



CASE STUDY · A BICYCLE RETAILER IN THE FIRST COVID LOCKDOWN

Keeping up – and knowing who to turn to.

The shop was shut and the brochure had gone out. According to the owners, the stockroom was full and there were about two weeks left before the business was at risk. Within a week, four buyer interviews showed why customers came.

SECTOR

Bicycle retail with
a service workshop

MARKET

Rhineland, Germany;
consumers

METHOD

JTBD interviews,
Wheel of Progress

DURATION

8 days to the first
test
30 March–7 April
2020

The shop was shut.
The reasons to buy were not.

Background

A bicycle retailer with a service workshop in the Rhineland, Germany; seven staff. In the first Covid lockdown in March 2020, the shop had to close, two days after the spring brochure went out. According to the owners, it held over €1m in stock, the financing depended on ongoing income, and there was breathing space for about two weeks.

Approach

From 30 March 2020, the work ran as a sprint condensed into days: revenue by product group; the business model in emergency mode; four buyer interviews from 1 to 3 April; on 6 April, an ideation workshop with the retailer's team. On 7 April, work began on the three test cards.

Outcome

According to the owners, the threat to the business had passed within three weeks, and the stock was sold within eight to twelve weeks. From 20 April, bicycle shops were allowed to reopen – the measures and the reopening coincided. The finding from the interviews: buyers wanted to keep up without effort and chose a retailer nearby.



4

buyer interviews, 3 of
them with the retailer's
customers

8

days from kick-off to the first test

6

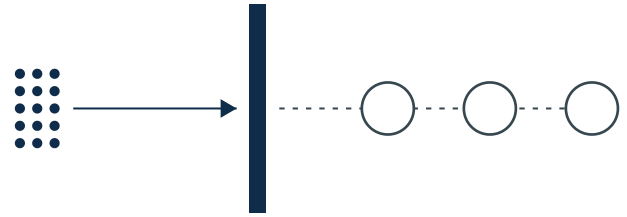
weeks ahead, the workshop was fully booked, according to the owners

CONTENTS	01	Background – Brochure out. Shop shut.	3
	02	The project – Eight days to the first test.	4
	03	Insight and what followed – Not a bike. A way to keep up.	5
	+	Key insight – They didn’t come by chance.	6
	04	Next step – The ideas came from the team. The direction came from the buyers.	7

All quotations are translated from German.

01

Brochure out. Shop shut.



For bicycle retailers, the season starts in spring. In 2020 the spring brochure went out two days before the first Covid lockdown. After that, the retailer's route to a sale was blocked: shop, advice, test ride.

around **110,000**
spring brochures, distributed two days
before the closure

over **€1m**
purchase value of the stock in the shop,
according to the owners

Company
**Bicycle retailer
with a service
workshop, Rhineland**

Size
seven staff

Management
**two brothers,
second generation**

Focus
**e-bikes, brand-name
bikes, servicing**

The challenge

Advertising followed a plan that the owner drew up in advance every year: a brochure and a newspaper advertisement placed through an agency. Sales happened in the shop – a needs assessment by the long-serving sales manager, then a test ride outside on the road. The website was, in the co-owner's words, 'more or less a web shop with no checkout'.

What was at stake

According to the owners, stock was about ten per cent above sales in the best year so far, the financing had to be serviced from ongoing income, and about two weeks remained before the business was at risk. Sales continued only in emergency mode, by appointment. The co-owner approached Oberwasser Consulting, with a goal of no more than ten days to the first operational change.

What the team brought with it

Test rides on the customer's own routes were already standard practice – 'give the customer the bike and ride the routes where they'll actually use it', as the owner put it. Open: why customers came here, and what of that could be shown without the shop.

'And that's what we call our spring brochure, to open the season. Naturally, we'd distributed it two days before the shutdown.'

