Marketing Triggers

Uncovering Consumer Wants and Needs

"Wow, this is so valuable. I write marketing materials for non-profits, and this helps me determine what the subscriber, donor, or participant might want, in addition to what they might need. Thanks!"

-Diane Holcomb

"Hi Bob! Thanks for your report. I love the ease with which you convey information to relative neophytes."

-Diana K.

"I’ve enjoyed and profited from your writing on how to make a living writing in the commercial world. Thanks for the instruction and inspiration."

-Dayan Arnaudov

"Thanks a lot for the ebook, Marketing Triggers. It’s awesome! I’ve purchased a number of your other ebooks, but this one is one of my favorites!"

-Lan Turner

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Notes to the Reader

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**Why Consumers Buy**

Do people need and want the product that you sell? Understanding whether they have a need or desire and if so, what about your product triggers this need or desire is one of the most critical elements of advertising success.

Consumers buy products for two basic reasons:

1. They want the product. They desire it because the product is desirable in itself (e.g., a collectible, an antique, a work of art) or because it offers them some benefit they desire (e.g., it helps them make money, save money, lose weight, improve appearance, gain prestige, etc.).

2. They need the product. It offers a benefit they must have or a benefit they perceive they must have (e.g., bran or fiber food products that reduce cholesterol, insulation that keeps the home warm and reduces utility bills).

Advertising man Joe Karbo lists the following as examples of needs and wants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs</th>
<th>Wants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rent or mortgage payment</td>
<td>$250,000 house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car repair</td>
<td>Rolls Royce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bills paid</td>
<td>$500,000 in the bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental work</td>
<td>50-foot yacht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A new washing machine</td>
<td>An original Renoir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New suit</td>
<td>1-year trip around the world</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Management consultant and author Michael LeBoeuf says, "The only two things people buy are good feelings and solutions to problems." The good feelings come from satisfying wants and desires. The solutions to problems come from fulfilling people's needs.
**Needs vs. Wants**
Is it better to appeal to a need or to a want, a desire?

At first glance, logic might indicate that the need is obviously the more powerful appeal. The things people want, after all, are often frivolous or unnecessary usually luxuries the consumer can well afford to be without. After all, no one really needs a fast food hamburger, cola soft drink, luxury automobile, trip to the Caribbean, compact disk player, high definition TV set, cable TV, or most of the things commonly advertised.

A need, however, seems almost irresistible. We need shelter, medicine, clothing, transportation, telephones, beds, lamps, furniture, insurance policies, and so many other things. If someone needs what you are selling, you may reason, all I have to do is tell of its availability, and I will make the sale.

All of this reasoning is logical. Sensible.

And it is totally wrong.

**Give the Customer What He Wants**
Unfortunately, people often do not do what is good for them. They do what they want to do not what they should do. For this reason, an appeal based upon a powerfully felt consumer want or desire is more likely to succeed than appeals based upon needs.

With a need, the consumer analyzes the purchase decision logically. The advertising reaches him only on an intellectual, rational level. With a want, the purchase decision is no longer purely logical. Impulse and emotion come into play. Advertising can tap into these emotions the hidden desires and longings of your prospect.

Example: A man, 45 years old, reads again and again of the danger of fatty foods, how they can cause high cholesterol and high blood pressure that can lead to heart
disease. His blood pressure reading indicates that, while the man is not yet in the danger zone, his blood pressure is nearly high enough to require medical treatment.

Yet, amazingly, the man does not comply with his doctor's instructions for a complete physical. Why? Possibly because he doesn't really believe that he is in any danger. After all, heart attacks happen to other people. Or, he avoids the check-up because he doesn't want to hear any bad news.

Nor does he change his diet. Yes, he knows that his bacon and egg breakfasts, mixed grill lunches, and steak dinners with ice cream for dessert are probably unhealthy. But, he reasons, "I probably don't have high cholesterol." He can say this safely in his mind because, after all, he refused to be tested. He refuses to change his diet or purchase healthy foods and dietary supplements (wheat germ, oat bran, fiber cereals) even though his blood pressure indicates he "needs" these items. So, what does he spend his disposable income on?

A new BMW.

Does he really need a $78,000 car? No. A $25,000 Sonata or $12,000 used Chevrolet would get him to his destination just as quickly (after all, he observes speed limits). But, the idea of owning a luxury car, which shows his success and status to his neighbors and friends, is irresistible.

He, like most BMW owners, did not need a $78,000 car. But he wanted one. And so, he bought it.

The moral of the story is that people are more eager to make purchases that satisfy their wants and desires than purchases that satisfy their needs.

In order, the three most effective advertising appeals are:

1. Appeals that satisfy both a want and a need.
2. Appeals that satisfy a want.
3. Appeals that satisfy a need.

All three can be effective, but the first two are more powerful than the third. The least effective appeals are appeals that fail to satisfy either a need or a want.

Sadly, most ads fall into this last category, not because of incompetence, but because of the difficulty of accurately guessing which wants and needs are true wants and needs wants and needs strongly felt by the consumer as opposed to wants and needs that are the advertiser's mistaken notion of what is important about his product.

