



Bob Hogg looks at an unjustly neglected source of business growth

# know your customer

In talking to clients who are looking to grow their businesses, I'm always amazed that the majority see attracting new customers as the only way to do that. While I would never discourage anyone from attracting new customers, there is often a better (and cheaper) way to achieve growth – and that is to develop the existing customer base.

The opportunity for developing existing customers almost always exists; but it does depend on a real understanding of those customers. In understanding your existing customers you will find it easier to identify the ones that are most valuable to you. This in turn gives you clues as to the types of prospect you should be looking for when you really do need to find new customers.

The root of understanding customers is finding out why the customer buys from you in the

first place. There are two stages to that:

## 1. What's the customer's problem?

I don't know of any business that buys print and its associated services just for the sake of it! They will always have some problem that they are trying to solve. Maybe they are trying to attract more customers and see print as one means of communication; maybe they are trying to impress a client; maybe they have a need for better internal communication. Sometimes the clue to their problem can lie in their past buying habits – what they buy and when they buy, for example – so some research into patterns of purchasing may well unearth useful information.

Also, the next time a customer enquires about buying something, ask them "Why do you need that?" You might be surprised at

the answers, but it will help you understand the needs of that customer better. It will also enable you to think about other types of customer that might have the same needs.

## 2. Why they should buy from you rather than from one of your competitors?

It's unlikely that a customer will just have a simple, single problem. More likely, they will have a number of other factors they take into account when deciding who to buy from. Price is obviously one of these, but don't fall into the trap of thinking that price is the only thing in the customer's mind; what's really in their mind is "value", not price. In other words, the level of service you can offer – perhaps the speed with which you can produce the goods, the delivery arrangements, the added services you can offer once you've

understood that customer's real need – will all play a part in helping the customer decide to buy from you rather than a competitor.

Armed with answers to these two questions, you will be in a better position to really understand your customer. This will help you satisfy their needs and build a strong long-term relationship with them, so that they wouldn't dream of going anywhere else for their print. Now wouldn't that be something?

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# The right messages for the right people

Mike Holland looks at communicating your unique selling proposition

If you've just read Bob Hogg's article, you now know who your ideal customers are. You will have worked out exactly why your products or services appeal to these potential customers – qualities that make you stand out from the crowd.

Remember, you need to express these qualities as benefits, not as features. For example, the fact that you use vegetable-based inks is a feature. It is not a benefit until you express it in terms that answer the customer's question: "So what?"

## Benefit-driven marketing

Customers buy benefits – not features. As the old marketing adage puts it, "Sell the sizzle, not the sausage." In this example, the benefit of using vegetable inks is that your customer has 'greener printing' and (perhaps) is meeting its corporate environmental policy.

Compile a list of the benefits

that you offer and prioritise it, putting ones that your competitors find difficult to match at the top. Then reduce that list to a few well-chosen words that sum up your competitive advantage. This should become the central message of all your marketing communications – the strapline beneath your logo, perhaps, or the headline for your adverts. Or both.

Now you have a message. It will do you no good, however, unless you can deliver it to the right people – the people in your target market who make the buying decisions.

## Hitting the target

If you really know your target customers you will have a database of names, addresses and email addresses. If you don't have the data, you can set to work finding it. Start by telephoning target companies and asking who is involved in print buying

decisions.

Then you can start putting your message out. Good creative direct mail and emails will help to build awareness and may generate enquiries directly.

Remember to think about things from your customers' point of view. As I said, talk about benefits, not features. Add elements to your communication that will capture attention – a free offer, perhaps, or ideas for cutting print costs.

If you don't know your target customers well enough to address them all individually in this way (maybe because you have thousands of potential customers) you will need to use 'broadcast' methods of communication, such as advertising or media relations.

Think carefully about your potential customers. What publications do they read, what websites do they visit? That is where your messages must be seen and read.

Those messages need to be reflected in the literature and computer presentations that your sales force uses and on your website. You need to deliver coherent, consistent, messages across all your marketing communications and sales activities.

Delivering the right messages to the right people is the key to achieving the right results.

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→ For more information about our upcoming Chartered Institute of Marketing 1 Day Workshop on the 25 May 2011 please contact Lori Laius on 020 7915 8321 or email [lori.laius@bpif.org.uk](mailto:lori.laius@bpif.org.uk)