

Value Proposition Design in 8 Steps

A Scientific Founder's Guide to
Creating Customer Value

UNDERSTAND

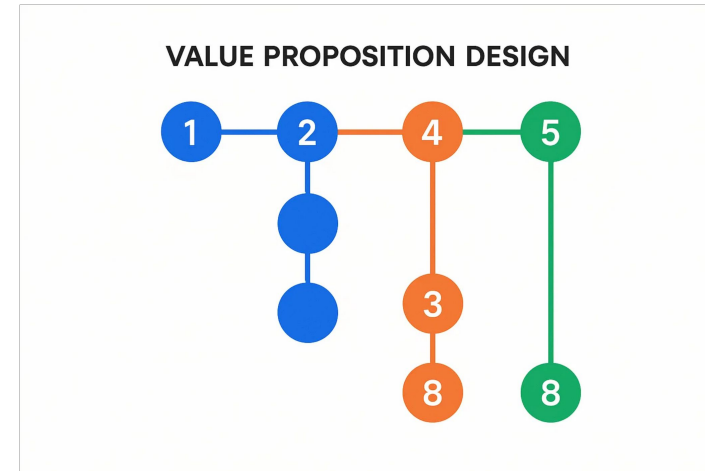


Introduction & Goal of the Process

What is a Value Proposition?

A value proposition is **more than a catchy tagline or feature list** ; it's the promise of benefits you deliver to customers. It connects to multiple parts of your business model, especially the Customer Segment and Value Proposition blocks of the Business Model Canvas.

Think of it as the bridge between your product idea and your customer's needs. What unique problem are you solving? How do you improve your customer's life or work? These are the questions a value proposition answers.



Field Insight

"Initially, you think your value proposition is the product's features – it's not. The value proposition changes with each stakeholder."

— Co-founder of MYNERVA (Medtech startup)

Pro Tip

Focus on outcomes, not outputs. Don't just list product features – explain what benefit the customer gets. If you can't answer "Why would a customer care about this?" for each aspect of your idea, refine it.

Why is a clear value proposition important for your startup?

What unique value does your idea provide to customers?

Step 1: Customer Understanding – Empathy Map

Step into Your Customer's Shoes

Who is your customer and what's their world like? In this step, you'll use an **Empathy Map** (a popular design thinking tool from IDEO/Stanford d.school) to capture key insights about your customer's mindset and context.

The empathy map isn't about your solution at all; it's about understanding your customers. The goal is to capture their reality before introducing your product. This empathetic perspective will later ensure your value proposition truly resonates.





Field Insight


"When it comes to a client's value proposition, do your homework first. Study your client before you even talk to them. Have a solid hypothesis, and don't be afraid to customize for each client in the beginning."

— Founder of Irmos

Pro Tip


Don't just assume – go find out! Even a handful of quick interviews or observations can enrich your empathy map. Listen to your target users describe their challenges in their own words. You might uncover surprising pains or desires.

 FEELS What emotions or worries does your customer have regarding this problem? <div style="border: 1px dashed gray; height: 60px; margin-top: 10px;"></div>	 THINKS What are they thinking deep down? What matters to them? <div style="border: 1px dashed gray; height: 60px; margin-top: 10px;"></div>
 SEES What do they observe in their environment? What trends or alternatives do they notice? <div style="border: 1px dashed gray; height: 60px; margin-top: 10px;"></div>	 DOES How are they currently behaving or coping with the problem? <div style="border: 1px dashed gray; height: 60px; margin-top: 10px;"></div>


 Target Customer:

Step 2: Customer Jobs, Pains & Gains


Building on Empathy: The Customer Profile

 **Jobs-to-be-Done:** What is the customer trying to accomplish? These can be functional tasks, social goals, or emotional needs. Think of it as the job they "hire" a product to perform.

Example: "Safely lift and move heavy boxes quickly" or "Prepare healthy dinner in under 30 minutes"

 **Pains:** What frustrates or prevents the customer from doing their job? What are the risks, obstacles, or negative outcomes?