This need not be a problem, as long as you test. In a test campaign, it's perfectly acceptable to create ads and mailings based on appeals that fail. After all, the whole purpose of testing is to eliminate the concepts that don't work and identify the concepts that do. An advertiser goes into a test campaign realizing at the start that it doesn't yet have the right answer, and it is willing to spend the cost of the test campaign in order to find the right answer.

Only when an advertiser leaps into a full blown campaign on an untested idea is it at serious risk. This is the quickest way to lose money in advertising to gamble your entire budget on untested concepts.

Example: You are introducing a new product to a specific market. There are three major publications reaching that market, each a monthly. You have an ad budget that allows you to run four-color full-page ads in all three publications each month (12 times per year). You know from past experience that the readership of all three magazines is similar, and all three tend to generate the same level of response for a given ad.

Traditional method: Create a new four-color, full-page ad for the product. Ask the product manager what is the most important benefit of the product and feature that one benefit in your new ad. Buy contracts in each publication based on a 12 time discount rate to get the lowest rate. Then run the ad in all three magazines 12
times. At the end of the 12 months, find out whether the product manager thinks the ad was successful.

The test method: Pick what you think are your three strongest appeals. Create three quarter-page black-and-white ads, each featuring a different appeal. Offer a free lead magnet in the ads and encourage direct response from readers. Run the following test schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Magazine A</th>
<th>Magazine B</th>
<th>Magazine C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Ad 1</td>
<td>Ad 2</td>
<td>Ad 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>Ad 2</td>
<td>Ad 3</td>
<td>Ad 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Ad 3</td>
<td>Ad 1</td>
<td>Ad 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do not run in April. Evaluate the results in April.

Results: For this example, assume that there was no significant difference in media effectiveness, but that Ad 2 was the clear winner, pulling double the results of Ad 1 and triple the response of Ad 3.

Now you have a winning appeal and can proceed with your ad campaign with greater confidence and knowledge that you are spending media dollars on a proven winner. Create a full-page version of Ad 2 and run full pages in each publication (Magazines A, B, and C) 3 times. Then measure the results.

Constantly monitor the response from the ad. If the response does not decline significantly, continue running. When the response starts to drop off, it may be time to create a new version and test it against your existing winner, Ad 2.

Conclusion: The traditional approach involves significant investment of capital with a large risk factor and no clear indication of returns until the money is spent. The testing method risks a much smaller amount of money (in media space, running nine quarter-page ads vs. 36 full-page ads) and allows you to scientifically test the effectiveness of your concept before running full-page ads. The benefit is reduced
financial risk plus increased advertising effectiveness and greater certainty in making advertising decisions.

**Understand What Consumers Really Want**
Marketing expert Russ von Hoelscher presents the following as a partial list of what your potential customers want.

**People want to be:**

- Loved
- Appreciated
- Admired
- Beautiful
- Creative
- Powerful
- Respected
- Productive
- Informed
- Free
- Successful
- Recognized
- Forgiven

**People want to obtain:**

- More money
- Advancement in business
- Security for the future
- More leisure time
- Improved health
- Self-esteem
- Peace of mind
Self-control
Pleasure
Improved physical appearance
More personal prestige
Positive image

People want to:

Do their own thing
Start their own business
Express their individuality
Accomplish something important
Obtain affection and love
Do important tasks
Improve themselves
Travel to exciting places
Have more fun
Do less work
Make a greater contribution

If your advertising campaign is to be successful, says Russ, it must tap into one of these fundamental human desires. If you do not give people what they want, but only give them what they need or what you think they need or want, your poor advertising results will immediately identify your failure to pinpoint and speak to the buyer's true desires.

Copywriter Herschell Gordon Lewis lists the following as the four great motivators of our time:

1. Fear
2. Exclusivity
3. Guilt
4. Greed
Each suggests a broad range of human motivations and attitudes which can be tapped into through advertising. Take fear as an example. People fear:

- Growing older
- Pain and suffering
- Humiliation
- Cancer
- AIDS
- Loss of hair
- Money worries
- Being unhappy
- Death
- Loss of control
- Radiation
- Toxic waste
- Pollution
- Flying
- Public speaking
- Traffic accidents
- Not being successful
- Not achieving one's dreams
- Having to live according to the dictates of other people
- Taking risks
- The unknown

This list could have been much, much longer. You could add many fears of your own. Others share your fears. A group of people sharing a common fear, if they can be reached through mass communication, represent a prime target market for a specific product or service that addresses that fear.

Robert Collier lists six "prime motives of human action":

1. Love
2. Gain  
3. Duty  
4. Pride  
5. Self-indulgence  
6. Self-preservation  

Of these, says Collier, love is always the strongest motive. "There are certain prime human emotions with which the thoughts of all of us are occupied a goodly part of the time." "Tie it up to the thing you have to offer, and you are sure of prospect's interest."

