

Article: "Do you 'we' on potential customers?
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by Liz Craig

HEAD: Do you "we" on potential customers?

Ever been on a blind date with someone who chatters incessantly about himself or herself, never bothering to ask a question about YOU? As the unrelenting drone of "blah-blah-blah-me-me-me" anesthetizes your brain, you plot to escape out the bathroom window. You wonder if your date would notice.

It's amazing, but some advertisers act like that boorish blind date, using advertising communications that "we" on their prospects. In other words, they unintentionally turn off potential customers by focusing exclusively on themselves. For example:

"Here at Acme Corporation, Inc., the Midwest's largest widget manufacturing company, we produce 3.2 million widgets daily, and we ship them to more than 2,300 major customers across the nation with our fleet of 250 tractor-trailers.

"We have won more than 40 "Widgie"® awards from the Widget Association of America (WAA) for excellent safety records in our state-of-the-art production facility."

As a potential widget customer, all I hear is "we-we-we." What about "me-me-me?"

I'll do business with a company that offers me ways to solve a problem, save money, or find a better way to get something done -- not a company that just crows about how great they are. I'm thinking of buying widgets from Apogee Corporation. Their brochure says:

"You have a problem: leaky dolyflappers. We have the solution: Apogee customized widgets.

"Wouldn't it be great if you could eliminate the safety hazard of dolyflapper leaks on your plant floor and the time and labor costs of cleaning them up? Now you can, with Apogee customized widgets.

"Customers told us their number one headache is leaking dolyflappers. Those leaks occur because most widgets are manufactured to such wide tolerances that they can't possibly prevent leaks in every application. But Apogee widgets can, because they are custom-manufactured to your dolyflapper specifications..."

As a potential customer, I think, "Hey. Leaking dolyflappers IS my biggest headache. These folks really know my business. I'm calling Apogee!"

To reach new customers, communicate using less "we" and more "you." Be interested in learning about potential customers' challenges. Develop a dialogue with them, as you would with a fascinating blind date. Find a way to meet their challenges, and tell them about it in a compelling way. Now, that could be the start of something big!

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Identifying Your Target Audience

Focusing on a specific audience's needs and wants is critical.

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By Liz Craig

When you're in business, you're always looking for more business. And that means gaining more eyeballs or ears paying attention to your business. Major marketers know it's vital to aim your advertising at a carefully selected target audience – the people most likely to want what you have to offer. But how do you figure out who the target audience is? You'll probably need to approach it from several different angles.

Geographic

Is your business dependent on the patronage of people in a defined geographic area? Some stores ask for your ZIP code when you make a purchase. Not a bad way to figure out where most of your customers are coming from, so you can concentrate future advertising in those areas. Some advertising media, such as Val-Pak or neighborhood newspaper versions, can place your advertising in ZIP codes you specify.

Competitive

Are other companies in your business area offering the same products or services you do? If so, how can you encourage their customers to come and see about you? What is unique and superior about your business? If your answer is, "Nothing," then perhaps you should think of something – perhaps you emphasize superior customer service. Make sure yours is the very best around. Call it "Blue Ribbon Service," or another name that clicks and sticks in people's minds. Advertise it with specific examples. Use customer testimonials to back up your claim. If people feel they will be treated very well at your business, they may not mind going out of their way to find you.

Economic

Products and services such as designer clothing, luxury cars and financial planning generally interest people with more than average disposable income. Grocery coupons, tools, work clothing and discount furniture outlets are interesting to those who wish or need to spend less.

According to Maslow's hierarchy, only after the basics necessary to sustain life (air, water, food and shelter) have been secured can people turn their attention to acquiring more esoteric products. Try to determine the income levels and lifestyles of people who may need or want your products or services and create advertising messages that will appeal most strongly to their emotional and economic needs.

Demographics

Demography is a “30,000-foot view” of the population of your city, county, state or nation. It includes such objective data as age and gender. If your product or service is most appealing to males ages 18 to 30, but your service area includes 70 percent retirees, you’ll need to figure out a way to lure the younger group to come to you, or move to where they are.

Psychographics

Where demography looks at populations through a telescope, psychographics uses a microscope to examine subgroups and their attributes relating to personality, values, attitudes, interests, lifestyles, social class and behavior. A specific collection of these is called a psychographic profile.

Distinct psychographic profiles have labels such as “Young Achievers,” “Affluent Empty-Nesters,” and so on. Their descriptions are less focused on hard statistics than on the emotional, cultural and psychological motivations of various groups. Here’s an example of a psychographic profile:

“Affluent Empty-Nesters are age 58 or older with household incomes of \$100,000-plus. They are still working hard and very involved with their business. With the children out of the house, they have more free time and freedom to do what they want. They entertain at home, indulge in the latest video and audio products, and like to be seen as savvy about technology. And they like to keep in touch with family near and far. Pastimes include golf, fishing, going out to dine, shopping and traveling.”

Knowing the psychographic profile of your target audience can help you focus your advertising messages like a laser beam, instead of a floodlight. Of course, there are many products that are straightforward and don’t require much analysis of psychological motivations. But even for these, the psychographic approach can help you determine the type of signage, décor, advertising design and general “face” your business presents to the world.

Research

Before you start your advertising and marketing, it is wise to work with a research firm to find out if there is enough “top two boxes” (Definitely or probably would buy) interest in your product or service, among which groups, and what they would be willing to pay for it. Don’t just survey friends and relatives. They’ll all say your idea is wonderful. A professional market researcher can advise you of the best, most cost-effective method to use to get objective input (Typical methods are focus groups, phone interviews and Internet surveys). He or she will provide a summary of the research results and some

recommendations that will help you fine-tune your messaging, and maybe even the name and the packaging of your offering.

Armed with the research summary, a good copywriter can develop advertising messages that clearly address your target audience's needs and wants. A professional designer can make your ads and packaging look great to your prospective customers, and a savvy media person can place your advertising where your target audience will most likely see it and respond.

Take the time to do all the thinking and strategizing that provides a solid foundation for your messaging. Knowing your target audience and saying the things that are meaningful to them, in the right style, via the right media, can dramatically increase your chances of making your product or service a resounding success.

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