4 b Barriers and competitors

Just because someone has the necessary characteristics or capabilities required to participate in a particular activity or service, doesn't mean they will. There are several other factors at play that may prevent someone from using a service, for example:

- Whether they feel sufficiently motivated to make the effort.
- What they perceive to be the benefits of participation– and whether these outweigh the costs.
- How easy it is to take part – and what barriers might prevent participation.
- What competing behaviours may get their attention instead.

This section sets out how to help identify the potential barriers to participation, and how they might create 'friction' along the user journey, reducing the likelihood of sign-up and participation. Having identified the key barriers, it is then possible to start to devise strategies to either remove them or help people overcome them.

Useful for:
- Identifying barriers that may prevent participation along the user journey.
- Develop mitigation strategies to reduce barriers to make it easier to participate to increase uptake.
- Reducing barriers to participation can also help make a service more inclusive.
- Identifying competitors which distract or divert potential participants away from the behaviours you would like them to exhibit.
- Developing counterarguments to common competing behaviours.

Barriers

How it works

Note: Link to a sample in mural also available as a mural template.

This activity considers what might prevent someone from moving along each stage of the user journey from interest, to sustained participation or use of a service. It's based on variation of the 'AIDA' marketing model – AIDCAS. (see image below).
AIDCAS stages are: Awareness, Interest, Desire, Confidence, Action & Sustain.

Barriers could include financial or non-financial costs, missing 'capabilities', or competing factors such as:
- Competing behaviours
- Competing benefits or motivations
- Personal influences
- 'Everyday life' getting in the way
- Wider social cultural, technological, economic, environmental, political, legal, or ethical forces.

Once identified, mitigating strategies to counteract each cost can be considered to help improve conversion rates along each step of the user journey. Alternatively, by honestly acknowledging barriers to participation, particularly those relating to user capabilities, we can be transparent as to who is best able to participate in the service, and who might be excluded.
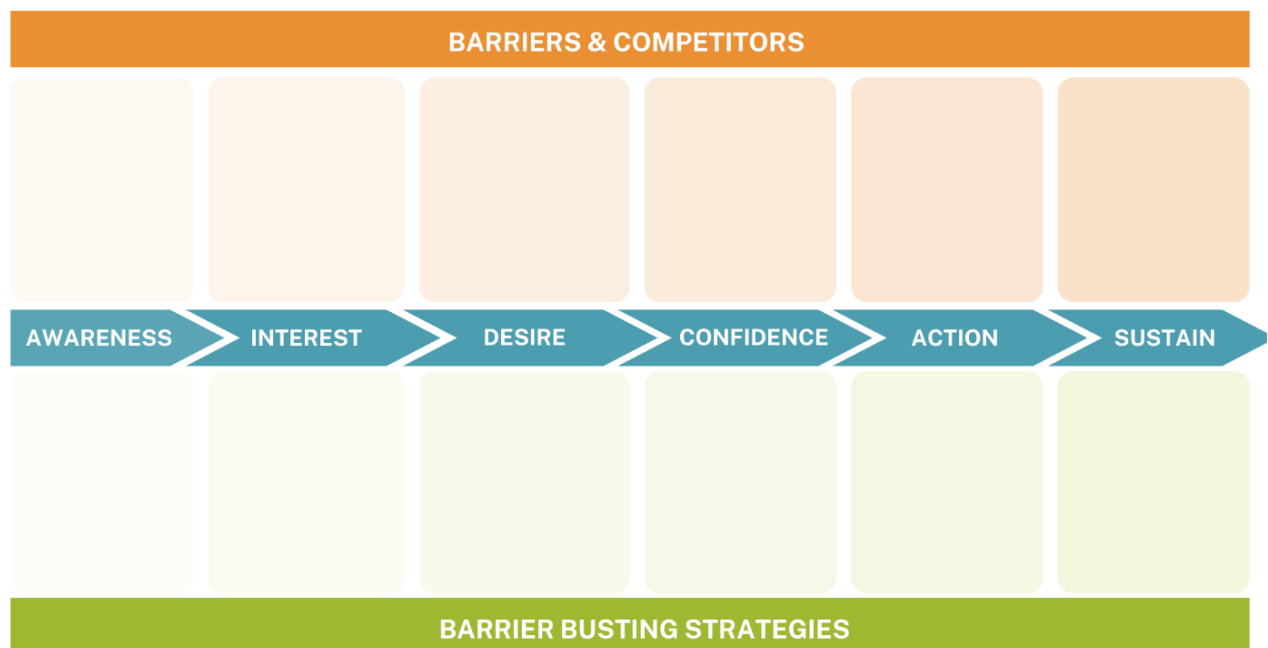
Competitors