Joe Karbo lists four basic human motivators:

1. Reincarnation (the hope for immortality or life after death). "Few of us really believe in it," says Karbo, "Most of us hedge our bets by creating works, children, or monuments that will survive our physical being so that at least some part of us will live forever."

2. Recognition (respect and admiration of others).

3. Romance (sex, love, comfort, companionship, tenderness).

4. Reward (material possessions and money).

Homer B. Smith lists these six basic buying motives:

1. Profit or gain  
2. Fear of loss  
3. Comfort and pleasure  
4. Avoidance of pain  
5. Love and affection  
6. Price and prestige
Tom Hopkins lists the following as the most widespread, effective, and powerful "buying emotions":

- Color and style
- Pride of ownership
- Vanity
- Security
- Prestige and status
- Ambition
- Employment change
- Peer pressure
- Self-improvement
- Health
- Love of family
- Family getting larger
- Family getting smaller

Mike Pavlish says the two major benefits desired by 98 percent of all people are:

1. More money
2. More love

**Is Business-To-Business Advertising Different?**

In consumer advertising, the three strongest appeals were:

1. Appeals that satisfied a need and a want
2. Appeals that satisfied a want
3. Appeals that satisfied a need

In business-to-business advertising, the order is slightly different. The three strongest appeals for business advertising are:

1. Appeals that satisfy a need and a want
2. Appeals that satisfy a need
3. Appeals that satisfy a want

In business markets, as in consumer, the buyer is motivated most strongly by things he wants for himself, his department, his company.

But in addition to satisfying a want or desire, the successful business product must also satisfy a need because the business buyer, unlike the consumer, must justify his purchase decision to others.

The business buyer answers to a purchasing manager, boss, or committee, and his decision must make sense from a corporate point of view. This means he is not free to buy things that are frivolous; he is spending someone else's money, and he must spend it responsibly.

For this reason, business-to-business advertising must clearly demonstrate how the product solves a problem, meets a need, or provides a necessary service, function, or benefit.

Looking around my own office, I am hard pressed to find a product purchased for business that was not needed. Look at what I have purchased: a facsimile, a photocopier, a computer, a bulletin board, filing cabinets, a book case, and Webcam. All of it was needed to run my business more efficiently and profitably.

I am self-employed, and the money for all this comes out of my pocket, so I don’t buy anything unless it's absolutely necessary or unless it will save money (or time, which translates into money) or make money in excess of its purchase price. About the only "luxury" is my boom box, but even that is really a necessity, since I am unable to work without music in the background.

In my house, however, it's a different story. Here are some of the recently purchased items: landscaping for front yard, vinyl siding, new storm windows, dining room rug, endtable, loveseat, new front door, family room addition, new pots and pans (to
replace old pots and pans, which worked perfectly), wall-to-wall carpeting on stairway and in upstairs hallway, sanding and polyurethane finish for wood floors, books, records, magazines, jewelry, flowers, plants, seeds, bulbs, and $5,000 for a large fenced in area in the yard for the dog. All of it gives us pleasure, but none of it is really needed. We bought these things because we wanted them not because they were necessary.

So, business-to-business advertising must show how your product offers a benefit that meets a need. But how to make it stronger?

1. Make sure you are appealing to a major need, not a minor need a need that desperately needs to be filled, or a problem of major proportions begging for a solution. For example, to a small business, the fact that your computer system can eliminate the cost of a full or part-time bookkeeper is more important than the fact that it makes typing easier.

2. If the offer can be made to satisfy not only a need but a want or desire as well, the appeal of the ad will be substantially increased. Conversely, advertising that appeals only to what the business buyer needs but not what he wants is not as powerful as advertising that appeals to both.

Business people may have certain constraints placed upon their buying habits, but they are human, too. They have certain things they care about and certain things they don't.

If your advertising gets them excited, if it deals with a subject near and dear to their hearts, they will work harder to make the company accept your offer and do business with you. If your product meets a need but does not excite them in some way, they will make only a mediocre effort at buying from you.

Example: One of my worst failures was a direct mail package I created to promote a manual aimed at telling business managers how to make sure their organizations
complied with local, state, and federal environmental regulations concerning hazardous waste and pollution control.

The idea of the product was to produce a layman's guide aimed at non-technical managers, rather than a scientific treatise aimed at engineers. The appeal was that a plain English explanation of environmental regulations and pollution control technologies had never been made available before, yet (we reasoned) managers needed to know this information because environmental controls and proper procedures were required by law, with stiff penalties for violators.

To make the story short, the mailings bombed. Everyone involved in the project thought they were right on target and had great hopes for success. But we sold few manuals. The reason?

Although we may have been accurate in saying that managers needed to be informed about environmental regulations and emission control technologies, the managers did not want to spend money or time getting this information. My guess is that the average prospect looked at our package and said, "I know this is important but I don't have time for this. If I have any questions about these issues, I'll ask our Chief Engineer; he gets paid to worry about this stuff, not me."

The moral of this example is that business people buy what they need and what the company needs. But, given two products, both of which meet a particular need, the product that also excites the prospect, one that appeals to his wants and desires, is the product that is more likely to succeed in the marketplace.

