

6-Step Guide to Operationalize a Consumer Connects Program

Establishing a Connects Program is a great way to support your consumer insight initiatives.

Here's how we do it at Discuss.io.





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INTRODUCTION

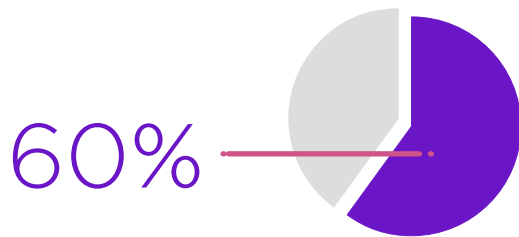
Is your brand beginning to show signs of myopia? As you focus on your business objectives, your revenue goals, and your day-to-day operations, are you losing sight of your customers? Do you really know what they think, how they feel, and what they want from your brand?

Understanding your customers goes beyond random surveys, occasional market research, and haphazard focus groups. It involves multiple interactions with consumers, beginning before they become your actual customers and continuing throughout the entire customer relationship with your brand.

Building that type of continuing relationship requires that your organization begin with a consumer-centric mindset and create a purpose-built connection program to inject the voice of the consumer into your organization efficiently.



WHY CONSUMER -CENTRIC ORGANIZATIONS SUCCEED



Deloitte research reveals that “client-centric companies are 60% more profitable compared to companies not focused on the customer.” Customer-centric companies are more likely to provide positive customer experiences than their counterparts, but consumer-centricity starts well before an individual customer begins to interact with your organization.

Consumer-centric organizations embark on consumer research in a different way than organizations that lack consumer-centricity. Their approach to consumer research involves, not just initial research prior to product development or a major initiative, but continuing conversations with consumers over time, often in an organized program known as a Consumer Connects Program.

The benefits of building a customer-centric organization with a Consumer Connects Program include:

- Greater access to the ‘voice of the customer’ at multiple points in the customer lifecycle
- Better information that leads to better business decision-making
- Increased likelihood of innovation
- Improved customer experience and employee engagement with customers
- Improved marketing strategy and hyper-focused campaigns
- Improved brand reputation and increased revenue opportunities

WHAT IS A CUSTOMER CONNECTS PROGRAM?

A Consumer Connects Program is used to gain empathy and better understand people's lives and how a brand can better fit into consumers' lives.

In a seminal [Harvard Business Review article](#), the authors (including Stan Sthanunathan and Keith Weed from Unilever, a Discuss.io client) call out seven key characteristics to the way insights engines drive Consumer Connects Programs:

- **Data Synthesis:** What matters is not so much the quantity of data a firm can amass but its ability to connect the dots and extract value from the information.
- **Independence:** Superior insights groups sit decisively outside marketing and other functions and often report to someone in the C-suite—the CEO, the chief strategy officer, or the chief experience officer.
- **Integrated Planning:** If insights groups are to help drive strategy, their activities must be aligned during the planning cycle with those of strategic planning, marketing, finance, sales, and other functions. That's why substantially more overperforming firms than underperforming ones (61% versus 46%) include insights leaders at all key stages of the planning cycle.
- **Collaboration:** In the study by Kantar Vermeer - i2020 - that interviewed 10,000 insights professionals, 69% of respondents from overperforming firms said they work closely with other functions and customers, compared with just 52% of those in underperforming companies.
- **Experimentation:** Overperforming companies are three times as likely as underperformers to embrace a culture of experimentation, the i2020 research shows (40% versus 13%), and B2B firms in general are more experimental than B2C companies.

- **Forward-Looking Orientation:** The most sophisticated practitioners—those with insights engines like CMI at Unilever —use predictive analytics and other technologies, along with new organizational structures, to both anticipate and influence consumer behavior.
- **Affinity for Action:** Action orientation manifests itself in two broad ways: in its specific recommendations to other functions and in the recruitment and training of “action-oriented” employees.