A complementary technique is to consider the competitors to the desired behaviour you want your target audience to exhibit. What might they be doing instead? These may be:

- Competing behaviours
- Competing benefits or motivations
- Hassle factors
- Everyday life
- Personal influence
- Wider forces

Examples of competitors to retrofit:

1. Domestic audience

Competing behaviours:
- It can be easier to stick with what you know and what you are used to, e.g. hot radiators, gas boilers.
- Householders may find a 'quick win' action such as installing solar PV preferable to tackling fabric measures.

Competing benefits or motivation

- With limited spending power, other projects may win out e.g. a new kitchen or holiday.
- The opportunity to pay off a mortgage may be more attractive than taking out an additional loan or incurring debt.

Hassle factors
- Information is fragmented and there is a lack of clarity as to where to go for support, especially against a backdrop of rogue traders and scammers.
- Technical language can make it harder for people to understand and choose the right way forward.
- Carrying out retrofit measures can involve mess, inconvenience and upheaval.
- Dealing with multiple contractors can take time and patience.

Everyday life
- Addressing major retrofit measures needed to improve a home may be perceived as important but not sufficiently urgent in the face of other pressing domestic tasks.

Personal influence
- A single household may have a number of key decision makers all of whom need to buy-in.
- A householder may also receive conflicting advice from peers or others that that trust, such as the person servicing their gas boiler sounding sceptical about air source heat pumps.

Wider forces
- This could include a wide range of social, technical, environmental, economic, political, legal or ethical factors. For example: A householder's being unsure whether they should delay work in anticipation of the next generation plan existing technology, or a new technology (hydrogen boilers for example) or hold out for potential future government grants.

2. SME audience

Competing behaviours
- Addressing "energy" has a number of sustainability competitors – such as waste, water, transport, and nature-based solutions. There are several engaging environmental initiatives and as one of the more technical issues, energy can prove a less engaging focus of SMEs wishing to demonstrate their Corporate Social Responsibility credentials.
- Perceived quick-win activities: For example, senior management may favour a quick win such as installing solar PV over a more holistic energy reduction strategy which is less visible and can take more time and effort.

Competing benefits or motivations
- May feel limited capital may be better spent elsewhere – in particular, spending directly relating to core business.

Hassle factors
- Information is fragmented and there is a lack of clarity in the sustainability space as to where to go for support.
- The ambiguous and overlapping use of terms such as energy, carbon, sustainability and environment can also hinder a clear sense of the right actions to take, and needs addressing.
- Energy reduction measures can be disruptive to the core business. For example, a complete lighting upgrade in a large office environment needs logistical planning to give the contractors access. Even if the work is carried out when staff are not in the building, there is mess and disruption. Contractors will usually charge a premium for weekend working. If the electrics have to be turned off, that can disrupt programmes running on machinery out of

hours. It would be a similar story of disruption with other measures such as window replacement or internal wall insulation.

- Facilities managers speak about having trouble getting contractors to provide quotes and then finding the time to pour over the different quotes, which don't always reflect the specification they have issued.

Everyday life

- Addressing energy performance is usually a secondary task to other core business tasks which staff need to prioritise on their to do list.

Personal influence

- Resistance of a key decision maker or staff who then need to change their ways of working.

Wider forces

- This could include a wide range of social, technical, environmental, economic, political, legal or ethical factors.

What next?

Create time to take an 'equity pause' at regular intervals throughout the development of your service. Consider how it can become fairer in respect to its outcomes, process and treatment. How can you remove barriers to participation to make it more inclusive?