We see over and over again in business-to-business and high-tech marketing situations where the manufacturer comes out with a new upgrade, program, computer, chip, or whatever with certain features the advertiser thinks are important and exciting.

But when the product is introduced to the marketplace, it flops. Why? Because the consumer does not care about these features. Yes, the features are new. They do what
the manufacturer says they can do. But the buyer does not want them. He does not perceive a need for them. He does not desire them, so he does not buy.

**Corporate vs. Entrepreneurial Advertising**

The corporate advertising manager is faced with the following task: Given an existing product, what are the sales appeals that will entice people to buy the product? How can the product be positioned as the ideal solution to meeting the wants and needs of specific target markets? What are these wants and needs? Which ones are most powerful?

The task is made difficult because you are forced to find within your product attributes which meet a powerfully felt want or need of a specific target market. But the product may not have been created with a specific want or need in mind. Many companies are product driven, bringing to market products that are technically innovative regardless of whether they satisfy the requirements of the market.

You may have to stretch your imagination and creativity to find the proper positioning of such a product in the marketplace. In some cases, the product has no appeal; gaining sales is impossible and advertising cannot change that. Your challenge then is to appropriate advertising dollars to products with the most promise and not waste money on those with limited or no potential.

The entrepreneur, on the other hand, is not so encumbered. Most great entrepreneurial advertising success stories are based on the fact that the entrepreneur started not with a product, but with a person the prospect and his wants, desires, and needs.

The entrepreneur saw a want or need going unfulfilled, then created a product or service to satisfy this demand. This is a surer path to advertising success, and it makes the advertising manager's job easier, because the product has inherent appeal to the marketplace. The challenge then becomes to focus on the strongest
wants and desire, and position the product as the ultimate satisfaction of those wants and desires.

New Jersey based copywriter Sandy Aptecker provides the following list as an example of products and services and the desires they fulfill:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product/service</th>
<th>Basic emotional longings/desires fulfilled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skin care/cosmetics</td>
<td>Desire to be beautiful, young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>Desire for security, protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank credit cards</td>
<td>Desire for status, power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-improvement programs</td>
<td>Desire to be smart, superior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business seminars</td>
<td>Desire for knowledge, success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel clubs</td>
<td>Desire for adventure, to save</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cellular telephones</td>
<td>Desire to be elite, exclusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial products</td>
<td>Desire for money, success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collectibles</td>
<td>Desire to acquire, to be important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's toys</td>
<td>Desire for superior progeny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto clubs</td>
<td>Desire to avoid disaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charities, fund-raisers</td>
<td>Desire to nurture others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subscriptions</td>
<td>Desire to be entertained, smart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers/software</td>
<td>Desire to be competitive, save time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacation property</td>
<td>Desire for shelter, to be elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical fitness</td>
<td>Desire for health, longevity, beauty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exercise: Divide a sheet of paper into two columns. In the left column, list the wants, desires, and needs of your prospects, numbering them 1-2-3 as you go along. Be sure to put them in order of importance, with the most powerfully felt desires listed first.

In the right column, list the features, benefits, and appeals of your product, labeling them a-b-c as you go along. Here is a form you can copy and use to complete this exercise.
INSTRUCTIONS: In the left column write down the needs, desires, and wants of your prospects in order of priority. In the right column, write down your product's features and benefits

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
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</table>
Now, using a pencil, match the features and benefits in the right column with the
needs and wants they satisfy (left column). The features/benefits that satisfy these
wants and desires are the ones that should be featured in your advertising messages.

Now match your product's features and benefits in the right column with the wants
and needs they satisfy in the left column. Those benefits that satisfy the most
important needs and most strongly felt desires are the ones to feature in your
marketing communications messages.

The 7 Key Differences Between Business-to-Business
and Consumer Marketing
When asked if he could write an effective direct mail package on a complex electronic
control system, a well-known direct response copywriter replied, “No problem. It
doesn’t matter what the product is. You are selling to people. And people are pretty
much the same.”

He’s wrong.

Yes, there are similarities. But there are also differences in selling to business and
professional buyers vs. the general public. In fact, here are six key factors that set
business-to-business marketing apart from consumer marketing:

1. *The business buyer wants to buy.* Most consumer advertising offers people
products they might enjoy but don’t really need. How many subscription promotions,
for example, sell publications that the reader truly could not live without? If we
subscribe, we do so for pleasure - not because the information offered is essential to
our day-to-day activity.

But in business-to-business marketing, the situation is different. The business buyer
wants to buy. Indeed, all business enterprises must routinely buy products and
services that help them stay profitable, competitive, and successful. The proof of his
is the existence of the purchasing agent, whose sole function is to purchase things.
2. *The business buyer is sophisticated.* Business-to-business copy talks to a sophisticated audience. Your typical reader has a high interest in - and understanding of - your product (or at least of the problem it solves).

