

A GUIDE TO CONDUCTING AND ANALYSING INTERVIEWS WITH SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS



In this document you will find a set of interview questions, and a guide to conducting the interviews and analysing the findings.

The questionnaire for business owners is divided into five sections:

1. Overview Questions / Foundation Questions
2. Financing / Sales Oriented Questions
3. Marketing Oriented Questions
4. Training and Consulting Questions
5. Concluding Questions

This guide will go through the key idea behind each section and how to briefly analyse each.

1. Overview Questions / Foundation:

This section is intended to get to know the business owner and his/her operations. The focus here is on some of the key success factors in getting the business going and the types of support that they received. *(HINT: business owners LOVE to talk about their business “baby” so get as excited as they do about their business and what they have accomplish!).*

In analysing this section, your focus should be trying to list out the key success factors, which and what type of organisation(s) with helpful in providing information to the owner in starting and running the business and what the

be trying to list out the key success factors, which and what type of organisation(s) with helpful in providing information to the owner in starting and running the business and what the barriers and difficulties have been in starting the business. At the end of all the interviews you will find a number of common answers across those that you have interviewed in each of these areas – the more frequent an answer is, the more important is what has been said.

2. Financing / Sales Oriented Questions:

This section is intended to understand the types of financing that were used to start the business and then maintain the business. In analysing this section, you should be focusing in on the various types of financing that have been used by the owner and its impact on the business. *(HINT: sometimes you may hear financial terms that you are uncertain about; feel free to ask for clarifications about these).*

Each respondent will likely have utilised a number of different sources of finance relevant to this/her business so do not worry if you do not see the types of common answers that you heard in the first section. At the end of all the interviews you will be able to get a sense of how important certain types of financing arrangements are to start and maintain those interviewed.

3. Marketing Oriented Questions:

This section is intended to understand the customer base of the business and the ways in which the company markets itself and decided on where to locate its operations. *(HINT: ask to see some marketing / promotion materials for the business and/or browse their website before or during the interview with the owner).*

In analysing this section, you will find that each business is going to have a unique set of customers and tools that have used to market / promote the business. There will be a focus made on the decision of where to locate the business and you should try to find common elements used by those that you have interviewed in making this decision.

4. Training and Consulting Questions:

This section is intended to understand the various types of training and consulting that have been utilised by the business and the types of organizations that have helped aid the development of the business and its employees. *(HINT: sometimes business owners may feel 'embarrassed' to admit that they had others help them so try to put them at ease in this section).*

In analysing this section, there may be some of your respondents who have simply "gone alone" and not utilised any training or consulting advice; feel free to 'prompt' them in such situations (i.e., "really, you have done any training needed yourself?"). In analysing this section try to look for frequently named organizations that may have assisted the business owners in these issues.

5. Concluding Questions:

This section is intended to gain a bit of insight into some of the lessons learned by the owner in starting and maintaining his/her business and what they would differently if they started again. *(HINT: like in section 1 of the questionnaire, owners LOVE to talk about their 'baby' so get excited and learn from their experiences – the more you learn the more others will learn!).*

In analysing this section, there will be a wide variety of suggestions put forward and feel free to prompt for more ideas. Try to look for common ideas expressed by the respondents or look for common themes that are coming through in what they are saying.



QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS WITH OWNERS OF SMALL BUSINESSES.



Overview Questions / Foundation:

1. Is this your first business?
How long has it been operating?
How many businesses have you started so far?
How many are still in operation?

2. What was the impetus for your first business
(Education? Work experience? Opportunity?)
Was this the same for any other businesses?

3. Did you partner with anybody in this
business?
If yes, what expertise did they have that made
the business stronger?

IF APPLICABLE: For other businesses did you
have a partner and what expertise did they
bring? Does anyone else help you run the
business? Partner? Family member(s)? How
to they help?

4. What have been some of the key sources
of information or advice you have used (or are
currently using) to help run your business?
Government? Local NGOs? Other business-
people (mentors)?

5. What were the key obstacles to starting your
business? Bureaucracy? Competition? Finding
the correct workers? Money?

Overall, how easy would you say it is to start a
firm?

6. What kind of support should one expect from
the government (local, national) when starting a
business?

Financing / Sales Oriented Questions:

7. Did your business need a lot of start-up
financing?

What type of sources of financing have you
used? All self-financed? Banks? Government
loans? Government incentives (EU? Local?)
Venture Capital?

8. What type of financing do you use to keep
your business going? All self-financed?
Government? Banks?

9. Did you make any business assumptions
and targets when you created your original
business? (e.g., financial? Number of
customers to be reached?)

Did you reach these targets?

If exceeded, why? If lowered, why?

Marketing Oriented Questions:

10. Who are your customers? What area of the city / country do they come from? Approximately what percentage of your customers live in the area of your business? Do you have a regular customer base? How has your customer base evolved? Naturally (word of mouth)? Marketing? Etc.

11. Do you advertise your business? If yes, how? If no, why?

a. Do you use any traditional communication tools to help run your business? Newspaper? Flyers?

b. Do you use digital communication tools such as social media to run your business? If yes, what kind and how do they help?

12. How did you choose the location for your business? Is the location of your business, relevant for its success? Did you consider other locations and how did you settle on this one? Do you think your business is operating in a good location?

13. How has the physical location that you started your business been an advantage to you? A disadvantage?

Training and Consulting Questions:

14. Do or did you use any training or consultancy related to your business/businesses?

What type of training systems or consultancy have you used?

Were these financed by you or another entity (government)?

15. How helpful have local organizations such as NGOs / Chamber of Commerce / Local municipality been in helping you with your business?

(e.g., Acquiring money? Renovations? Supporting you? Etc.)?

Concluding Questions:

16. If you were to start your business again, what would you do differently?

What would you do the same or more of?

17. What local actions should be taken to encourage people to start their business?