

How Well Do You Know Your Customer?

In his 1985 book, *Ogilvy on Advertising*, David Ogilvy famously said, “The consumer is not a moron; she is your wife.” Of course, he’d have a hard time getting away with that kind of comment today, but his point is still a valid one.

The truth is: Too many businesses think of their target market as one large, pulsing mass. But your target market is actually made up of individuals just like you, your wife, your husband, your mother, your father, or your children. Your customers are people with hopes, dreams, frustrations, families to feed, bills to pay, and vacations to plan. The most successful brands recognize this and look at their target market as a “Target of One.” So, how well do you know *your* target market ... your Target of One?

Can You Describe Your Customer in Detail?

Since a solid brand positioning begins first and foremost with understanding your target, the more intimately you know the core elements that make up a great target market statement, the better job you’ll do at building your brand and making it successful. How well do you know each of these elements of *your* target market?

Demographics. Former CBS president Howard Stringer once said, “We’re chasing our tails for 18- to 49-year-old idiots when 10,000 people are turning 50 every day.” The point is that your demographic changes periodically, and you should stay on top of those changes.

Psychographics. Pepsi targets an audience of “young thinkers.” That psychograph – that overarching mindset that leads to a target market’s perceptions and behaviors – is what has helped Pepsi differentiate itself and battle rival Coke in key markets.

Attitudes. What is your target market’s ‘attitude’ toward the category or industry you are in? Is their purchase decision a highly involved one or are your products the type customers don’t think about twice? Understanding this will make all the difference when it comes to changing that customer’s behavior.

Telling Behaviors. Let’s say your target market wants to help the environment. Does that mean they are careful to turn off light switches when they leave a room, or do they go all the way and install solar panels on their home? Do they use recyclable eco-bags when shopping at stores, or do they go the extra step and stop the car on a highway to pick up trash? The extent of these ‘telling behaviors’ will shed a lot more light on the psychograph of your audience.

Current Usage. If you don’t know which substitutes for your product your target market is using now – and how often – you don’t know what you’re up against. How often does your target switch between brands? Is their brand usage light or heavy? What brands are getting their attention, and which ones are keeping it?

Functional Needs. Who knew that we needed to carry around a contraption with 8,000 songs on it? Apple did, and it filled that functional need of its target market when it created the iPod.

Emotional Needs. Starbucks provides more than just a good cup of coffee. What makes Starbucks different is how it fills an *emotional* need for its target market by offering a place to relax and spend quality time with friends, check e-mail, and not be rushed out to make room for the next customer.

So, how well *do* you know your customer? Knowing your target market as well as you know yourself is fundamental to branding success. You’ve heard over and over the importance of building a relationship with your customers, and the best way you can do that is to think of them as individuals just like yourself. That’s how you develop a loyal customer for life.

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With an MBA from Harvard Business School, Brenda’s career has spanned more than two decades and has included developing mega brands for Procter & Gamble and Bristol-Myers Squibb across four continents and 50 countries. Now, as President of Brand Development Associates (BDA) International, she travels the world speaking, training, and coaching individuals and companies to greater success through creative, yet practical, corporate and personal brand development.

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