Importantly, the reader usually knows more about the product and its use than you do. It would be folly, for example, to believe that a few days spent reading about mainframe computers will educate you to the level of your target prospect - a systems analyst with six or seven years experience. (This realization makes business-to-business writers somewhat more humble than their consumer counterparts.)

The sophistication of the reader requires the business-to-business copywriter to do a tremendous amount of research and digging into the market, the product, and its application. The business audience does not respond well to slogans or oversimplification.

3. *The business buyer will read a lot of copy.* The business buyer is an information-seeker, constantly on the lookout for information and advice that can help the buyer do the job better, increase profits, or advance his career.

“Our prospects are turned off by colorful, advertising-type sales brochures,” says the marketing manager of a company selling complex ‘systems’ software products to large IBM data centers. “They are hungry for information and respond better to letters and bulletins that explain, in fairly technical terms, what our product is and how it solves a particular data-center problem.”

Don’t be afraid to write long copy in mailers, ads, and fulfillment brochures. Prospects will read your message - *if* it is interesting, important, and relevant to their needs. And don’t hesitate to use informational pieces as response hooks for ads and mailers. The offer of a free booklet, report, or technical guide can still pull well - despite the glut of reading matter clogging the prospect’s in-basket.
4. A multistep buying process. In consumer direct response, copywriters’ fees are geared toward producing the “package” - an elaborate mailing that does the bulk of the selling job for a publication, insurance policy, or other mail order product.

But in business-to-business direct marketing, the concept of package or control is virtually non-existent. Why? Because the purchase of most business products is a multistep buying process. A vice president of manufacturing doesn’t clip a coupon and order a $35,000 machine by mail. First he asks for a brochure. Then a sales meeting. Then a demonstration. Then a 30-day trial. Then a proposal or contract.

Thus, it is not a single piece of copy that wins the contract award. Rather, it takes a series of letters, brochures, presentations, ads, and mailers - combined with the efforts of salespeople - to turn a cold lead into a paying customer.

5. Multiple buying influences. You don’t usually consult with a team of experts when you want to buy a fast-food hamburger, a soda, bottle of shampoo, or a pair of shoes, do you? In most consumer selling situations, the purchase decision is made by an individual. But a business purchase is usually a team effort, with many players involved.

For this reason, a business purchase is rarely an “impulse” buy. Many people influence the decision - from the purchasing agent and company president, to technical professionals and end-users. Each of these audiences has different concerns and criteria by which they judge you. To be successful, your copy must address the needs of all parties involved with the decision. In many cases, this requires separate mailings to many different people within an organization.

6. Business products are more complex. Most business products - and their applications - are more complex than consumer products. (For example, clients I now serve include a commercial bank, a manufacturer of elevator control systems, a data processing training firm, a database marketing company, a mailing list broker, a general contractor, and a semiconductor manufacturer.)
Business-to-business copy cannot be superficial. Clarity is essential. You cannot sell by “fooling” the prospect or hiding the identity of your product. Half the battle is explaining, quickly and simply, what your product is, what it does, and why the reader should be interested in it. “In high-tech direct mail, the key is to educate the prospect,” say Mark Toner, who manages the advertising program for Amano, a manufacturer of computerized time-clock systems. “With a product like ours, most customers don’t even know of its existence.”

In short, in business-to-business marketing, the rules are different. In the months to come, we’ll explore ways to increase response and profits in this exciting and challenging marketplace.

**Business Buyers are Looking for Personal Benefits**

In a column titled “The 7 Key Differences Between Business-To-Business And Consumer Marketing,” I described the six key factors that set business-to-business marketing apart from consumer marketing. They are:

1. The business buyer wants to buy.
2. The business buyer is sophisticated.
3. The business buyer is an information seeker who will read a lot of copy.
4. Business-to-business marketing involves a multistep buying process.
5. The buying decision is frequently made by a committee and not by an individual.
6. Business products are generally more complex than consumer products.
   Recently, I have formulated a seventh principle which I would like to add to the list.
7. The business buyer buys for his company’s benefit - and his own. There are two parts to this principle. Let’s take them one at a time.
The Business Buyer Buys For His Company’s Benefit

The business buyer must acquire products and services that benefit his company. This means the product or service saves the company time or money, makes money, improves productivity, increases efficiency or solves problems.

Let’s say, for example, that you sell a telecommunications network and your primary advantage over the competition is that your system reduces monthly operating expenses by 50 percent. If a prospect is spending $40,000 a month for your competitor’s network, you can replace it and provide his company with the same level of service for only $20,000 a month.

The company benefits because it saves $240,000 a year in communications costs - more than $1 million in a five-year period.

Yet, despite this tremendous benefit, you find that prospects are not buying. They seem interested, and you get a lot of inquiries. But few sales are closed.

Why? Because in addition to buying for his company’s benefit, the prospect also buys for himself.

The Business Buyer Buys For His Own Benefit

The second part of principle #7 is that, while the buyer is looking to do right by his company, he has an equal (if not greater) concern for his own well-being and selfish interests.

