

Understanding Your Target Market

(Hint: They aren't you.)

It is a principal of marketing that in order to be effective, you must understand the characteristics and demographics of your market.

And that means knowing more than their name, rank and serial number. You also have to know what motivates them, identify their pain points and be clear as to why they should buy from you. Otherwise you will not be able to present your product or service in a way that will mean anything to them.

Every organization, large or small, needs to understand what its value is from the customer's point of view. The first step is to understand that you are not your customer.

But I AM like my customer, you say. We like the same things and have the same needs — that's what I've based my business on. What appeals to me is what will appeal to them. We're on the same wave length!

Well, surprise — **you're not them. What they value about your business is not what you value about it.** The biggest difference: you want to make a living from it and they want to solve their problem. Those two points of view are very different. Example: you want to sell Russian nesting dolls and they want to find a unique gift for Aunt Martha. It's up to you to find the connection between these two unrelated problems and make a compelling case for it. Your customer is not going to get there on her own.

One simple way to figure this out is to **pretend you are the customer and observe your business from his/her viewpoint.**

All too often, when you read a business's ad, brochure or web site, **the messages are entirely about how great they are and not about how they can solve the customer's problem.** We've all had the experience of going to a web site to find answers to a particular dilemma, only to be confronted by a wall of self-congratulatory text that must be slogged through to find any answers.

It is essential to get into the customers' mind-set and out of your own. This is hard when you're immersed in all the day-to-day details of running a business, but well worth the effort. In customer mode, you'll be able to see your business strategy more clearly. Pretending to be your customer will help you identify the problems and build on the strengths.

Understanding how people experience your enterprise is a matter of business survival. Since we tend to become blind to what's constantly around us, **the trick is to cultivate fresh eyes and ears so you can understand how your customer perceives your product or service.** It's a free source of important information.