However, there is another level of tactical excellence required to not only extract the full value of the Consumer Connects Program but to make it operationally efficient to keep costs down and the number of customer conversations up.

A well-designed Consumer Connects Program involves the participation of key brand stakeholders, training of all brand participants, appropriate technology to support program needs, a clearly defined method of analysis of results, and the all-important step of using those results to discover actionable insights that inform future business decisions.

At Discuss.io, a Consumer Connects Program makes it easy for your brand to regularly engage in conversations with consumers around the world. Discuss.io helps you find the right people to talk to and makes it easy to schedule a time to speak with them. Before, during, and after each conversation, Discuss.io provides the tools and training necessary to help your brand get the most from each conversation with consumers, connecting you with the customers and the insights that really matter.



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HOW TO BUILD YOUR CONSUMER CONNECTS PROGRAM ON SOLID GROUND

Building an effective Consumer Connects Program begins and ends with a consumer-centric organizational culture. Keeping your customer first and foremost in everything you do will help you build and maintain your program over time. Here are the essential steps to take:



1

DETERMINE SPECIFIC GOALS AND DESIRED OUTCOMES.

The first step to building any program is to understand why you are building it. Ask yourself, why is a Consumer Connects Program important to our brand right now?

Some common goals for consumer online research programs that include current customers may be:

- To make faster, more informed decisions
- To establish empathy for customers
- To develop deeper category understanding
- To build a more consumer-centric culture
- To create more effective marketing or products

One or more of these goals may be applicable to your organization, and Consumer Connects Programs can help you achieve many of these goals at the same time. Map out specific goals, objectives, and outcomes you want to achieve. These goals will be used for several purposes. First, you will use them to make the business case for a Consumer Connects Program with your C-suite. For example, if one of your objectives is to establish greater empathy for consumers, you might point out in a presentation to the C-suite that a [2018 M&C Saatchi study](#) of 34,000 consumers across 225

brands in China, the US, UK, and France revealed that the empathy deficit in businesses costs the average brand over \$300 million in lost revenue each year. By any objective standard, that is a compelling reason to cultivate empathy for consumers.

Second, you will use those goals to create a blueprint of your talking points and conversation flow during your conversations with consumers. Third, you will use those goals to inform your participant selection process to ensure you will be speaking with the consumers who are most qualified for your program.

Included in your objectives for the program should be consideration of its scope. In your organization today, who has access to the voice of the consumer? More importantly, who would you like to have access in the future? How are you planning to use the knowledge you gain with your Consumer Connects Program? Who in your organization will be able to benefit from it?



How Discuss.io can help:

Discuss.io's team of experts can help you think through your research objectives and create tailored guides based on your goals and desired outcomes. Our professional services include project management, so you don't have to do all the heavy lifting by yourself. This can be especially helpful if you are just beginning to build a Consumer Connects Program.

2

SELECT THE RIGHT PARTICIPANTS FOR CONSUMER ONLINE RESEARCH.

Your candidates should represent the buyer profile that best relates to your desired goals and outcomes at that stage of the lifecycle where the research is focused.

Sometimes, your focus may be a broad category of brand users if you simply want to understand consumer lifestyles. Other times, your focus may be much narrower. For example, if you are a natural wellness brand and you want to focus on expecting mothers, you will want to leave teens, seniors, men, and moms with established families out of the conversation, even if these groups also buy from you.

Selecting candidates involves much more than simply filling seats based on a basic demographic, however. You will also need to filter candidates with well-designed screening questions to find the best fit for your program. The more in-depth you can go with your screening process, the more likely you are to

find the right participants. That means that your screener questions play an important role in the process. Here are some general guidelines to help you with screener questions:

- Use 10-15 questions that apply specifically to your target group.
- Do not use questions that will be part of your actual Connects conversation.
- Explain the purpose and the type of research being conducted.
- Clearly outline the dates involved and check availability.
- Ask about previous participation in surveys/ research and employment.
- Weave in indirect behavior and usage questions to gauge suitability of candidate.