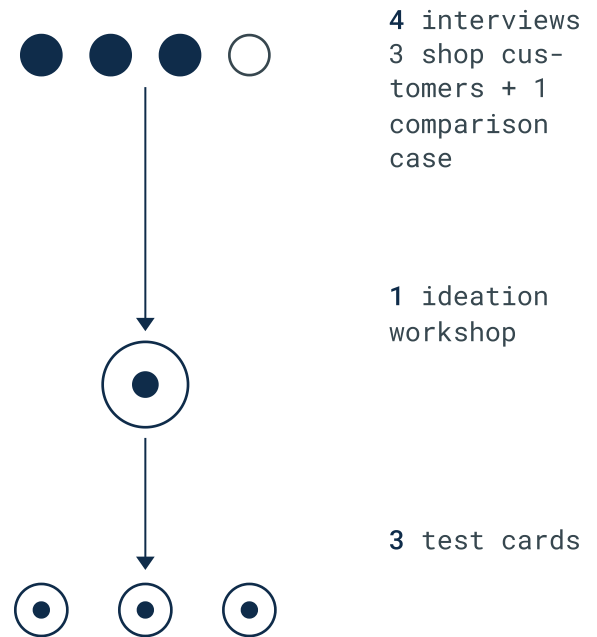
OWNER OF THE BICYCLE RETAILER

at the ideation workshop on 6 April 2020 (translated from German)

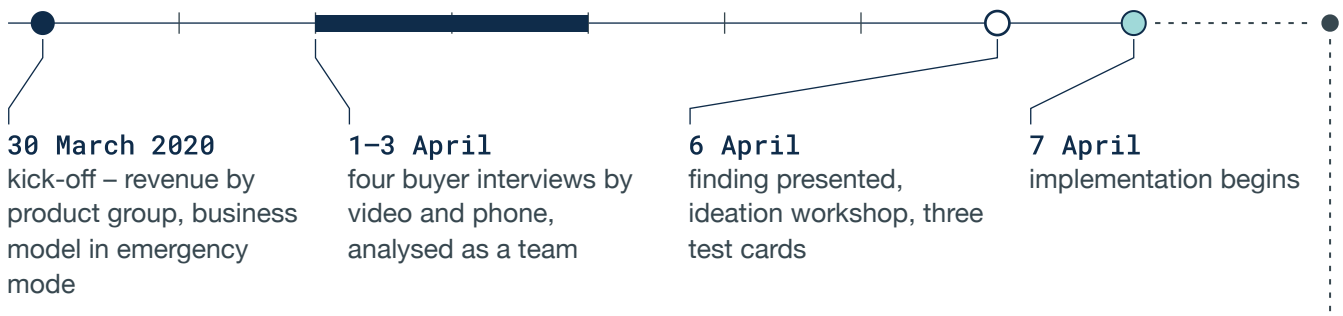
02

Eight days to the first test.

The format was called ‘Re-innovate to survive!’: a sprint in days rather than weeks. At kick-off, revenue was broken down by product group; e-bikes brought in the largest share, and the focus went there. The retailer’s team developed the ideas itself.



TIMELINE



Afterwards

According to the owners: after about a week, the workshop was booked up six weeks ahead; after three weeks, the threat to the business had passed; after eight to twelve weeks, the stock was sold. From 20 April, bicycle shops were allowed to reopen; the measures and the reopening coincided.

METHOD

The JTBD interview

It was based on in-depth Jobs to Be Done interviews using the Wheel of Progress framework: three with customers who had bought an e-bike from this retailer in the preceding months, and one with a mountain biker who had bought her bike elsewhere – as a comparison. A team of four analysed them.

The Wheel of Progress

The Wheel of Progress makes the forces at work measurable.

DEVELOPED IN 2019 BY ECKHART BÖHME AND PETER ROCHEL

03

Not a bike. A way to keep up.