Example: "Frequent back pain and injury risk from lifting" or "Meal planning takes too long after work"

 **Gains:** What positive outcomes does the customer want? How do they measure success or delight?

Example: "No back injuries and feeling energetic at end of day" or "Dinners are healthy and kids love them"

Field Insight

"During early brainstorming, I found the Business Model Canvas and Jobs-to-be-Done very useful – they help you focus on the key areas and see where you still need work."

— Co-founder of MYNERVA

Jobs

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Pains

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Gains

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Prioritization Question:

Which single pain, if solved, would make your customer most likely to choose your solution?

Step 3: Our Solution – Products & Services

Turning to Your Side of the Equation

Now it's time to outline **what you are offering** – your product(s) or service(s) – and link each one to the customer needs identified. List the core components that make up your solution and ensure each addresses a specific customer job, pain, or gain from the previous steps.

For each feature, consider: **Which customer job/pain/gain does this correspond to?** This ensures every part of your solution is purposeful. Try articulating each element with the phrase "which helps the customer to..."

For instance:

Automated scheduling feature – helps the customer book meetings 10x faster (addresses the 'time-saving' gain)

Back-support mechanism – helps the customer lift safely (addresses the 'back pain' pain point)

Field Insight

"Our first product is a back-support exoskeleton for people who do a lot of lifting, to reduce strain on the back. We tested very early prototypes, and workers immediately told us, 'This is more comfortable for me.'"

— Founder of Auxivo AG

Pro Tip

Solution Mapping Template

Links to customer:

Links to customer:

Links to customer:

[+ Add Another Feature](#)

Step 4: Pain Relievers & Gain Creators

Detailing Your Value

This step goes deeper into the value your solution provides. For each major pain your customer has, describe the **Pain Reliever** your solution offers – how you solve or mitigate that pain. Likewise, for each major gain your customer wants, describe the **Gain Creator** – how you enable or enhance that positive outcome.

Essentially, you're translating your solution's features into specific customer benefits. This completes the Value Map side of your Value Proposition Canvas, showing exactly how your solution addresses customer needs.

Field Insight

"For the payer – insurance companies – you always need to prove the health economic assessment and show that with your solution they're going to save money. For the prescriber – the doctor – it's a combination of time savings and money earned within the same time frame."

— Co-founder of MYNERVA (Medtech startup)

Pro Tip

Prioritize quality over quantity. Focus on the top 3 pain relievers and gain creators that will truly differentiate your solution. For each one, be specific about how much pain is relieved or gain is created (e.g., "reduces processing time by 40%" rather than just "saves time").



Pain Relievers

How does your solution alleviate specific customer pains?

1 Top Pain Reliever

2 Second Pain Reliever

3 Third Pain Reliever



Gain Creators

How does your solution create or enhance customer gains?

1 Top Gain Creator

2 Second Gain Creator

3 Third Gain Creator

Step 5: Differentiation & Competition

Stand Out From The Competition

Now that you've defined your solution and its value, it's time to analyze how it **stands out from alternatives**. This step helps you articulate your unique position in the market and identify your competitive advantages.

Consider both direct competitors (similar solutions) and indirect competitors (different solutions to the same problem). Analyze them across key dimensions that matter to your customers. What makes your solution uniquely valuable? Where do you have an edge, and where might you be at a disadvantage?