How Discuss.io can help:

Discuss.io is designed to work with your own panel of participants if that is your preference. Or, if you would prefer, as part of our professional services, Discuss.io can assist you with writing a screener that will flesh out the best candidates for your Consumer Connects Program. These questions will be designed to establish a best fit for your program in relation to the specific goals and outcomes you have outlined in the first step.

What's more, our project management services include conducting candidate screening on your behalf, as well as organizing schedules and setting up a time to connect with qualified candidates.

3

CREATE AN IMPACTFUL DISCUSSION GUIDE.

The consumer research from your Consumer Connects Program is only as impactful as the questions you ask. Your questions should be designed in direct relation to your goals and objectives. This narrows the focus of the conversation and can help you and your participants stay on target.

A well-designed discussion guide delivers several benefits for your brand. It provides consistency, the ability to improve your customer conversations and tweak them as you go through the process, and the ability to keep everyone in the process on the same (virtual) page.

Every discussion guide is different and specific to the brand and purpose of the Consumer Connects Program. However, the best discussion guides share these common characteristics:

- Start with a general discussion of the topic that builds rapport and gets the conversation flowing.
- Ask about product or service awareness.
- Dig into product or service usage - pros, cons, and observations.
- Discuss buying behavior and why/how that product or service was selected.
- Discuss product switching and what would drive them to a different brand.
- At each stage in the conversation, remember the discussion rules are general before specific, behavior before attitude, positive before negative, unaided before aided, participant categories before moderator categories.



How Discuss.io can help:

This is one of the key areas where the Discuss.io platform really shines. Unlike other video conferencing tools that were built for company meetings or time with family and friends, Discuss.io was purpose-built for consumer conversations. On the Discuss.io platform, your discussion guide shares the screen with your meeting room so moderators can stay engaged and on track. Check off each question as it is asked, and Discuss.io will record, transcribe, and bookmark each spot where a response was given for easy reference.

When a discussion guide is loaded into a project, all sessions within that project have access to that guide to improve consistency and provide a baseline for improvement. In the recordings for that project, video clips can then be sorted based on the discussion guide questions. If you are conducting multiple interviews with consumers and customers, that enables you to search for patterns across all meetings and unearth the insights you need to make smart decisions for your brand.

4

CONDUCT THE INTERVIEW VIA LIVE VIDEO.

The global COVID-19 crisis highlights some of the advantages live video offers to brands in need of consumer research. Participants can lend their opinions and insight without putting themselves or the moderator at risk and can do so from the comfort of their own home. Live video makes scheduling each session more convenient.

“Pre-COVID-19, only 20% of brand/consumer video interviews were online, but we are now seeing a shift in that as many as 70-80% of interviews planned for 2021 will be conducted online by forward-thinking brands even after facilities start re-opening.”

*- Jim Longo, Discuss.io
Co-Founder and VP, Research Solutions*

The benefits of live video go much further than that, however. Global pandemic or not, live video is becoming a desired alternative to in-person interviews and focus groups. Eliminating the need for travel, it allows a brand to expand its reach beyond the local market into many countries much more quickly and cost-effectively than an in-person approach allows.



How Discuss.io can help:

An added benefit of the Discuss.io platform is that observers can quietly listen and watch the session just as they would from a backroom and one-way mirror in an in-person interview session.

What's more, observers can speak with the moderator throughout the session without interrupting the participants to help strengthen each discovery session.

5

CREATE A RECORDING AND TRANSCRIPT OF EACH SESSION.

The moderator's role is to listen proactively to participants and ask engaging follow-up questions to guide the conversation. This is easier to accomplish when the moderator does not have to take notes.

The best practice to capture every detail is to record each session and, if possible, turn the recording into a searchable transcript that allows product managers and insight professionals to quickly find comments around keywords or important themes.

Use video tools to capture key moments that will help you tell the consumer story of a particular topic or theme. In this way, your entire team will be able to extract important consumer insights from each interview, which will, in turn, help build consumer empathy throughout your organization.