All three shop customers described the same task: keeping up without effort – uphill, into the wind, with a partner or with the dogs. None of the three purchases had anything to do with Covid.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

According to the owners: workshop booked up six weeks ahead after about a week, threat to the business passed after three weeks, stock sold after eight to twelve weeks, including to friendly retailers. From 20 April 2020, bicycle shops could reopen. Whether, and how much, the measures contributed cannot be separated out.

WHAT THE THREE SHOP
CUSTOMERS DESCRIBED

Wanting to keep up without effort	●●● 3 of 3
Researched before the visit (manufacturer sites, directories, reviews, acquaintances)	●●● 3 of 3
Chose the retailer partly because it was nearby	●●● 3 of 3
Explicitly mentioned the workshop and later servicing	●●○ 2 of 3
Attentive advice tipped the balance	●●○ 2 of 3
Purchase had something to do with Covid	○○○ 0 of 3

BUYER WITH DOGS

‘Without an e-bike, no chance at all.’

Came into the workshop with a broken bike. Found the retailer through the manufacturer's dealer directory and good reviews.

BUYER, BIKE FOR HIS WIFE

‘[...] to keep up, to switch the motor on now and then.’

Retailer nearby. The sales conversation tipped the balance.

COUPLE, E-BIKE PURCHASE

‘[...] every obstacle, really, with a smile.’

Retailer nearby, with an eye to servicing later on. The advice tipped the balance.

COMPARISON CASE

Mountain biker: wanted fun and better skills; bought elsewhere, without a test ride.

BEFORE, AND THE THREE TEST CARDS OF 6 APRIL · NO MEASUREMENTS PER TEST CARD

Before	Test card
spring brochure and newspaper advertisement on an annual plan	a call to the local radio station with an offer for commuters. Criterion: agreement to run a piece within 14 days
test rides from the shop, outside on the road	test rides at the customer's home, offered on the website, with a note to manufacturers for their dealer directories. Criterion: ten test rides booked within seven days
advice only in the shop	questions and answers with a checklist on the website, plus the boss's phone number. Criterion: at least three calls in the first week

KEY INSIGHT

They didn't come by chance.

At the ideation workshop, the owner asked whether these customers had come into the shop by chance. The interviews showed otherwise: all three had done their research beforehand – manufacturer sites, dealer directories, reviews or acquaintances. They chose a retailer nearby, two of them explicitly with an eye to servicing later. Both could be shown even with the door shut.



3 of 3: researched beforehand



3 of 3: proximity mattered



2 of 3: explicitly mentioned the workshop and servicing

WHAT THE OWNER ASKED

Chance?

WHAT THE BUYERS DESCRIBED

research beforehand, a retailer nearby, two with an eye to servicing later

‘So, by implication, that means it was basically chance that they came into the shop here, because we hadn't got the message across beforehand that we're a good service partner. Or how should I read that?’

OWNER OF THE BICYCLE RETAILER

at the ideation workshop on 6 April 2020, after the interviews were presented (translated from German)

IN THEIR WORDS

‘[...] someone who can also give us a certain level of service later on. Because these e-bikes do need servicing after a while.’

E-BIKE BUYER

on choosing the retailer (translated from German)

04

The ideas came from the team. The direction came from the buyers.

Here it was a closed shop. For you, it might be a sales channel falling away, a new competitor or a market on the turn: you know what you are good at – but not which of your strengths tips the balance for buyers.

Do you know whether your customers come to you by chance?

NEXT STEP

Why do your customers really buy?

The Buying-Reason Finding: a real buyer, interviewed and checked against your assumptions. In this case, it was four interviews in a week. For you, it starts with a list of what you believe today – and one interview.

[VIEW THE BUYING-REASON FINDING](#)

oberwasser-consulting.de/en/buying-reason-finding

Need to know how your customers buy across the board? Then the Customer Insights Sprint is the direct route.

Prefer to find out more first? oberwasser-consulting.de/en/podcast – episodes with real cases, methods and results, many of them in German.

To pass on to others with a say: summary on page 2, key insight on page 6.



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