

# Discover Your Market: A Student Entrepreneur Project

Jennifer Gessner (EIX/University of St. Thomas)

**KEYWORDS:** High School Resources.

A free, classroom ready module that helps students explore customers, value, and early opportunity discovery.

**Adapted from the work of Jon Eckhardt, Ph.D., University of Wisconsin–Madison**

Discover Your Market builds on Jon Eckhardt's [original T-shirt entrepreneurship exercise for college classrooms](#) (<https://eixexchange.com/content/294-t-shirt-project-teaches-customer-discovery-to-fu>) to give students an approachable way to understand how entrepreneurs and marketing professionals explore markets, identify opportunities, and shape ideas through evidence. The project still begins with the familiar T-shirt example introduced in Eckhardt's college-level exercise, but the high school module has been expanded so educators can guide students through a wider range of entrepreneurial pathways -- including physical products, digital storefronts, and events or experiences.

Grounded in Jon Eckhardt's research on early-stage venture development and opportunity discovery, this module offers a clear structure for helping students practice the early behaviors entrepreneurs use to understand customers. The expanded high school version maintains fidelity to Eckhardt's core ideas about evidence-based decision making while allowing students to experience them through multiple formats that reflect real entrepreneurial practice.

## What Students Learn

Students develop foundational skills that support both entrepreneurship and marketing practice. They learn to identify and compare customer groups, articulate specific customer needs, create simple customer personas, form a value proposition rooted in evidence, and explain their insights in clear business language. These activities help students see how ideas become

opportunities through exploration rather than guesswork.

## What Is Included

### Educator Guide

A structured overview that supports the introduction of key concepts, classroom facilitation, and optional extensions. The guide includes pacing suggestions suitable for either a single class session or a short multi-day project.

### Student Packet

A set of worksheets and templates for segmentation, customer personas, value propositions, and reflections. Each page is designed to be intuitive and easy to use in both print and digital formats.

### Printable Worksheets

Clean, consistent templates that help students organize thinking and document their process in a way that mirrors real-world entrepreneurial practice.

## Why Educators Use This Module

This module reflects evidence-based insights from entrepreneurship research and gives students a meaningful introduction to how opportunities develop. Educators appreciate its clarity and adaptability, including the option to emphasize physical products, digital storefronts, or events and experiences depending on their students, time, and budget. It supports skill building through a relatable and low-pressure activity that fits naturally in business and marketing classrooms, entrepreneurship programs, advisory periods, career-focused courses, and interdisciplinary settings where creative problem solving is encouraged.

Students often find the activity engaging because it connects directly to everyday products and familiar choices. Educators note that it helps students move naturally from initial ideas to more thoughtful analysis rooted in customer understanding, whether they are imagining a product to make, a store to mock up, or an experience to market.

## How the Project Works

Students begin by selecting or imagining a simple idea to explore, often using the T-shirt example introduced in Jon Eckhardt's original exercise as the starting point. From there, they investigate who might value the idea, what those customers care about, and how the concept could evolve with new information. This progression helps students understand how opportunities take shape through exploration rather than assumption.

Teachers can guide students toward developing a basic product concept, creating a simple online presence, or promoting an event or cause, choosing the pathway that best fits their classroom. The core questions about audience, message, and value remain the same, while the format adjusts to local goals and constraints.

## Download the Materials

The full module is available free of charge and includes the educator guide, student packet, and printable worksheets. All materials are designed to support ease of use and thoughtful implementation in a wide range of classrooms. They can be downloaded from the links at the top of this article.

## About the Author

This module is adapted from the work of **Jon Eckhardt, Ph.D., Pyle Bascom Professor in Business Leadership at the Wisconsin School of Business**, whose research examines entrepreneurship, opportunity discovery, and the early actions that shape new ventures. The original T-shirt entrepreneur exercise developed in his work provides the foundation for this expanded high school module.