

Get Inside Your Customer's Mind

Getting inside the mind of your customer is crucial for a business. If you don't make the time to really understand what makes your customers tick, your business could be seriously missing the mark. And with some advice from the experts, it's not as difficult as you might think.

Put yourself in their shoes

Businesses can become so fixated on their internal processes and systems that they forget what their business looks like from the customers' perspective.

Daniel Banick, co-founder of digital advertising agency August says businesses must regularly consider what the customer experiences when they walk into your store or shop with you online.

Before August creates an e-commerce site for its customers, it goes mystery shopping. When working with a car company recently, it went through the process of testing driving cars, making online enquiries and shopping with competitors to put themselves in the customers' shoes.

"It's vital that businesses understand what it's like from the customers' side of the fence if they want to improve," Banick says.

Four types of shoppers to understand

Brand engagement consultancy next reminds businesses that customers differ greatly.

Stefan Grafe, next's founder and managing partner, says its own research has shed new light on shopper types.

The research found that there are four key groups of shoppers, which highlight the differences in retail behaviour and brand decisions. These are:

- strategists, who make their purchasing decisions before entering the shop. These shoppers often carry a list while shopping and are not swayed by special offers or new influences
- explorers, who find shopping exciting. They are highly prone to influence and take their time selecting products and seek interesting solutions to their product needs
- flutterers, who are easily persuaded or distracted by new offers. Their experience of shopping is often overwhelming and mildly frustrating
- impulse shoppers, who frequent convenience stores. They constantly feel they're missing something and often walk out with more than they intended to buy.

Be a fly on the wall

Businesses have ways and means of listening in even when customers don't know about it. Social media monitoring is the next big thing, with businesses tracking blogs, microblogs and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter.

Jason Davey, managing director, digital marketing for digital agency Bullseye says monitoring enables a business to observe personal conversations, searching based on brand name, location or demographic.

"Monitoring social media is becoming a lot more popular among businesses," Davey says.

Monitoring enabled a retailer to uncover a trend among young male skaters who preferred skating at night, prompting the brand to reposition itself and change its product lines slightly, resulting in a jump in sales.

Pose questions carefully

When talking to a customer, ask open questions to understand their needs and challenges, rather than asking questions to find a fit for your product or solution.

Simon Harrop, managing partner, Sydney sales training and coaching outfit Straight Ahead Sales says the more you get the customer talking, the better chance you have of understanding what they really need.

If a customer is buying a computer, he suggests asking: 'tell me about the users of the computer' rather than 'what size hard drive do you need?'

Commission a survey

Conduct a survey of your customers, which can give you a crystal clear insight into what makes them tick.

A survey can uncover how a customer found your business, whether customer service is up to scratch, what they buy from you and how often, and much more.

Conduct an experiment

Consider setting up an experiment, which Ferrier says can paint a telling picture for a business. If you think a particular product or service sells best on a particular day, then move things around in your store or run a promotion to see how it goes.

Make sure you record the results. Try a different approach next time and again record the data, Ferrier says.

"Small in-house experiments can help you to track what works and what doesn't. Just make sure that you look at the results and if something doesn't sell, try a different experiment the next time."

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