

SOSE Pathways: Value Proposition Design

Understanding your customer, their jobs, pains and gains, and how to prioritise what matters

Overview

A value proposition is not a slogan or messaging exercise.

It is a structured way to understand:

- What your customer is trying to do
- What gets in their way
- What a better outcome looks like

This understanding should inform:

- What you build
- How you prioritise
- How you communicate your product

The purpose of this exercise is to reduce assumptions and improve the quality of your decisions.

Getting Started

This work should be done visually.

Use:

- A whiteboard with post-it notes
- A digital whiteboard (e.g. Miro)
- A simple card-based tool (e.g. Trello)

You need to be able to:

- Capture ideas quickly
- Move and group them easily
- Iterate as your understanding develops

Avoid writing this out as a static document.

Structure

Create three areas:

- Customer Jobs
- Customer Pains
- Customer Gains

Capture each item individually (one per note/card).

Do not try to be precise at the start. The goal is to externalise your current understanding.

Customer Jobs

Customer jobs describe what your customer is trying to get done in a specific context. It could be:

- an important issue your customers are trying to solve in their work or in their lives,
- tasks they are trying to perform and complete
- the problems they are trying to solve
- or the needs they are trying to satisfy

Types of Jobs

There are different types of jobs customers are trying to get done

Functional jobs

When your customers try to perform or complete a specific task or solve a specific problem they are aiming to get a functional job done.

Social jobs

Trying to look good or gaining power and status are social jobs. These jobs describe how a customer wants to be perceived by others.

Emotional jobs

Your customers may seek a specific feeling, such as feeling good or feeling secure.

Supporting jobs

Besides trying to get a core job done, your customer performs ancillary jobs in different roles. These can be divided into three categories:

Buyer

In this role, your customer performs jobs related to buying, such as comparing offers, deciding which products to buy, performing a purchase, or taking delivery of a product or service.

Co-Creator:

In this role, your customer performs jobs related to co-creating value with you as an organisation, such as co-designing a product or solution or even creating part of the value proposition.

Transferrer:

In this role, your customer performs jobs related to the end of the lifecycle of a value proposition. This could be, for example, how customers dispose of a product, transfer it to others, or resell it.

This is not:

- what they say they want
- or what your product does

It is:

- what is actually happening in their world
- what they are trying to achieve or progress

How to identify Jobs

Focus on real situations and behaviours rather than abstract descriptions.

Core questions (anchor in reality)

- What is your customer trying to get done?
- What are they trying to achieve in this situation?
- What does a successful outcome look like for them?
- What needs to be true for this to be considered “done”?
- What is the underlying objective behind what they are doing today?
- If they didn’t have their current tools or process, what would they still need to achieve?
- What are they ultimately trying to make progress on?
- What is the core task or responsibility they are trying to fulfil?
- What outcome are they accountable for?
- What would they still need to do even if everything worked perfectly?
- What is the job independent of any specific solution or tool?
- What would remain the same even if the solution changed?
- How do they want to feel?
- How do they want to be perceived?

Context and constraints

- When does this typically happen?
- Where are you when this happens?
- Who else is involved?
- What constraints are you working within (time, budget, process)?
- What happens if this doesn’t get done properly?

Importance and frequency

- How often does this come up?
- How important is this compared to other things you’re dealing with?
- What happens if you delay or ignore this?
- Where does this sit in your wider workflow or responsibilities?

Current behaviour

- How are you currently doing this today?
- What steps do you go through?
- What tools or systems are involved?
- Where do you have to improvise or work around things?

Outcomes

- What does a good outcome look like here?
- How do you know you've done this well?
- What would make this easier or smoother?

Common mistakes

- Describing your product instead of the job
- Writing vague statements (e.g. "manage X better")
- Ignoring context
- Missing the surrounding workflow

Customer Pains

Pains describe anything that makes it harder for the customer to get a job done.

This includes:

- Friction, frustration, or inconvenience
- Time, cost, or effort
- Risk or uncertainty
- Negative emotional or social consequences

Pains vary in intensity. Some are minor, others meaningfully affect behaviour.

How to identify Pains

Look for where things break down, slow down, or create stress.

Useful questions

- What does your customer find too costly (time, money, effort)?

- What is frustrating or annoying about this?
- Where do things go wrong or underperform?
- What are the main difficulties or blockers?
- What risks do they worry about (financial, social, technical)?
- What negative consequences do they want to avoid?
- What's keeping them awake at night in this area?
- What workarounds are they using today?
- What is stopping them adopting a better solution?

Common mistakes

- Generic statements without evidence
- Assuming pain rather than observing it
- Ignoring emotional or reputational impact

Customer Gains

Gains describe the outcomes and benefits the customer is seeking.

This includes:

- Required outcomes (must-haves)
- Expected outcomes (baseline expectations)
- Desired outcomes (meaningful improvements)
- Unexpected outcomes (additional value)

How to identify Gains

Focus on what "better" looks like from the customer's perspective.

Useful questions

- What would make this significantly better?
- What would save time, cost, or effort?
- What would a good outcome look like?
- What would make them switch from what they do today?
- What would increase confidence or reduce risk?
- What would make this easier to adopt?

- What would exceed expectations?
- How do they measure success or failure?

Common mistakes

- Jumping to features rather than outcomes
- Assuming benefits rather than validating them
- Focusing only on functional gains

Prioritisation

This is where most of the value comes from.

Step 1: Identify signals

Look for:

- Repetition across customers
- Clear consequences if unresolved
- Evidence of workarounds
- Situations where customers invest time or money

Step 2: Reduce to a small set

For each category:

- Top 3 Jobs
- Top 3 Pains
- Top 3 Gains

If you cannot do this, your understanding is likely too broad or too shallow.

Step 3: Test strength

For each prioritised item:

- Is this based on direct evidence?
- Has it come up multiple times?
- Does it materially affect behaviour or decisions?

Step 4 — Use it

This should directly inform:

- What you build
- What you prioritise
- How you describe your product
- What you explore next in customer discovery

How to Use This Going Forward

This is not a one-time exercise.

Revisit and refine your understanding as you:

- Speak to more customers
- Test assumptions
- Observe behaviour

Over time, this should move from:

- Assumption → evidence
- Broad → specific
- Unclear → actionable

Final Note

The value of this work is not in completing the canvas.

It is in improving your understanding of the customer and using that to make better decisions.

Good luck!