

Your Ideal Customer: The Foundation

Effective Marketing

Why you need a good understanding about your ideal customers?

Because understanding your targeted audiences or market segment allows you to focus on marketing strategies that bring more profits for least efforts. Your ideal customers are a good fit for your business offerings, and selling to them is easy because they are actually looking for solutions your business has.

Knowing your ideal customer also enables you to turn a blind eye on people who aren't a good fit. You don't have to waste your time in selling products or services to people who aren't truly interested in what you offer.

Your Ideal Customer:

Who are they, and how to speak directly to them

Let's face it: without marketing that works, you have no business. It is the effective marketing strategies that bring customers to your business, and put money in your bank account.

Understanding who you want to reach with your marketing will help every decision you make: the mediums you choose for your marketing messages, the words you use, and the design elements you implement.

What You'll Learn in This Guide

Obviously, you will learn how to identify your ideal customers. Finding your ideal market segment or highly targeted potential customers is the most crucial aspect in marketing that you will learn in this guide.

Because if you get your ideal customer wrong, you'll waste lots of efforts and resources in launching marketing campaigns that either attract the wrong group of people,

or don't attract anyone at all.

How to Use This Guide

First, read through the material once, from start to finish. Don't do the exercises at first: it's more important to understand the basic concepts for finding your ideal customer before you actually begin to identify them.

As you'll read, identifying your ideal customer happens in two stages.

If you already have customers and need to hone your marketing skills to attract more customers in your market segment, you can go directly to stage 2, the "fine tuning" stage. If you're just starting out, you'll need to begin with stage 1, the "educated guess" stage.

Either way, this guide includes all the tools, resources and guidance you need for identifying your ideal customers. Once you go through this guide, you'll face no problem in identifying the right customer base for your business. You'll be able to describe them in great detail, and this will make all your marketing decisions easier, and your efforts more effective. So, let's get started!

Start with the End in Mind

Why you need to focus on ideal customers even before starting your marketing efforts?

Irrespective of the complications in modern marketing techniques or strategies, you are supposed to communicate your company's offer to highly targeted prospective customers, whether it's a product or a service. Design and marketing decisions have to be made based on who you want to reach with your communications. Your marketing communication is an arrow, and your ideal customer is the target!

If you don't know who you're aiming for, your marketing efforts will misfire and be ineffective. When you truly

understand your market, you create valuable products and services that fulfill their needs. That means they'll sell well, and your business will grow.

Getting to Know You

John Jantsch, in *Duct Tape Marketing*, formulated the following aspects to find highly targeted potential customers in your market segment: (My observations are in parentheses.)

Physical description (Their gender, age group, income, employment status)

- + What they want (their needs right now)
- + Their problem (issues that make them desperate buyers – and solutions you offer)
- + How they buy (how and where they purchase: in person or online stores?)
- + Best way to communicate with them (what they read, watch, and listen to.)

= Ideal Prospect

Two Stages of Defining Your Ideal Customer

There are two stages to this process, and you'll want to keep them both in mind as you proceed.

Stage 1 is the “educated guess” stage, where you research and gather as much intelligence as you can about the potential customers you want to reach. You explore their lives, their challenges, what they admire, and where they gather. Based on this information, make educated guesses and form a vision of who they are and how you'll reach them.

Stage 2 is the “fine tuning” stage, where you adapt your ideal customer description to your real-life experiences with the actual customers. In this stage, you'll discover one of three things:

- You've attracted highly targeted potential

customers, exactly the customer group you were hoping for: hurray! Proceed as planned.

You've attracted a slightly different group. You have to adjust your ideal customer description to the actual customers you've attracted, and target your marketing efforts toward this group.

- You've attracted the wrong set of customers. They don't see any value in your offerings, they're impossible to work with, and they come and go too quickly. If this is happening, it means your marketing efforts are not streamlined to work for the group you wanted to reach. Take this as a sign that you need to overhaul your approach.

If you've been in business for a while, you might be able to go directly to the fine tuning stage. Look at your past customers and find traits they share. Learn as much as you can about the people you've already done business with by:

- Speaking directly to them: interview a “focus group” by phone and ask them about their needs
- Taking a few of your best customers out to coffee or lunch
- Inviting them to a brief online survey
- Look at your sales data to see if you find common business types (if you sell business-to-business) or types of people (if you sell business-to-consumer)

Focus on the customers who buy and repeat. Don't hesitate to shifting your focus away from those who aren't profitable.

Define Your Customer

Let's define this ideal customer of yours. It's time to use your imagination and some web research to find out the answers to the following questions:

Describe them: what is their gender, age group, income, employment status?

Describe their needs: based on the information you gathered, what are their needs right now?

Describe their current challenges: what problems or issues related to your business make them desperate buyers?

Describe how they shop: how do they prefer to buy goods or services related to your business?

Describe how you'll reach them: what media do they consume?

Where Can I Find This Information?

We're lucky to live in a time when doing research on your ideal customer is relatively easy. The tools below are low-tech, but should yield some interesting insights, and you might even find them fun.

Spend some time in a store that sells a wide collection of magazines, and take a good look at the magazines that target your market. If you can, buy a few to keep on hand. Read the letters to the editor and articles to see what you can learn from the topics they're addressing.