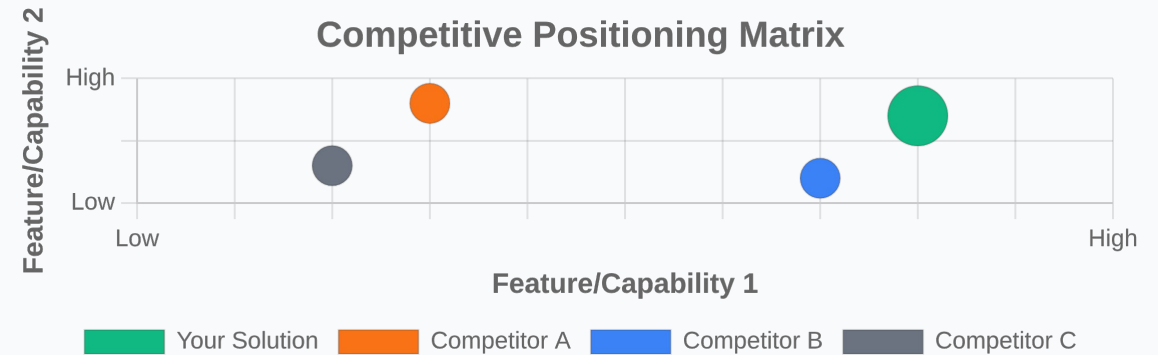
Field Insight

"The venture capital firms want to understand how is this a unicorn case? How will you disrupt the market? How is your advantage so big that it's worth taking the risk of investing into your company."

— Founder of Unbound Potential

Pro Tip

Don't try to be better than competitors on every dimension. Instead, identify 1-2 areas where you can truly excel and differentiate. Sometimes, being radically better in one dimension is more powerful than being slightly better in many.



Competitive Analysis

Feature/Dimension	Your Solution	Competitor 1	Competitor 2
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Key Feature 1

Key Feature 2

Key Feature 3

What is your unique competitive advantage?

Step 6: Value Proposition Statement

Crafting Your Value Proposition Statement

Now it's time to distill everything you've learned into a **clear, concise statement** that captures the unique value you offer to customers. This statement will become the foundation for your marketing, sales, and product development efforts.

A strong value proposition statement answers these key questions:

Who is your target customer?

What problem do you solve for them?

What makes your solution uniquely valuable?

Why should they choose you over alternatives?

Field Insight

"Your value proposition needs to be simple enough that anyone can understand it in 30 seconds, but specific enough that it doesn't sound like everyone else. It took us months to get this right."

— Founder of Auxivo AG

Pro Tip

Test your value proposition statement with real customers. If they respond with "So what?" or "How exactly?", your statement is too vague. If they say "I don't understand," it's too complex or jargon-filled. Refine until you get "That's exactly what I need!"

Value Proposition Statement

Fill in the blanks to craft your statement

For **[target customer]** who **[customer need/problem]** ,
our **[product/service name]** is a **[product category]** that
[key benefit/solution] . Unlike
[main competitor/alternative] , our product
[key differentiation] .

Example:

"For warehouse workers who suffer from back pain due to repetitive lifting, our LiftAssist exoskeleton is a wearable support device that reduces spinal compression by 40%. Unlike traditional back braces, our product adapts to each worker's movements while allowing full range of motion."

Elevator Pitch Version (30 seconds):

Step 7: Test Plan & Commitment

Validate Before You Build

Before investing significant resources into your solution, it's crucial to **validate your key assumptions**. This step helps you create a structured plan to test whether your value proposition truly resonates with customers.

For each critical assumption in your value proposition, design a specific test that will provide clear evidence. Define what metrics will indicate success and set deadlines for completing each test. This creates accountability and prevents analysis paralysis.

Remember that validation is not about proving yourself right—it's about **learning quickly** whether your assumptions are correct before committing more resources.

Field Insight

"We did a lot of customer interviews before building anything. We asked them to rank their pain points, and we were surprised that what we thought was their biggest problem wasn't even in their top three. That completely changed our approach."

— Founder of Irmos

Pro Tip

Start with the riskiest assumptions first. Design "minimum viable tests" that can

Key Assumption	Test Method	Success Metric	Deadline
+ Add Another Test			

Team Commitment

What specific actions will you take in the next week to start validating your value proposition?

Let's Bring Your Idea to Life

Your journey from scientific discovery to startup success
starts now

