help me in my job interviews

As deep or as little a level of commitment as I want (54.8)
Ownership of a project I have implemented
Introductory courses that are more general-management oriented
Not to always have to decide in favor of academics
Understand how my classes interrelate
Not to be grade penalized for taking a course that is difficult for me
Not to have the core or thesis get in the way of electives

Professors with expertise (81.3)
Hot shots that teach the MBAs
Alliance with a professor
Faculty that are willing to answer questions about their careers and industry experiences
Understand what makes me "click"
Professors who manage class discussion
Professors who refer to the readings
Professors who entertain me
Lessons learned from class discussions clearly spelled out
Professors who explain their teaching approach and intentions
Professors who don't let one student hold up the class

Develop a well-rounded set of tools (90.3)

Environment that matches the program to my needs (64.6)
Supportive environment
Be exposed to people who might think differently: internationals, cultures, and sexes

Learn how to be an effective contributor in the business world (75.4)
> Know what is used in the real world
>> Improved computer skills
>> Know how comfortable I can be with my data
>> Read the Wall Street Journal and understand it
>> To focus
> Keep up with a changing business environment
>> Credentials and tools on paper
>> Understand which managerial styles work
>> Learn how to juggle/prioritize
>> Learn the jargon
>> Understand how narrow my perspective is coming in the door
>> Group format that encourages and promotes relationships
>> Work in groups to learn from other students

Develop my personal impact (88.2)
> Know how to be well-liked
> Feedback from faculty that is not strictly grade related
> Think more than memorize
> All students involved in class discussion
> Hands on class projects
> Know how to motivate people
> Experiment with my personal style

Total experience that helps me learn relevant exciting and useful tools and knowledge   (89.3)
> Test and practice my approach to solving problems
> Consulting classes to get practice
> Tools learned in the core to be applied later
> Learn what other people loved and hated in their jobs

Coursework that covers all the bases (80.7)
A school where I fit (65.0)
> Time to figure out what else is out there
>> Relate back to something I have experienced
>> Not to have to compromise the work I do because I am so busy
>> De-emphasis on grades and competition
> Career planning office that helps me figure out where I might be happy
> Professors who tell me what is right and wrong in my case write-ups or exercises
> Feedback from my peers
> Reflect upon my own experiences
> Friends and alums who have respect for the school

To be able to get a course I want (90.0)
> Technology integrated into the curriculum
> Support to develop my thesis
> Not to have to take core courses I don't feel will benefit me
> Time to let what I have learned sink in more
> Students who talk to each other about substantive issues

Cutting-edge professors who help students learn theory and skill (78.2)

Network of close friends and business associates (65.9)

Professor who tell you their war stories
Not to be nickeled and dimed
Feel that I have been selected for the program
Meet the people that I am going to spend the rest of my life communicating with
Mix of 1st years and 2nd year students in classes
Common experience for all students
Course planning and counseling to make a better decision about my course load
School with a good research heritage
Signal the market my interests (thesis before the job search)

School that projects a strong and accurate image of itself (64.5)

Statistics and where I am likely to use it
Become more critical of published business information
Know what people outside of my field are talking about
Place to talk that is not drinking oriented
Student commitment to the school
Pride and heritage in the school

Cutting-edge professors who help students learn theory and skill (78.2)

See how business people work: their office, techniques, etc. (71.5)

See good examples of what real companies have done and learn by example
Exposure to a lot of companies
Insight into the way business communications really are

Select a career that is right for me while learning about myself and other students (68.8)

Understand how people go about pursing their careers
Learn how other countries do business
Explore opportunities through other students' experiences
Institutional memory that continuously improves courses
Professors that push me to speak out in class
Manageable class size

Exercises that show me what the course is trying to accomplish (46.7)

Not to summarize case facts
Courses where we can jump right in without worrying about the least-common-denominator
Classes run like corporate meetings as if we are involved

Facilities that make my life easier (72.0)

Facilities that make us feel like professionals (43.8)

Lockers that hold my suits
Our own building we don't have to share with other departments
Athletic facilities
Copiers available 24 hours per day

Central place to go and meet with other students (20.0)

Convenient graduate housing
Place to watch TV
Computers available 24 hours
Offices

Facilities that positively affect our experiences (63.9)

    Class Structures that maximizes my learning (78.7)

        Facilities that reflect positively on the school
        Place away from the intensity of the school
        Not to be worried to say what I am thinking
        To feel like a professional adult
        Waiver policy that respects my background
        Administrators that care to make things easier for me
        Talk more intelligently
        Feedback early to reduce my stress level
        Become more well rounded & less judgmental
        Learn things that are important for me in the long run
        Gain a personal vision
        Develop into my concentration
        Tools that will not go out of date
        Role models
        Develop network and credentials
        Exposure to research being done at the school
        Professional contact with alumni
        Opportunity to take a leadership role
        Cafeteria that is nice, not crowded and open all the time
        Our own building we don't have to share with other departments
        Develop personal and communication skills
        To learn leadership vs. ongoing status quo management techniques
        Learn to apply all types of knowledge
            Frameworks for thinking about and solving problems
            Get the big picture without worrying about the details
            Learn the quantitative basics of the trade and not master technical skills
        Learn how to set up problems so I can approach them
            A bag of tricks across all disciplines
            Fundamental basic readings
        Gain an adaptable management style
            Learn how to listen to others
            Understand how I am perceived

    Feel that the school is committed to the program (74.9)