Search on Amazon to see what books are being written for your potential market. Read the descriptions, reviews and comments about the books. Some of the negative comments may mention what they require, and this is good information for you: **developing products to meet those needs will impart you with a competitive edge in the market.**

In order to streamline your online marketing plans or strategies, conduct some research to find out where your ideal customer hangs out online. What forums or social media sites they frequently visit? Spend some time on popular forums and social media sites to see what people are asking about and what they need to understand about your business.

These valuable real-world conversations will give you valuable insight into the problems or issues your potential customers face right now. <http://omgili.com/> and [http://](http://boardreader.com/)

boardreader.com/ are the two search engines that will help you in finding popular forums related to your business.

Don't hesitate in following links to any resources that people recommend on the forums you visit. This will show you where they're finding their information online. If you have existing customers, invite them to take an online survey. Some business owners even offer a free giveaway to encourage customer's participation and spend some money on Google Adwords ads to drive web traffic to their survey.

Resources:

You can visit <http://surveymonkey.com> to find some useful resources for creating your online surveys. If you need more information on how to create online surveys, you can visit <http://www.surveygizmo.com/survey-blog/category/know-how/>.

Use online keyword research tools to see what words your ideal customers use to find products or services related to your business. Effective marketing "speaks the language" of the market it targets. Familiarizing yourself with the words used in the search phrases will help you in optimizing the language you use in your marketing campaigns, whether it's in print or on the web.

If you need resources on search engine optimization and keyword research, you can visit <http://www.seobook.com/archives/001013.shtml> and <http://moz.com/beginners-guide-to-seo/keyword-research>.

Guess, and don't over-think.

In a nutshell, you are trying to make an educated guess about your prospective customers so that you can go after a highly targeted market... but the real magic begins once you start engaging your potential customers and actually produce goods or services for them. It's then — and only then — you get the real feedback that reveals whether your targeted market is viable or not.

Find a market that seems to have good potential, identify your ideal customers as clearly as you can, then start cranking out small offerings for them, and see if you get any tangible result. Don't get stuck thinking too much: action is

what gets real results.

Optional: Develop a “Character”

It might be helpful to do this: try building a “character” or “ideal type” that represents your ideal customer. Give her a name, find an image that you think looks like her, and write a little back story for her. (Does she drink tea or coffee? Does she have children? Is she single? Where does she like to shop?)

I can hear you already. “I don’t know these things!” I’m actually asking you to imagine them. Just construct an image on the basis of your research and current customers. Doing this creative exercise will help you in writing, manufacturing, designing, developing or marketing products and services to your ideal customers. Your marketing communications will be more vivid because you’ll have a “real” person in mind as you create them.

Who Is NOT Your Ideal Customer?

Reverse engineering is another very effective method of focusing on your targeted audiences. Consider those whom you don’t like or prefer to have as a customer. This is your business, after all, and you get to decide!

However, in order to ignore some customers without affecting your business, you have to focus on people you might have interacted with.

Who was easy to work with?

What were their traits?

And who was difficult to work with?

What made them difficult?

The answer to these questions will help you in identifying the customers who are not ideal for your business.

When you know what is not good for your business from the very beginning, you’ll save time and frustration that might be wasted in dealing with issues or customers

who are not suitable for your business. You’ll find it easier to look for referrals because you’ll know who you want to target. And you’ll find it easier to work with the clients you attract, because they’ll be people who value what you do, appreciate your contribution, and will want to recommend your business.

Don’t Be Afraid to Narrow Down the Group You Serve

It’s important to be very clear about who you’re serving. Don’t be afraid to serve a narrow part of the market. Your marketing efforts will be more successful if you talk to smaller yet highly targeted market segment. Another good reason to narrow your focus is that it’s easier to ask for referrals when you can clearly communicate who your ideal customer is.

Some Examples

Consider who among the following three customers can be your ideal customer:

- Teenagers who love technology, but don’t have much to spend, love to order online and use text messaging extensively?
- Retired senior citizens who want to learn about investing, but don’t know how to use a computer, like to purchase things from an individual and enjoy reading?
- Single women who aspire to start a business, need office equipments, prefer to try it before purchasing and want to shop in a showroom to compare brands?

Based on these descriptions, the way you’ll market and speak to these three targets should be quite different. When you know who you are serving, and how they prefer to buy, it will be clear where you should invest in your business.

The Hard Truth about This Exercise

You need to accept that you may not like the result of your

research.

You may find that there aren't enough people who meet your ideal customer description to launch a comprehensive marketing campaign or develop a business to meet their needs.

You must be willing to be flexible and look reality straight in the eye: you could save months and years of struggle if you take time to do this right.

Additional Resources

Market Research: Guided Search to learn more about the US

American Fact Finder:

http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/guided_search.xhtml

Census data to get a feel for the size of your market in the US:

<http://www.census.gov/ces/dataproducts/bds/>

Business Dynamics Statistics: Survey your ideal customer
Google Consumer Surveys:

<http://www.google.com/insights/consumersurveys/home>

Samplify: <http://simplify.it/>

Ask Your Target Market: <http://aytm.com/>

Instant.ly: <https://www.instant.ly/>

It's Your Turn

It's time to take what you've learned and create your own ideal customer description. Watch the video I created for you, fire up your favorite web browser, open a blank document and get started!

Ready for more information on finding the right name and tagline of your business?

Happy Branding!!



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