

AD420 • ME444 • MKTG594 Elkay Project
Fall Semester, 2007**Stephen Melamed**, Industrial Design, College of Architecture+Arts
Michael J. Scott, Engineering, College of Engineering
Albert Page, Marketing, College of Business Administration**Assignment** **No. 4** VOC/Observation/Contextual Research**Project Description** **Identifying New Product Opportunities -
the Voice of the Customer**

The purpose of this assignment is to provide students an opportunity to learn and experience *first hand* how it is possible to identify opportunities for new products/systems for **Elkay** by doing research with consumers and customers by applying Voice of the Customer (VOC) and observation/contextual research to your team's emerging global market category.

Over the past ten years a set of research tools have been developed which fall under the general heading of Voice of the Customer Research. Working as a cohesive unit, your team will conduct two types of VOC research to identify *problems and/or needs* that represent unique opportunities for new and improved products/systems for Elkay Manufacturing Company.

VOC research includes: 1) being the customer; 2) observing the customer; and 3) talking directly with the customer. All three kinds of research should be included in your early stage research work for Elkay, but the intention for this assignment is to primarily focus on talking with the customer. The IPD faculty expects your team to conduct a *minimum* of 20 VOC interviews with consumers/customers for your assigned category and relate the findings of your research in a paper that will be handed in on the eighth class meeting. In addition to being your customer (everyone should engage in a series of store visits to familiarize yourself with these product categories and the shopping/buying experience); each team will also be required to conduct 5-10 on site observations. This observational/contextual research may be conducted at the same time, with the same participants as the VOC research. Once the interviews are completed, provide the participant with a scenario for a specific type of *use case scenario*, and then ask the participant to demonstrate the manner in which they would prepare to deal with this situation, what things they would do, what items they would use, and to *walk you through the entire process from start to finish*. (within the context of their natural environment).

Each team is to provide Prof. Page with a draft of your VOC research questions for approval by the 4th class meeting. This schedule should leave you sufficient time between the 4th and 8th class sessions to conduct the interviews and observations, as well as write the draft and final version of the paper.

Regarding the interviews you conduct, they are to be deep, probing, rich conversations with lots of questioning, and following up of answers with further questions they may spawn (*but do not interrupt the participant*).

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It is to be a dialog, and to make this happen all the questions must be open-ended (avoid all yes/no questions). The interview itself should last from 15 to 45 minutes and you should expect it to take a while before the participant becomes engaged, interested in the subject, and comfortable with the interviewer. Begin with easy, conversational questions, first to help lubricate his/her mind regarding the topic area and help to recall tacit knowledge. *Each interview must be conducted with two people.* One person should ask the questions and lead the conversation, while the other takes notes of the responses. Take careful, precise notes during the interview. Also, it is advisable to ask the participant if audio taping/video taping/still photos of the interview for later analysis would be acceptable.

Of course, all students must respect the privacy rights of the participant and not divulge any personal information that might damage or injure the person. Also, do not disclose to the participant who the company is that has sponsored the class and the research.

The research paper is to be written from the perspective of Elkay Mfg. and the problems and opportunities you identify for them. Describe the research methods briefly, but cover all the important points necessary to establish the credibility of your findings and implications with your reader (IPD faculty and Elkay product management). The IPD faculty wants to see the questions you ask, and the answers they elicit from the participants. Verbatim transcripts of the interviews are not required nor desired; however, useful and effective summaries of them by question, and not by participant, are the substance of this assignment. Insightful exact quotes can be extremely useful.

The faculty is also interested in knowing how did you select the participants? Who are they (not in terms of their names, but in terms of the market and the demographic they represent)? Use a *convenient sample* of people who are appropriate for a conversation about your particular category; however, *the participants should fit the profile of Elkay's target customers and market.* Include any key findings you may have discovered by also observing the participant within the context of their home- kitchen, bathroom, garden, laundry room, etc., yet was never articulated by the interviewees.

End your paper with a robust list of the problems you have identified and another list of the potential opportunities for new products/systems for Elkay that these problems present. Since VOC research is a rich, qualitative research tool, make use of the richness it provides by using your participants' voices in your paper (direct quotes) to help make and further illustrate your key points. If you were permitted to do so, you should also include photos.

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The paper is to be 8 - 10 pages in length (text). The page length refers only to pages of typed text and does not include any photos, exhibits, tables, figures, sketches, or graphs that may be, and should be included with your paper as necessary and useful supporting information.

Your paper should have a cover page with the name of your assigned Elkay category, your team's name, as well as all individual team member names. The paper should be stapled in the upper left hand corner. The paper should be double spaced, with one-inch margins all around, and the pages of text must be numbered. Place all tables, photos, exhibits, charts and/or graphs on separate unnumbered pages and insert them into your paper immediately after the numbered page of text on which they are first mentioned.

All of these tables, charts, etc., must be discussed in the text of your paper since the faculty (as well as Elkay product management) will not be able to attribute any value to them unless you clearly explain what they mean to you within the context of your paper, your category, and the assignment.

In addition to the report, please provide 2-3 PowerPoint slides of *key findings*. Include at least one image or graphic. You may use smaller type (14 pt.) than we would normally accept for a presentation, but keep it legible. These two slides should be created within the context of being appropriate for your boss to include in a presentation to senior management about your project's status.

Both the report and the slides should be uploaded to the IPD web site, *and also* submitted in hardcopy.

Project Requirements

1. Prepare extensive set of questions for VOC interviews.
2. Identify convenient sample, conduct 20 VOC interviews (minimum).
3. Conduct 5 -10 on site research, observation/contextual sessions.
4. 8 -10 page write up, summary of all research performed, plus supporting documentation (photos, graphs, charts) referenced in the text. Submit hard copy to Prof. Page and upload digital version of same to IPD web site.
5. Prepare 2-3 PowerPoint slides of acquired *key findings*. Be prepared to discuss, and present your key research findings to the entire class.

Due Dates

- Set of preliminary questions: Tuesday, September 18, 2007
- Draft of research paper: Tuesday, October 2, 2007
- Research paper with exhibits: Tuesday, October 16, 2007
(Incorporate these findings into your Mid-Term presentations to Elkay).