

People Buy What People Buy **The Difference That Makes Lady Gaga Popular**

“They can beat you on price, but not on the value you deliver.”

Are you selling what people want, or just what you THINK people should buy from you? I wondered this checking into a beach resort in Mexico. We had just experienced a four-hour airplane trip and one hour in the taxi. We were hot, tired and just wanted to relax. Have you ever wanted something so bad, you would pay anything to get it? That was us.

Weary from travel, hungry and in desperate need of some rest, we checked in. Immediately we were bombarded by people who wanted to sell us...relaxation? No. Food and refreshments? No. A ride to our room so we could change and lie down? No. What were they so eager to sell us at registration? They tried to sell us more resort stays - the minute we got our room keys. This was not exactly what we were in the mood to buy at that moment - or ever again after the heavy sales pitch. Somehow I just don't think they were in touch with their customers' needs and values at check in. Let me explain what I mean. Let's examine some people who know what customers value. Lady Gaga knows a thing or two about what her customers want.

Lady Gaga Knows

The pop singer Lady Gaga is phenomenal at selling what people want. She appeared at a concert in Atlanta a few months ago. What a show! My daughters' description of the performance was phenomenal. In a day when entertainers and presenters tell you to turn your cell phone off while they are onstage, Lady Gaga communicated with the crowd through Twitter. They were tweeting during the concert. She called a lucky fan out during the presentation who texted her (it was like a prize drawing) to meet with her after the concert for “hot cocoa.” She knows what her fans like and value. She is better in touch with a single audience than most performers are in a lifetime of concerts.

As Andrew Hampp put it in a recent article for *Advertising Age*, “Lady Gaga, with her army of nearly 2.8 million Twitter followers and more than 5.2 million Face Book fans, can move product. Since fall 2008, her digital-single sales have exceeded 20 million and her album sales hit 8 million, all at a time when no one under the age of 60 buys CDs anymore.” She delivers what the public wants... in waves. The premiere of her video for “Bad Romance” debuted on LadyGaga.com *before* MTV or any other service outlet could play or publish it – resulting in a server crash, a Twitter trending topic that lasted a week and 110 million (so far) views on YouTube, more than any viral music video in the past.

What makes Lady Gaga so popular? Simple. She sells what she knows people want to buy. Music fans are buying the extravaganza (did you see her intro at the Grammy awards with iconic singer, Elton John earlier this year? Or maybe you caught her on-stage act for American Idol). Her fans are buying the image. They are buying the show. They are buying an onstage performance that would make even Alice Cooper say, “Wow!” They are buying what she delivers. Why aren't more performers selling as many albums or digital singles? Because most performers aren't selling what people want to buy.

If you can find out what people are buying and why, your success is guaranteed. A friend in the speaking business was telling me that she taught executives how to dress for success. She helps leaders create a great first impression. She said that her greatest challenge lies in convincing her prospects that her service is needed and that *she* is the best one to deliver it. That's too much work in my opinion.

Let's look at it from another perspective. What if you marketed only to people who already saw the value in your service? What if you targeted those who were already of a persuasion to know the importance of a great first impression in dress and demeanor? Wouldn't that make the sales process easier? All you would need to do then is convince those people that you were their best choice. This cuts the sales process in half. Sell only to people who already want to buy and STOP selling what you think they *should* buy. Quit convincing people that they need you when they aren't converted to your cause.

Customer Values and You

A market leader's goal should be to design the marketing and sales approach to what the customer values. Today the focus on the customer's need for a service and not just a product is influencing more and more companies. Banks, for instance, make little or no money off their student customers, in the hope that they will become more valuable in later years. They invest in the long-term relationship building process with their services because people value the relationship.