Although the idea of saving $240,000 a year with your telecommunications system is appealing to your prospect, his thought process is as follows:

“Right now I have an AT&T system. Your system sounds good but I don’t know you or your company. If I switch and something goes wrong, I will be blamed. I may even get fired. My boss will say, ‘You shouldn’t have gambled on an unproven product from an unknown vendor - why didn’t you stick with good ole reliable AT&T?’ He
will say this even though he approved my decision. So to be safe, I will stick with my current system...even though it costs my company an extra $240,000 a year. After all, I’d rather see them spend an extra $240,000 a year than me lose my $60,000-a-year-job!"

This play-it-safe mentality is only natural, and it affects buying decisions daily in corporations throughout the country. Data processing professionals are fond of saying, “Nobody ever got fired for buying IBM.” Buying IBM ensures the prospect that no one can criticize his decision, even if brand X is the better choice from a business and technical point of view.

A corporate pension fund manager, writing in Money magazine, noted that no money manager ever got fired for losing money invested in a blue-chip stock. A different example, but the principle remains the same.

**The Business Buyer Is For Himself**

Concern for making the safe, acceptable decision is a primary motivation of business buyers, but it is not the only reason why business buyers choose products, services and suppliers that are not necessarily the best business solution to their company’s problem.

*Avoiding stress or hardship* is a big concern among prospects. For example, a consultant might offer a new system for increasing productivity, but it means more paperwork for the shipping department...and especially for the head of the shipping department. If he has anything to say about it, and thinks no one will criticize him for it, the head of shipping will, in this case, work to sway the committee against engaging the consultant or using his system...even though the current procedures are not efficient. The department head, already overworked, wants to avoid something he perceives as a hassle and a headache, despite its contribution to the greater good of the organization.
Fear of the unknown is also a powerful motivator. A middle manager, for example, might vote against acquiring desktop publishing and putting a terminal on every manager’s desk because he himself has computer phobia. Even though he recognizes the benefit such technology can bring to his department, he wants to avoid the pain of learning something he perceives to be difficult and frightening. Again, personal benefit outweighs corporate benefit in this situation.

Fear of loss is another powerful motivator. An advertising manager in a company that has handled its advertising in-house for the past decade may resist his president’s suggestion that they retain an outside advertising agency to handle the company’s rapidly expanding marketing campaign. Even if he respects the ad agency and believes they will do a good job, the ad manager may campaign against them, fearing that bringing in outside experts will diminish his own status within the company.

In these and many other instances, the business buyer is for himself first; and his company, second. To be successful, your copy must not only promise the benefits the prospect desires for his company; it should also speak to the prospect’s personal agenda, as well.

Reach Your Prospects on a Deeper Level
How well do you really know your customers?

Reading the list data cards is a good way to find out something about the folks you are mailing to, but it’s not enough. Knowing that you are writing to farmers, Information Technology (IT) professionals, or plumbers is just the start. You have to dig deeper. But how?

To write powerful copy, you have to go beyond the demographics to understand what really motivates these people – who they are, what they want, how they feel, and what their biggest problems and concerns are that your product can help solve.
One direct marketer told me, “We want to reach prospects on three levels – intellectual, emotional, and personal.”

Intellectual is the first level and, while effective, not as strong as the other two. An intellectual appeal is based on logic – e.g., “Buy the stocks we recommend in our investment newsletter and you will beat the market by 50 to 100 percent.”

More powerful is to reach the prospect on an emotional level. Emotions that can be tapped include fear, greed, love, vanity, and, for fundraising, benevolence. Going back to our example of a stock market newsletter, the emotional appeal might be, “Our advice can help you cut your losses and make much more money, so you become much wealthier than your friends and neighbors. You’ll be able to pay cash for your next car – a Lexus, BMW, or any luxury automobile you care to own – and you’ll sleep better at night.”

The most powerfully you can reach people is on a personal level. Again, from our example of a stock market newsletter: “Did you lose a small fortune in the April 2000 tech stock meltdown? So much that it put your dreams of retirement or financial independence on hold? Now you can gain back everything you lost, rebuild your net worth, and make your dream of early retirement of financial independence come true. A lot sooner than you think.”

To reach your prospects on all three levels – intellectual, emotional, and personal – you must understand what copywriter Michael Masterson calls the buyer’s “Core Complex.” These are the emotions, attitudes, and aspirations that drive them, as represented by the formula BFD – beliefs, feelings, and desires:

- **Beliefs.** What does your audience believe? What is their attitude toward your product and the problems or issues it addresses?

- **Feelings.** How do they feel? Are they confident and brash? Nervous and fearful? What do they feel about the major issues in their lives, businesses, or industries?
□ Desires. What do they want? What are their goals? What change do they want in their lives that your product can help them achieve?

For instance, we did this exercise with IT people, for a company that gives seminars in communication and interpersonal skills for IT professionals. Here’s what we came up with in a group meeting:

□ Beliefs. IT people think they are smarter than other people, technology is the most important thing in the world, users are stupid, and management doesn’t appreciate them enough.

