

Job Stories

The idea of job stories can be traced back as early as 1969, when Harvard Business School professor Theodore Levitt quoted a marketing man saying "*People don't want to buy a quarter-inch drill. They want a quarter-inch hole!*" in his book *The Marketing Mode*. In 2006, Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen shaped the method of designing products that do a job rather than filling a product segment. He described the attempts of a major fast food chain to improve their milkshake sales and compared the different approaches of market segmentation and design research.

On the one side, the marketing department profiled the demographic and personality characteristics of frequent milkshake buyers, invited a suitable test group and asked them if they wanted their shakes to be more cheap, healthy, sweet, milky or chunky. Although they got clear results, the "improved" milkshakes showed no increased sales.

On the other side, a design researcher spent a day in a restaurant and observed the people buying milkshakes: When did they come in? What else were they buying? Did they come by car? Were they alone? He realized that most customers bought milkshakes in the early morning, they came alone, bought nothing else and consumed their shakes in their cars. In the next step, the researcher interviewed milkshake customers as they left the restaurant to figure out which job the drink did for them. He learned that many of the customers faced a long commute to work and needed something to entertain them during the drive. Although they weren't hungry in the morning, they knew they'd be at the end of the ride and needed something to keep them full until noon. A milkshake did this job better than other food sorts - bagels were too dry or made their fingers sticky, a banana didn't last long enough. The food chain's milkshakes with their thin straws and thick fluid lasted for a long time of the commute and the customers didn't feel hungry by 10 am. [The company could now improve the product to do these jobs even better.](#)

Not many companies are aware of the "jobs" their customers use the products for, though. Economist Peter Drucker put it straightforward in his 2010 book [The Strategic Drucker](#): "*The customer rarely buys what the business thinks it sells him.*"

Read More:

An interview with Clayton Christensen on Jobs to be Done: <https://hbr.org/ideacast/2016/12/the-jobs-to-be-done-theory-of-innovation>

Clayton M. ChristensenTaddy HallKaren DillonDavid S. Duncan: "Know Your Customers' 'Jobs to Be Done'" > <https://hbr.org/2016/09/know-your-customers-jobs-to-be-done>

Alan Klement: "Replacing The User Story With The Job Story" > <https://jtbd.info/replacing-the-user-story-with-the-job-story-af7cdee10c27#.k48v7qk92>