How Discuss.io can help:

One of Discuss.io's hallmark features is the ease of recording each consumer research live session. Discuss.io will also turn each recording into a transcript that you can search for specific keywords or themes. Transcripts and recordings will also contain annotations marking where you asked each question in your discussion guide so you can go back and find specific details quickly.

The recording also includes our Save Moment feature, which is one of the most popular features for our clients. When a participant offers an idea or insightful moment, simply click the Save Moment button to mark that spot in the recording for future reference. When the "Save Moment" button is clicked, 15 seconds before and after are automatically rendered into an easily editable and shareable video clip. Turn those moments into a highlight reel to share with other stakeholders. If you didn't remember to click the Save Moment button, you can still highlight part of your transcript and create a video highlight reel from it.

6

DOCUMENT, REVIEW, AND SHARE YOUR FINDINGS.

After each session concludes, it's time to do a brain dump to capture details before you forget them. The goal is to get these thoughts onto paper and make sense of them later. Don't worry too much about sorting through ideas in your mind, as this can cause you to forget crucial details before you've had a chance to document them.

Once you've documented your findings, you can start connecting the dots and compiling data to create usable reports. This is often the longest part of the Consumer Connects Program process, but it's also arguably the most important. You've done a lot of research and hard work up to this point, and what you do during this step will ultimately determine the outcome of the program. Without the right insights and captured details, you may fail to get the results you need.

The real power of your Consumer Connects Program lies in capturing the voice of the consumer itself. Sharing consumer insights in a video format with the actual consumers telling their own stories is both impactful and inspiring, contributing to the consumer-centric organization you're building.

Not only will you need to compile initial reports and analysis, but you will also need to share those results with the right stakeholders across your organization. Remember that one of the primary goals of your Consumer Connects Program is to build a consumer-centric organization. It is by sharing the results of your Customer Connects conversations that you accomplish this goal.

To that end, you'll need to:

- Capture your immediate takeaways as soon as the session ends.
- Build a highlight reel of key moments.
- Review saved moments from your sessions and analyze for patterns.
- Build the video highlights reel into a shareable version of research that tells a compelling story about consumers and their relationship with your brand.




How Discuss.io can help:

The Discuss.io platform can be configured to collect your notes and thoughts immediately upon ending a live session. These ending notes and questions can be customized to each objective. From there, stakeholders can export their responses for faster analysis. As discussed in Step 4, Discuss.io facilitates the capture of consumer insights with its "Save Moment" feature, as well as offering transcription if requested. As part of our professional services, our team can also create a topline summary or full report from your findings and conversations to further streamline your analysis.



BUILD YOUR CONSUMER CONNECTS PROGRAM WITH THE RIGHT PLATFORM





BUILD YOUR CUSTOMER CONNECTS PROGRAM WITH THE RIGHT PLATFORM

A Consumer Connects Program can provide your brand with the insight you need to make informed, intelligent decisions based on input from the real people who buy or will buy your products.

Such a program builds consumer empathy throughout your organization, which, in turn, leads to a consumer-centric mindset that elevates every customer experience, informs every customer interaction, and engages every employee in the important work of building your brand every day.

Unlike video conferencing tools that were built with business meetings or friends and family connections in mind, Discuss.io is built for brands looking to connect quickly and effectively with consumers. Our platform is designed to streamline online consumer research, from building your Consumer Connects Program to analyzing the results over time. Our team of experts works with brands every day to recruit and screen the right participants, build impactful discussion guides, and provide analysis as part of our professional services offering.

Our full-featured platform facilitates live video interviewing with integrated discussion guides, a special “Save Moments” feature that allows you to bookmark and share highly insightful moments from consumer conversations, a “Key Takeaways” feature that enables moderators and observers to quickly capture initial thoughts after a live session, and video research tools that enable searchable functionality around keywords and themes, making consumer insights accessible to stakeholders across your organization.



Ready to see Discuss.io in action?

[Schedule a free demo](#) today!

SCHEDULE A FREE DEMO