□ Feelings. IT people often have an adversarial relationship with management and users, both of whom they service. They feel others dislike them, look down upon them, and do not understand what they do.

□ Desires. IT people want to be appreciated and recognized. They also prefer to deal with computers and avoid people whenever possible. And they want bigger budgets.

Based on this analysis, particularly the feelings, the company created a direct mail letter that was its most successful ever to promote a seminar “Interpersonal Skills for IT Professionals.” The rather unusual headline: “Important news for any IT professional who has ever felt like telling an end user, ‘Go to hell.’”

Before writing copy, write out in narrative form the BFD of your target market. Share these with your team and come to an agreement on them. Then write copy based on the agreed BFD.

Occasionally insights into the prospect’s desires and concerns can be gleaned through formal market research. For instance, a copywriter working on a cooking oil account was reading a focus group transcript and came across this comment from a user: “I fried chicken in the oil and then poured the oil back into a measuring cup. All the oil was there except one teaspoon.”
This comment, buried in the appendix of a focus group report, became the basis of a successful TV campaign dramatizing the selling point that food did not absorb the oil and therefore was not greasy when cooked in it.

Veteran ad man Joe Sacco once had an assignment to write a campaign for a new needle used by diabetics to inject insulin. What was the key selling point?

The diabetics Sacco talked to all praised the needle because it was sharp. A non-user would probably view being sharp as a negative. But if you have ever given yourself or anyone else an injection, you know that sharper needles go in smoother, with no pain. And Sacco wrote a successful ad campaign based on the claim that these needles were sharp, therefore enabling easier, pain-free insulin injection.

Copywriter Don Hauptman advises, “Start with the prospect, not the product.” With BFD, you can quickly gain a deeper understanding of your prospects before you attempt to sell them something. Stronger marketing campaigns usually follow.

Are Customer Surveys a Waste of Time?

It sounds like a good idea: survey customers to find out what they want, and then let their answers shape your product development and marketing.

But in reality, it’s often a bust.

A case in point: according to an article in BusinessWeek (8/1/05, p. 38), in 2002 the Gap began an intensive program of focus groups, surveys, and other market research.

But in the fiscal quarter ending April 30 of this year, sales fell 4 percent. Analysts expect them to drop another 2 percent for the quarter ending on July 30, 2005.

The reason: eight former employees and two analysts say the Gap “has shifted too far toward research and away from the instinct and emotion favored by many successful clothing merchandisers.”
I see an insidious trend today, especially among traditional marketers turning toward direct marketing: they sincerely believe they can, through customer surveys, confirm that consumers will respond to the product, price, offer, headline, and copy before producing and mailing the promotion.

They mistakenly believe that if they get enough survey responses, they are guaranteed a winning promotion simply by stringing the consumer responses together into copy.

Unfortunately, experienced direct marketers know that there is a huge gap between what consumers say they will buy and what they actually buy.

And for this reason, the only accurate way to determine what will sell is through testing: selling a real product with a real offer to real consumers who vote their preferences not by answering a survey, but with their purchases.

“In my 10+ years experience in DM publishing, I’ve found that customer surveys can be very misleading,” says Julie. “Recipients tend to give answers they think you want to hear.

“Case in point: a company spent over $100,000 developing a product that customer survey respondents said they would purchase. At the end of the day, they didn’t purchase. And the company lost a bundle.

“My advice: treat survey responses as minor gauges of interest. Tread lightly. And test, test, test!”

“A lot of the time customers really don’t know what they want,” says Peter. “The masses simply clamor about waiting for the next best thing. Not exactly the best group of folks to ask.

“This kind of thing permeates video game design discussions quite frequently. Everyone wants to predict what the next blockbuster title will be based on current
trends, when in reality, you could spend millions of dollars on focus groups of current title enthusiasts and come up with an ultra-generic flop.”

“A few years ago an insurance company hired me to create a direct mail package. When the design and copy were completed to draft form, my client had a brilliant idea: ‘Let’s show this to a focus group of potential customers,’” says copywriter Steve Slaunwhite. “Nothing I said could dissuade him.

“Based on feedback from the group, my client made sweeping changes to the package, which included eliminating all references to the word FREE. ‘Too trite,’ they said. The package was mailed. And it flopped.

“What went wrong? Not the focus group, according to my client. ‘The focus group can’t be wrong,’ he asserts. ‘After all, they’re the customers!’”

One reason that customer surveys are particularly ineffective for evaluating promotional copy is that consumers like to believe they are immune to direct marketing techniques.

A focus group will loudly proclaim that you “buy one, get one free offer” won’t work with them because they don’t like gimmicks. Then, in an actual test, that same offer will perform like gangbusters, beating the pants off the straightforward offer the focus group members all said they preferred.

So the next time someone at your company says “Let’s do a customer survey,” keep these facts in mind:

1. Survey results are not terribly accurate predictors of what products and offers will sell, the price consumers will pay, or the headlines, copy, or promotions they will respond to.

