Talk to their customers first

A short guide for learning the words customers really use, and for keeping every promise honest. Use it before you write a single line of copy.

Why we do this

- Customers do not describe a business the way the owner does. The words they use are the words they type into Google and say to ChatGPT.
- Copy written in their language is clearer, easier to trust, and matches the searches we plan to rank for.
- Real conversations stop us from guessing, and from promising things no one can honestly promise.

Who to talk to

- 3 to 10 recent customers, including at least one who nearly chose a competitor.
- The client's own customers. Ask the client to introduce you; no panel is needed.
- Someone who found the business through Google or AI search, if possible.

Ground rules

1. Listen more than you talk. Aim for 80 percent listening.
2. Do not pitch. Do not promise results, rankings or dates.
3. Ask open questions: "tell me about the last time you..."
4. Write down the exact words. Do not clean them up.
5. Ask permission before you quote anyone, and keep names private unless they agree.
6. Thank them. Keep it to 15 to 20 minutes.

Before you call

- ☐ Client business name: _____
- ☐ Customer first name or initials: _____
- ☐ Date and how we met (phone, video, in person): _____
- ☐ Permission to quote them? Yes No _____

Interview script

15 to 20 minutes. Start with the opener, then ask each question and write what they say in their own words.

Opener: "Thank you for talking with me. I am not selling anything. I am helping [business] write a clearer website, and I want to learn how you really think and talk about this. There are no wrong answers. Is it okay if I take notes?"

1 **What were you looking for when you first started searching?**

2 **What words did you type or say? What did you search?**

3 **What almost stopped you from calling or buying?**

4 **Who else did you look at, and what made you choose this business?**

5 **What was the moment you decided?**

6 **How would you describe this business to a friend?**

7 **What was frustrating about other options?**

8 **What would you want to know before calling next time?**

Language capture sheet

Copy the exact words people used. After every interview, mark where each phrase could go: headline, button, service name, FAQ or review request.

Their exact words	Where it goes

Words we should NOT use (jargon the customer never said)

Promise check

Before any claim goes on a page, check it here. If we cannot prove it, we do not publish it.

We can promise

+ The scope, price and timeline, in writing.
+ Speed, mobile and usability tests, with results.
+ Copy written from real customer words.
+ Honest reports, even when numbers are not good.
+ You own every file, domain and account.

We cannot promise

x A ranking on Google or a place in AI answers.
x A set number of leads, calls or sales.
x Results by a fixed date.
x Anything we cannot prove.

Claims we want to make

Claim	Proof we have (review, number, date)	Safe? Y / N

After the interviews: the top 3 patterns we heard