

Empathy maps: getting inside the heads of your audience



What is an empathy map and why create one?

As a communicator, you know what your charity wants to say. But do you know what your audience needs and wants to hear, and how?

Empathy maps are tools to build a broader understanding of users, donors and supporters, and their motivation for interacting with your charity. They shift the focus from what your charity is trying to achieve (e.g. raise money) to what your donor is trying to achieve (e.g. feel their donation is having an impact).

Empathy maps:



Draw on data: your existing customer data; focus groups; external research etc.



Explore categories such as: feelings; tasks; influences; pain points; and goals.



Can be used as a foundation for audience personas, giving you an idea of a typical donor, supporter or service user.

In practice, an empathy map is a simple, easy-to-digest visual that captures knowledge about a user's behaviors and attitudes. Empathy mapping is a simple workshop activity that can be done with stakeholders, marketing and sales, product development, or creative teams to build empathy for end users. The exercise of creating the map helps participants consider things from the user's perspective along with his or her goals and challenges.



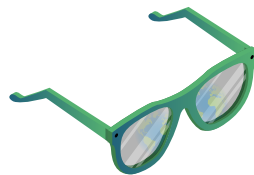
Step 1: Establish Focus and Goals

Who's the person the map is based on?

This is the user who you want to understand and empathise with. Summarise their situation and role. If you have multiple personas, each one will need their own map.

What is the desired outcome?

This is what you hope the user will do. For example, decide to donate to your charity. While the exercise is about building empathy and not selling, answering this question helps focus participants and set context for the activity.



Step 2: Capture the Outside World

What do they SEE?

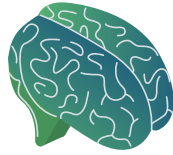
What are they encountering in their daily experiences? These could be people, their activities, or things. What are the people around them doing? What are they watching, reading, and exposed to in their environment that could influence them? Look at your competition. Remember this is their world, not yours, so don't assume that your charity is commanding their attention.

What do they DO and SAY?

What are their behaviors and how do they conduct themselves? What is their attitude and what do they say? This may change depending on where they are or who they are with. Attitude can be actions towards others or how they convey something. If applicable, note how their behaviour has changed recently or changes in a public versus private setting.

What do they HEAR?

What is the user hearing and how is it influencing them? Consider personal connections with family, friends, and coworkers along with what is being said in the media by bloggers, social media influencers, and experts in fields. Focus on things that impact her thinking—not superfluous information streams. Home in on the people, things, or places that influence how the user acts.



Step 3: Explore Inside the Mind

After completing the outside elements, the focus moves inside the mind to explore the thoughts and feelings that are internal to the user and not observable. These might be inferred, guessed, or captured in direct quotes during research. This is the central point of the exercise, as teams imagine what it is like to be in someone else's head.

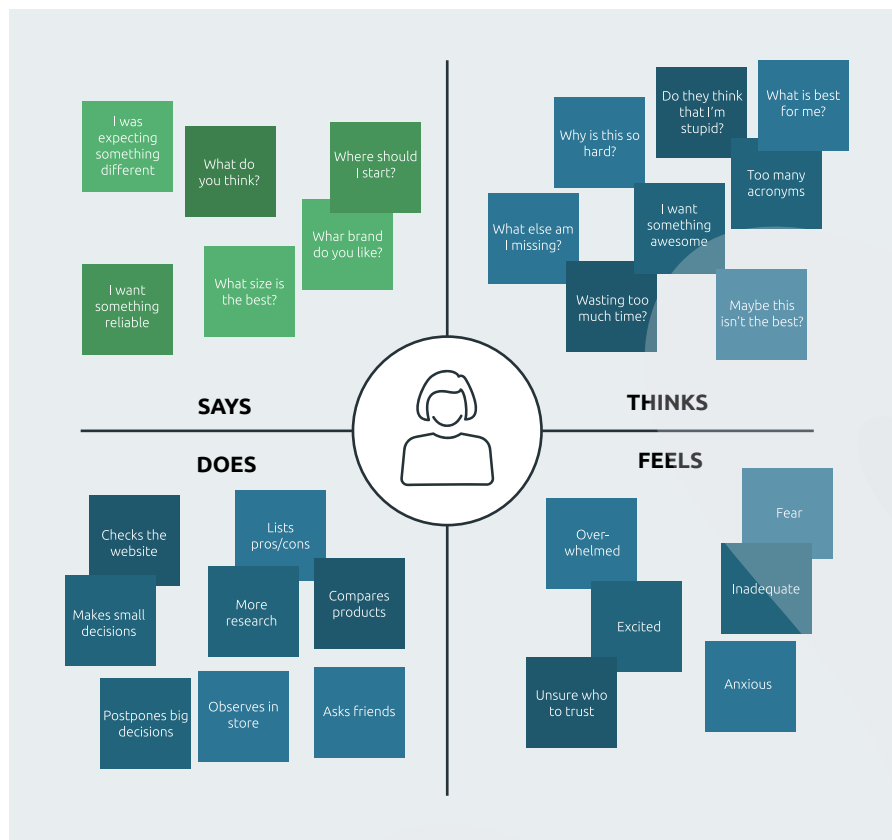
What do they THINK and FEEL?

Consider positive and negative sides of thoughts. What makes them feel good or bad? What do they worry about or what keeps them up at night? Their mind is exploring paths and possibilities as they consider doing or trying something.

How do they feel? Frightened? Excited? Anxious?

Next, explore the specifics of their pains and gains. Capture frustrations and challenges, the obstacles that stand in her way. What goals and dreams do they have? Gains are what they aspire to achieve or have.

EMPATHY MAP EXAMPLE





Step 4: Summarise and Share

When all the sections are complete, take a moment to reflect. Have participants share their thoughts on the experience. Ask how it changed their perspectives or if it produced new insights. Capture conclusions and ideas the team generated, take pictures, or create a new electronic version for sharing online. If you work in an office, hanging the original empathy map in a public area or creating designed poster versions is a great way to expose others in the organisation to the persona and encourage the customer-empathy mindset.

Here's a template to get you started:

Empathy Map Canvas