2. Surveys, in particular focus groups, are useful for discovering the language that consumers use to talk about a particular product, need, or problem.
3. The Internet allows large numbers of consumers to be surveyed quickly and at low cost, with online tools such as www.surveymonkey.com.

**Improve Copywriting with “Experienced-based Empathy”**

In one of his lectures, AWAI co-founder Michael Masterson told his audience – mostly new and aspiring direct response copywriters – “I highly recommend you have children.”

Copywriter John Forde also advised his readers to have children in a recent issue of his Copywriter’s Roundtable e-zine.

Michael and John want you to have children not just to experience the joys of parenting, but because it will make you a better copywriter.

How so?

The most crucial part of copywriting is your ability to understand your readers – and reach them on a deep, emotional, personal level. And the more you are like the people you are writing to ... the more experiences you have shared with them ... the easier it is to be empathetic with them.

I call it “experienced-based empathy.” It means being able to relate to a person because you are in their group or have common experience or background.

Experienced-based empathy is a powerful technique. Not only does it enable you to get inside the minds of your prospects in a way other marketers can’t. But you can actually use it in your copy to forge an instant connection with your reader, e.g., “As a CPA, I know all too well how time-consuming it is for a busy accountant like you to keep up with constant changes in the tax code.”

Of course, you cannot become a member of every target market you write for: you can’t be all things to all people. A man, for example, can’t be a woman (for the most
part). Therefore, one can argue that a female copywriter is a better choice to write ads for feminine hygiene products, bridal gowns, or cosmetics.

As a rule, the more well-rounded your knowledge, and the more experience you have in life, the wider the range of audiences to which you can write with strong empathy and understanding. But you can’t know everything about everything.

The solution? Broaden your knowledge and experiences, but do so selectively. The best areas in which to acquire new knowledge and experiences: markets you want to write for, as well as characteristics or habits that are widespread rather than unusual.

For example, the “norm” in America today is to have children, not to be childless. Therefore, if you never have children, you distance yourself from your readers who are average people. In addition, you are at a disadvantage when it comes to understanding the responsibilities and emotions of parenting, because you haven’t been there.

Do I think you have to be a golfer to write good copy for golf clubs, golf balls, or golf books or videos? It’s not mandatory. But if I had to choose between two copywriters of otherwise equal experience and ability to write my golf ad, and one played golf every weekend and the other had never played, I’d probably choose the golfer. If you are a golf-playing copywriter pitching a golf account, it can’t hurt to let them know you’re a duffer.

I do believe copywriters should pick and choose their projects based, in part, on their knowledge of and experience with the product and its market. For instance, at the beginning of my career, when I badly needed the work, a book publisher offered me a project writing direct mail packages for books on hunting and fishing. I turned down both topics – the hunting and the fishing – for slightly different reasons.

Hunting was easy. It sickens me. I love animals. I could no more write enthusiastic copy about killing a warm-blooded animal than I could write copy telling people to smoke cigarettes.
I do not have the same problem with fishing. I have gone fishing. My older son likes it, and fishes off the dock of our weekend lake house. My father loved fishing with a passion.

I’ll do it. But I don’t love it. And so I turned down the assignment to write copy for fishing books.

I understand fishing well enough to write empathetically about its positive points. Fishermen are usually nice people. But I told the client that plenty of people – and copywriters – love to fish. I advised him to find a copywriter who is passionate about it. I only tolerate it.

In business-to-business, “becoming your prospect” can be even more difficult. I once wrote copy for a company whose products were sold to orthopedic surgeons. It was not realistic for me to become an orthopedic surgeon just to write better copy for this client (even if I wanted to, I couldn’t get into med school).

On the other hand, I knew an account executive at an industrial advertising agency assigned to a welding account. To better understand his target market, he took courses at night and became a certified welder.

I am a chemical engineer, so during the first half-decade of my career, I worked largely with industrial clients, particularly in chemical processing and related industries. Not only did I understand the client’s prospects better, but engineers working for my clients felt more comfortable talking with me, knowing I was one of them and not a typical “ad guy.”

When home computers were introduced, there were more copywriting opportunities in high-tech than in industrial marketing. I enrolled in night school and trained as a Certified Novell Administrator. Again, by training to become an IT professional in a class full of IT professionals, I became better able to understand and empathize with IT professionals on a deeper level.
While I’m not recommending you totally change who you are, here are some suggestions that can enable you to market more confidently to a broader range of prospects:

1. Read widely in many different fields – not just marketing.

2. Seek out new experiences – snorkel, sail, rock climb, build a new deck. If you volunteer to feed the homeless at a shelter, do you think that would improve your copy to raise funds for your client’s homeless shelter?

3. See popular movies – the ones grossing $100 million a year or more.

4. Get married, have children, adopt a dog or cat (or both) from an animal shelter. This will allow you to experience emotions you might otherwise miss.

5. Whenever possible, buy and use your clients’ products. Own shares of their stock.

6. Talk to people. You may discover that a relative, neighbor, or friend can give you insight into a group they belong to (Vietnam veterans, boat owners, Wiccan) that you might have to sell to some day.

About the Author

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