

Customer Profiling: How to Hit the Target

Do you watch Criminal Minds, CSI, NCIS, Bones, etc.? What have you learned about profiling? Do you use profiling in your business? You should!

To market your product or service effectively, you need to know information or “the profile” of the customer you want to sell to. You need to identify a target market. If you don't narrow your potential customers, it is a huge challenge to get your message out to them successfully. Let's look at why you need to profile and how to get started.

Diluted Marketing

The biggest issues in marketing are budget and message. If your target market is “men”, it's going to be pretty hard to find a single, clear message that appeals to all of them. Since men come in an endless variety of shades and flavours, with so many different interests, it's almost impossible to find a mix of marketing and advertising media that could possibly reach them all. Well, unless you have an endless budget.

Even in a smaller community where it seems that broad marketing will give you the most bang for your buck, it's never the way to go. Lindsay Eason and Angela Reid quickly learned that lesson when they started [GreenStep](#), an eco-venture that provides sustainability coaching for businesses in Kelowna two years ago.

“By having a market that was too broad, we were spreading ourselves thin,” says Lindsay. “We learned to hone in on the right people and start to build relationships with them. You have to choose who you want as a client and approach them.”

After researching business sectors in Kelowna, they found that the small to medium-size businesses in the tourism industry fit well with their mandate. Narrowing their target to a specific profile resulted in increased sales.

Trying to lump everyone together simply doesn't work. The solution is to think truly targeted market, that small, hard to hit, sweet spot in the middle of the target (the bull's eye).

Finding the Sweet Spot

To reach the sweet spot, you need to start at the outer edge of the target and work your way in. The first step, when you start in business, is doing [market research](#) to define as specific a description of your prospective customers as possible. You'll get a pretty good idea of who is likely to purchase, but until you actually get going and test the waters, it's still only theory.

Once you have a few clients in your portfolio, you'll begin to get a sense of whether your initial ideas were on the mark or whether you encountered some surprises along the way. As you adjust your focus based on the response you've received (i.e. sales), you move one ring closer to the bull's eye.

Fine Tuning the Profile

It won't take you long to build a larger database of clients to draw from, giving you an opportunity to get an even clearer, more specific picture of who is buying your product or service.

Review your records and identify the obvious characteristics they have in common: age, gender, industry, geography, purchase patterns, etc. Any details you can glean from your customer data becomes valuable information in repeating your success on a grander scale.

Go Straight to the Source

Ask your customers!

There is no better way to understand the unique characteristics of your customers and why they choose to do business with you than [asking them directly](#). Find out what they like, what they don't like, what's working for them and what's not. Truly put yourself in their shoes and learn what motivates their buying behaviour.

When Barb Fetherstonhaugh took over her father's business in 1998, [Pete's Tent and Awning](#) in Victoria, she asked a lot of questions. And the more questions she asked, the more she found out about her clients and how to meet their needs.

Asking questions worked so well for her, that Barb got her employees on board with it. "They have a specific list of eight questions that they can use to get feedback from customers over e-mail or by telephone. They also track any feedback that's given to them while they're on the job."

As a result of asking those questions, Barb found an existing need that wasn't being serviced by other businesses. A large portion of her client base, a full 25%, now consists of clients who have items custom built and designed for a specific purpose.

Niche Marketing

There's a good chance even with the more focused target market not all of your customers look exactly alike. That's great news!

Now you get to take the final step and decide precisely which bull's eye -- which sweet spot -- you want to hit. Look at the shortlist of customers profiles you have identified as likely prospects, which one do you want to spend your time, energy and marketing budget focused on?

To make that decision, you'll want to factor in the hard facts, such as which category of customer is most profitable, with the human facts, such as which customers do you most enjoy serving?

You can gather a great deal of research and experience to take you most of the way toward hitting your customer profile target, but in the end the final decision is up to you.

Written in collaboration with Liz Gaige.

Liz Gaige, owner of [Market Navigators Consulting](#), specializes in bringing creativity and a shot of inspiration to business and marketing strategies for businesses of all sizes. By her own admission, she does her best work when she's just a little bit cheeky!

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