I put the statement out on my Face Book page that "Customer values dictate the market." Immediately a fan wrote me that he thinks most people are generally ignorant and have no idea what they want. How sad of a commentary! That is the precise thinking that gets you interruption advertising - telling people what they really want, even though they didn't know it before you interrupted their lives to tell them. "We know what is best for you and we just need to convince you that we are right." Assuming that the general populace is stupid is indicative of your sales slump. The dumber you assume people are, the more you will push what you want over their needs and desires. The smarter and more savvy you believe they are, the more you will endeavor to sell what they tell you they want.

Savvy consumers determine what is successful and what isn't. In 1958, the Edsel was one of the most luxurious cars Ford ever built. It came with options that only the most discerning and wealthy Ford customers would want. But the public thought it looked ugly and obscene. Perception became reality. The car wound up being a major flop and embarrassment for the Ford Motor Company. Today the car named for Henry Ford's son is synonymous with failure.

A few years later, in 1964 under the leadership of Lee Iacocca, Ford premiered the Mustang, the world's first fully customizable sports car. It was (and still is) an overwhelming success. The public bought into the image of a car for the "me" generation that they could customize and call their own. The car became a collector's item, still featured in movies and television. An entire industry has been built around buying and restoring mid-'60s Ford Mustangs. I know. I restored a classic Mustang myself.

Many realtors put their faces on their business cards. Why? Because that worked for a few years for a few realtors in the business - better than it does now. It didn't stop the downward slide in home sales, though, did it? Why? No one is buying the realtor's face. They want a good deal on a home. They don't want the relationship with someone's face; they want the value of buying or selling their home. Realty customers put a high value on buying and selling. Customer values dictate the market, not what you say dictates it. Customer purpose in buying tells you what they value.

Who do you sell to "only"?

Knowing your customers' *purpose* helps determine what will succeed and what will fail. WHY customers buy your product or service is more important than whether they buy them. I believe if you know why your product sells, you can sell more to people who want it. Do you ask your top customers why they like you and buy from you? You might be surprised at the answers you get. Knowing why people buy from you influences more than just knowing what they buy. They are telling you when your phone rings. When it does, what do they say they want from you? What is the reason they are doing business with you?

Knowing this and acting on it would have worked great for the resort in Mexico. The spa at the resort is being beat out by a cheaper group, next door on the beach. I knew the beach people were winning the war when I saw the signs from the resort. Not advertising, but warning signs. Instead of a value based marketing campaign, the beach is littered with warnings that these people are not official staff and not guaranteed. Obviously, vacationers on the beach want a massage. Perhaps they could offer their own more valuable services on the beach - right where people are motivated to buy. Instead the warnings didn't make me want to visit the spa. It made me suspect everyone who offered services.

What if the resort spa owner signed customers up *before* they ever get to the beach? We would have paid anything to relax the night we registered. They could offer discounts for signing up at (you guessed it) registration as one of the "must dos" while you are here. This is a better alternative than negative warnings or hard-sell time-share sales. "Want to relax after your long trip to get here folks? We can help you begin NOW." Wow!

Unfortunately they are busy selling spa treatments and not relaxation. When you go to a place to relax, do you say, "I need a treatment," or do you say, "I need to relax"? They are out of touch with their primary customers because they haven't tapped into the purpose that their customers value. It isn't hard to figure out. What is the top reason most people go to a beach resort in the first place? They could make a fortune by selling relaxation ONLY to people wanting it (which is everyone who shows up).

What can you take away from this? As in sales and business, knowing what the client/customer wants to buy and is buying is what determines the Gold Medal of success. It's not what you or I *think* they want. If they complain about your lack of availability or locations, move closer to them. If they want your services on the web, get an internet site that delivers. If they want convenience, sell convenience. If they want security, sell them security. What do they want that you (and only you) can deliver? How can you increase the value to them?

You don't get the opportunity to determine what people are buying. They buy what they buy. You do get to determine what you sell them, though. Sell them what they are buying and you are successful.

Sell something they don't want and you are a footnote in history. You need to find the movement, trend or wave that people are buying in. What would your customers pay anything for without even thinking about it much?

Sell that.

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