        Administration that is open to my ideas
        Orientation that tells me what school is about
        Professors who make me enthusiastic about the subject
            Students prepared for class
            Class segmentation by levels of experience and interest
            Professors who apply the theory they have just talked about
            Cutting edge academics
        Challenge in a safe environment
            Real class discussion that is relevant and prepares me for the future
            Professors who push students to make substantive comments
        Respect for my needs
            Panel discussion and forums to discuss real business issues
            Recent literature on the reading list
            International issues truly integrated into the core
            Visit companies and plants
            Exposure to different career paths

RECRUITERS NEEDS

Have the knowledge to contribute to an organization's success

Have a life experience that demonstrates well-roundedness

Have a balanced personal life with outside interests

Have done something charitable

Played sports in college

Involved in professional organizations

Have a worldly experience

Had a semester of education abroad

Know one foreign language or more

Understand how the real world looks

Had a broad based undergraduate education

Studied quantitative disciplines and have analytical background

Can think abstractly, numerically

Have undergraduate degree requiring quantitative skills

Familiar with functioning in the corporate environment

Have 2-5 years work experience

Have track record of promotion

Was a team leader in previous job

Understand the reality of work

Know what it is to have a fight with your secretary; an office romance, etc.

Able to bound back and handle frustration

Have a proven aptitude for the business

Have street smarts

Know industry buzz-words

Possess computer skills like e-mail, word-processing, and spreadsheet

Have a sense of self-knowledge

Can articulate why you went to business school, what purpose it served and what your goals are now

Have done a self-assessment and know what makes you happy

Recognize own limitations

Have strong sense of personal integrity

Have done a lot of career thinking and know what you want in a career

Have facility with language of business through rigorous coursework

Took courses that are pertinent to work world

Teaching methodology encourages participative learning

Case method

Smaller classes that encourage interaction

Project type of course: practical/focused

Have the personality and skill to contribute to an organization's success

Can get things done

Know what to focus on and how to ask the right questions

Have a can-do, action oriented approach

Able to set things in motion

Know how to manage your time

Deliver results in a timely fashion

Know how to make good use of resources and understand the structure of the organization
as a whole
    Have a sense of politics
    Know what things are likely to offend
Have the ability to delegate and manage change
    Able to do multi-tasking
    Confident enough to say "I don't know"

Can size up a situation or a person
Can recognize an opportunity and understand what the client needs
    Command the confidence of the client
    Know how to get to the heart of the client
Able to make a stand and support your opinions
    Intuitive sales skills, persuasive
    Business maturity, smooth under pressure
    Ability to negotiate

Able to marshal all the troops
Understand how to motivate, reward and discipline people
Have a belief in getting things done through people
    Outward enthusiasm
    Like talking to people; can draw them out
Have a collegial approach and the ability to educate
    Willing to be on a team; respectful of others
    Your presence enhances boss' value
    Not intimidating or hierarchy conscious

Fit with the organizational culture
Possess certain personality traits that relate to success
Can access other people and find common ground with those who are different from you
Have presentation and general business etiquette skills
    Polished and look presentable
    Know how to run a meeting

Get the students we need effectively and efficiently
Facilitate getting to know students
Have a faculty who refer students and take a proactive stance in getting to know the firm
Give firms access to the students
    Invite firm to lunches, club meetings
    Allow firm to participate in case study
    Involve firm with panels, classroom discussions

Leading edge faculty and students
Have a well-known faculty
Have a rigorous admissions requirements
    Students who are accomplished with strong undergraduate records
    Students with good test scores (680+)
    Pre-screen/interview prospective students
    Have a global student body

Students match the needs of recruiters

Strong reputation in marketplace for placing students in jobs comparable to the firms
Have students who want to work in the countries in which the firm does business
Have students who are a "good value" for the money

Career development office is well organized and user-friendly

Act as an information source answering recruiters' questions and researching where students get placed
Provide a specific contact person
Let firm know well in advance when names are due
Build constructive relationship with recruiters
Bring together recruiters to discuss their needs
Actively give recruiters feedback and ratings
Have strong relationship with students
Present company to students in a realistic light
Make students aware of corporate deadlines
Have good internal communication system

Facilitate the interviewing process

Run presentations efficiently and professionally
Ensure students will show up
Preempt schedule conflicts with other recruiters
Provide equipment upon request
Make the resume book process run smoothly
Collect students' resumes by end of summer
Provide resume book quickly and free of charge
Set resume book up on computer program to facilitate ease of use
Break resume book down nationally and internationally
Make day of interviewing painless
Provide plenty of coffee
Schedule enough breaks
Give recruiter student escort
Encourage 2nd year students to have flexible schedule
Provide a physical space that is accommodating and dedicated to interviewing students
Rooms with sufficient light
Rooms that are quiet and clean
Rooms that are connected to placement office
Rooms with easy access to telephones

Students have the ability to distinguish themselves from others during the interview

Can prove inside of 10 minutes how you can leverage your experience to contribute to the firm's success
Able to sell yourself in terms of demonstrated accomplishments
Know more than just canned questions and answers
Present yourself strongly in person and on paper
Have a firm and strong handshake
Not nervous or passive during interview
Look interviewer in the eye
Able to write a good cover letter and resume
Show signals of commitment to industry
Understand cultures of different firms
Know which niche of industry interests you

Looking for a longer term career path
Able to articulate why you want to work for a particular firm
Have a researched the recruiting company and know its facts and figures solidly before interviewing