



[00:00:04.65] Jake Cook is the co-founder and CEO of Tadpull, a software and services firm that helps middle market companies leverage data to grow their e-commerce businesses. Jake has also served as an adjunct professor of marketing, design thinking, and data analytics at Montana State University, the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, and the University of Montana. Jake introduced me to the 3 x 5 x 10 Interview Method.

[00:00:32.94] In this short interview, I asked Jake to explain what the method does and how it works. He gives some examples of how it can be used, and Jake offered some suggestions regarding some Dos and Don'ts.

[00:00:45.89] So, Jake tell me about the 3 x 5 x 10 method, and specifically, what problem does it solve? Why use it at all, and how does it work?

[00:00:58.98] So, the problem it solves is to try and get at the empathy part of why your product or solution will help a potential customer. And what I've found in my career is, it's very easy to sit at the whiteboard, or if you're into programming, you can write tons of code, and then you go out there and you introduce it. And you may spend months or even years building stuff that completely falls flat. And what you find by doing this method is you tell that customer upfront in as soon as possible.

[00:01:29.66] And the 3 x 5, it forces you...it's a 3 x 5 card, so you have a physical artifact. And going something that we live so much the world in digital media, so when you have to write something or sketch something, it helps cement some things. But having that physical artifact, on one side is your value proposition. So, this is what I think it's going to do for help. On the

backside is going to be who my customer is and what their persona, what they look like, if you will. And then the 10 part of the 3 x 5 x 10, the 10 part is you would talk to 10 people.

[00:02:02.61] And by doing this exercise, you save a tremendous amount of time and money and not waste your precious energy or resources on building something nobody wants, because you didn't actually talk to the market.

[00:02:15.16] One of the things I appreciate about the 3 x 5 physical card and the constraint that that gives is it forces one to focus a little bit more. When you have unlimited space, it's easy to blather on.

[00:02:31.94] Yeah. You can build the deck by PowerPoint, pitch deck, or write a big massive long marketing plan or product spec sheet or whatever. And then when you have to really sink, boil it down in the cement, fits in that kind of geography, it's really, really effective. That's why I have a stack to 3 x 5, because you may have to go through five or six of them to get it down into something you can actually fit on that size a piece of paper.

[00:02:59.03] And what's magic about 10 conversations?

[00:03:02.74] Great question. You know, you can get a couple people pretty easily. But when you get around eight to 10 people especially right around 10, you'll start to see the themes with your value proposition really start to emerge. So, if you have a weak proposition, by the time you get to eight or nine, if you're like, I don't know. I don't get it. Or I guess, maybe. Like, you know pretty quickly. If you're two or three, you can commence it, well, I just picked the wrong group, and they just didn't understand it. But at 10, the data's pretty clear that you either have something or you don't.

[00:03:38.16] And it's also a small number that you ask one person, do you know anybody else I can talk to, they can just you wanted two people. And you can knock down 10 pretty quick in a week or two.

[00:03:48.90] So give me an example of how the 3 x 5 x 10 method has been applied and what was learned in the process?

[00:03:59.19] So I'll talk a little bit about what we did at Tadpull, our company, and how we did that. And then I'm going to use another example, like Dropbox and how some if you're building Dropbox might use it. So let's start with Dropbox, because that's something everybody understands. I always think that people have aspirations and afflictions. So, what are they aspiring to do? So in the case of Dropbox, you might be just trying to have a way where you can get all your files in one place on any device. That's an aspiration.

[00:04:25.55] An affliction might be you're poorly organized, or you struggle to archive, digital media in an effective way or whatever. And so by asking the aspirations and afflictions as you go through that, it can be really, really, really powerful, because people know what they want,

but they can tell you the problem. So, it's like, hey, when you think about finals, what do you really wish you could do? And somebody's like, oh, my gosh. Well, I get tons of attachments, and I lose them, and then part of it's on my desktop, part of it's in the cloud, blah, blah, blah,

[00:04:57.71] So that's just to say I wanted to do cloud storage. But they're saying, I want to be able to have my files at my fingertips. Afflictions can be, it's really hard to share stuff when we get out of order.

[00:05:08.08] I shared a file, and they looked at the wrong file, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So they're kind of hinting at that. And when you do 10 of these, you start to see that maybe everybody really struggles to archive their files. From that little insight, you can start to build a marketing campaign, and you can build the whole onboarding experience around this very specific value proposition, knowing that you've talked to 10 people, and they all are in that bullseye for what that looks like. So I think Dropbox is kind of a good one.

[00:05:33.29] At Tadpull, we build a lot of software for e-commerce managers, people that work with lots of data all over the place. And what we noticed is, when we went on site, we'd sit there, and we'd interview them. We'd say, this is kind of weird, but can we just look at your laptop for a second-- your desktop? Walk us through.

[00:05:51.49] You come into the office; you pour a cup of coffee. What does your morning look like? They're like, oh, well, I open up Mailchimp, and Google Analytics, and my email. And they have 14 tabs open.

[00:06:01.18] And the insight that taught us was, they're trying to look at all these different websites and all this different data, and then they tend to get overwhelmed. They don't see correlations between, something over here is happening with Facebook ads and their email. And so they're missing some of these pieces.

[00:06:14.54] And so, that simple insight led to the whole value proposition of, hey, we're going to suck all your data into one place, and it's one place you go check it every morning when you get your coffee. And from that, you'll know how to start your day and if you're on track to get your campaign goals. And then, hopefully, you're on track to get that promotion, because you're executing off the data against what your manager or the owner wants done.

