

Guidelines for Writing Need Statements

Creating a list of customer needs might seem really difficult based on that example but in fact there's a technique involved that makes it pretty straightforward and the technique involves these five guidelines. I'll explain each one, the first which is really the most important one is called what, not how and what that means is that customers will often tell you a solution, how to solve a problem.

But what we want to capture here in the needs statement is what the problem is, not how to solve it. In fact, if they give you a great solution you should hold onto that, save it for the concept generation phase next. But for we want to write down what exactly the problem is, so in the Nest example a customer says, voice of the customer might be, I would like my iPhone to adjust my thermostat.

The right way to capture that needs statement is the thermostat can be controlled remotely without requiring a special device. The wrong way to do it is to say a specific solution, the thermostat is accompanied by a downloadable iPhone app. And what we want to do is to capture faithfully what it is the problem is they want to solve without necessarily restricting ourselves to a solution. So that's the most important principle, what, not how. The others just help us create a list that's in a consistent format.

For example, the next one, specificity, the customer says I have different heating and cooling systems, so that's what they say. Now what do we want to write down, we write a thermostat can control separate heating and cooling systems, it solves their problem.

Instead of something that's maybe less specific, we write the thermostat is versatile, well that's true we want it to be versatile but in fact that's not specific enough, the customer told us something about their special situation, we want to capture that. Try to phrase the needs statements as something that's a positive not negative.

We're going to write a sentence, try to put it in the positive. For example, the customer says I get tired of standing in front of my thermostat to program it. What we write is the thermostat can be programmed from a comfortable position, that's a positive statement, instead of saying something negative.

The thermostat does not require me to stand in front of it, that would just -- and there's nothing wrong with that really except if we have a lot of statements and some are yes and some are no it's harder to read the whole list and understand it easily. Try to phrase them all in a consistent way.

Next write the needs statements as an attribute of the product itself, not describing something about the home or the users, describe the product. For example, the customer says, I have to manually override the program if I'm home when I shouldn't be. What we write is the thermostat automatically responds to an occupant's presence. It's an attribute of the product. Instead of

writing an occupant's presence triggers the thermostat to adjust and so forth. So that would be not an attribute of the product that would be talking about the user.

Finally, we avoid words like must and should. To eliminate that confusion, although we don't really know which is more important than others, we just leave those words out. And the sentences work without them. The customer says I'm worried about how secure my thermostat would be if it were accessible online, we simply write the thermostat controls are secure from unauthorized access.

Instead of writing the thermostat must be secure from unauthorized access. You see if I had written must or should that sound one is more important than another but in fact we just leave those words out. And if we need to identify the importance, we'll do that later on. These are the five guidelines and if you can write all the needs statements using these guidelines you get a really good useful and consistent list as described with the Nest thermostat example.