[00:06:36.35] And what does actually having that three-by-five card do to make that process of empathizing with your customer better. What about the three-by-five process really enhances or enforces just maybe normal good listening?

[00:07:04.35] Yeah, this gets into the dos and don'ts with this method. And I think, especially if you're building something new, you're so excited about it. It's your vision, your idea. You know?

[00:07:13.71] And you get in there, and someone doesn't get it. Well, that sucks. Or maybe it insults you. It's something you created, and you're insulted. It can come across as an insult a little bit.

[00:07:29.74] And so, when you think about it, the three-by-five method is all about being a scientist. I'm going to go run 10 experiments and just collect the data. And the big thing is, I'm not going to sell. I'm just here to get the data.

[00:07:38.71] And if they say, oh, why would I ever put my files in the cloud? It's not safe. It's not secure. Blah, blah, blah.

[00:07:45.52] Well, then you know that up front. But you've got to go in there and collect the data like the scientists would. Here's the value proposition. Here's the customer. Let's see what they say over 10 experiments.

[00:08:00.08] And sometimes, it's just shifting the value prop or it's just shifting the customer base. And so you may be in the ballpark. But market, value prop-- making those things align gives you some feedback on those two lovers.

[00:08:13.00] So what I hear as a to-do is, treat it like a series of experiments rather than pitches.

[00:08:23.81] Yes. And scientists have a great name for failure. They just call it data. It's when you're just running a bunch of experiments and you're just collecting data on it.

[00:08:35.04] And wouldn't you want to know before you write a line of code or you take a small business loan out if you've got something and what you need to tweak? It's very easy to quickly iterate, pivot, and make adjustments. You're out the cost of a couple three-by-five notecards and some time. And that's way, way, way, way, way better.

[00:08:52.71] And the other part is, if you get the end of the experiment, and there's just nothing there, you can abandon the whole thing. Versus when you go down the road of writing code, or taking loans, or starting a business, or whatever, again, the act of creation is really fun, but the act of going through the pain and suffering of building something nobody wants, that's way, way worse than how much fun it is to build it. So a little bit of time up front is really valuable.

[00:09:17.59] And then the other thing I'd add is, you're never quite done. Because markets are dynamic. They're moving. Customer behavior is changing. Revisiting this as you go through is really important too, once a year or something like that, especially as you think about new service offerings or new things you might roll out.

[00:09:35.25] So have you seen any things to avoid in particular when using a technique like this to get consumer insights? Are there some common mistakes that people should watch out for?

[00:09:51.78] I think the value proposition thing is really important. And that's hard. It's a hard thing to boil something down. That's why you have to get it on that small piece of paper.

[00:09:59.54] But be really thinking through that. And I guess the other part is, if you make it through three or four, and your proposition is way off, it's OK to scrap it and start over and kind of tighten it up a little bit. That somewhere where people get a little bit murky.

[00:10:13.41] You might open a brewery, for example, and I'm going to serve sushi. Well, do people want sushi and cold beer? No, maybe they want ethnic different types of food or whatever. But you can go through and change some of that stuff.

[00:10:26.79] So think of that value proposition and being open just to shifting it. The people I've seen really crush this and do really well are the ones that are listening to that, and adapting, and testing, and going back and forth. And they'll hone in on that bullseye pretty quick.

[00:10:41.22] I taught a lean startup graduate course for design students. It was a ton of fun. But you could see, in certain groups, there would be somebody where they would just shove down their idea.

[00:10:49.44] And every week, you could see these interviews coming in. And you're like, no, no, no. And then some groups were like, oh, we're going to collect data. OK, no, we're going to click this. Oh, no, it goes to a whole software app to collect data for scientists that do stream water quality management.

[00:11:04.11] And they started something way over here trying to do water ecology work. But they would pivot every week and then come back and forth. And it was really eye-opening watching that mindset and what it did for the results.

[00:11:14.84] So what I'm hearing you say is, treat it like experiments to generate data, but also pay attention to what the data is telling you and adapt.

[00:11:24.80] Exactly, and being open to that. It's opening. There's that super famous quote Steve Jobs said.

[00:11:33.26] Excuse me. It wasn't Steve Jobs. It was Henry Ford that said, "if I would have asked people what they wanted, they would've said a faster horse," right? And people say, that's why you don't talk to the market. You should just be out there.

[00:11:42.13] And the brilliance of Steve Jobs in inventing the iPhone-- first of all, most of us aren't Steve Jobs. And second of all, people wanted to go faster more efficiently. So there's things there that Henry Ford obviously tapped into and built some amazing technology at the time. But the thing is listening and adapting off that, and then coming back to some very core--

[00:12:02.39] People want things easier. They want to achieve their dreams. They want aspirations and afflictions, really.

[00:12:08.54] And so, when you kind of anchor off that-- and in my career I've been wrong way more than right on that stuff. And so honing in on that empathy piece, it just makes everything in your business model go easier-- lower customer acquisition cost, it's easier to get customers on board, it's easier to keep customers when you kind of hone in off that piece of it.

[00:12:30.33] In summary, use the three-by-five-by-10 interview method to test your assumptions about your target audience and value proposition more quickly and inexpensively. Go out and collect data like a scientist. Pay attention to the feedback you receive and adapt. What questions do you have about how to make the three-by-five-by-10 method work for you and your business?