

Marketing Strategies to Influence Buyer Behavior: The Consumer

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Date: November 4, 2022

Walden University

WMBA 6060: *Marketing for Competitiveness*

Being a Consumer

To grow, companies continually need increases in sales. This can be accomplished by selling more to each customer or by acquiring more customers. Either way, consumers are at the center of a company's growth. Marketing is the principal method that companies employ to expand their customer base and increase sales. Marketing is the process of recognizing consumers' needs and pinpointing the best way to meet them (Young, 2022). Marketing is an action word. Marketing involves exploring ways to both create, and deliver, value to the consumer.

The first step any business must take is to determine their target market (Hubbard, 2019). There are five main types of consumers, to wit; loyal customers, impulse shoppers, bargain hunters, wandering consumers, and need-based customers (DemandJump Inc, 2020). For this dissertation I'll explore the process a product-based technology company would go through in marketing to wandering consumers. The wandering consumer is the hardest to get a purchase out of because the company must demonstrate product value to the consumer and it must be at the right price. A need-based customer or loyal customer may be able to ignore price to an extent, and a bargain hunter or impulse shopper may be able to overlook a lack of value, but the wandering consumer must be appealed to on all levels.

An example of the wandering consumer and the lengths businesses go to solicit a purchase from them is seen on the holiday commonly referred to as black friday, the day after thanksgiving. On black friday, consumers enter a dozen stores and browse. Technology stores such as Best Buy send out adverts which advertise items that have been reduced in price for the holiday. They even sell some items at a loss, known to store managers as loss-leaders, and known by consumers as door-busters. These items are significantly discounted and often severely limited in quantity to draw the wandering consumer in. Once the consumer is in the store, the store will likely lure them deeper in with flashing electronic displays or displays and demonstration models of various products. Consumers are more than customers, they are the end-users of the products (Think and Learn Pvt Ltd, 2019). Since the wandering consumer does not know what they want to purchase, product value and usefulness must be demonstrated to them (Think and Learn Pvt Ltd, 2019).

Consumers' Decision-Making Process

Consumers follow a five step process in making the decision to purchase a product (Lucid Chart, 2019). The process may even occur subconsciously. The five steps are: Problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase evaluation. The first step occurs as the consumer attempts to recognize their need for a given service or product (Lucid Chart, 2019). Questions enter the consumer's mind such as, "How does this product work?", "What could I use this for?", and "How could this make my life easier?". Companies can help consumers with this purchasing hurdle by creating social media buzz about the product or through showcasing consumers using the product. As examples, Apple created compelling

commercials showcasing consumers' use of the Apple Watch, and Best Buy installed video monitors that play Apple commercials in the Apple section of their stores.

The second step, termed the information search, happens while consumers are gathering information about the product (Lucid Chart, 2019). This may be through reading the product specification list or taking in the bulleted list of product features that companies place prominently on their product packaging or on a display placed near the product. The third step, is the evaluation of alternatives (Lucid Chart, 2019). In this moment, the consumer weighs comparable alternatives. Technology companies can assuage consumers' concerns or favorable views of alternatives by offering pricing promotions, price matching, by adding an in-store limited warranty, or through bundling options.

Fourth is the purchase decision (Lucid Chart, 2019). To reach this step and get the consumer to complete the purchase, the store may have to offer a final discount or display other customers' stellar reviews of the product for the consumer to actually make the purchase. There is a fifth step in the consumer decision-making process, and that is the post-purchase evaluation (Lucid Chart, 2019). This is very relevant with stores' lenient return policies these days. To ensure the consumer keeps the product, stores may have to offer a limited amount of support and may have to help the consumer figure out how to install, setup, or use the product.

Conditioning and Culture

Two factors challenge the development of a marketing strategy, to wit; conditioning and culture. Conditioning finds its root in behavioral theories of psychology and has to do with a certain response that is elicited at the prompting of specific stimuli (Yousaf, 2016). A great example of this can be seen in the reaction to a cake created to look like a hamburger, as seen on the television show Food Imposters or Comfort Food Dessert Imposters. This same concept applies in marketing as well. A great example occurred when customers that were used to purchasing a computer with the Microsoft Office suite pre-loaded learned that they would be expected to now pay annually for a subscription to "Microsoft Office 365". Similarly, for the longest time consumers saw tablets and laptops as two distinct and different classifications of computers, that is, until convertibles and two-in-ones started being sold. Conditioning is a challenging thing to overcome. Alienware is a company known for making expensive and high-end gaming computers; the company would certainly struggle if it tried to enter the budget office-computer market under the Alienware brand name.

The second factor that challenges the development of marketing strategies is culture, because people make decisions about product consumption based on cultural influences (Hunt, 2019). A great example of this is the differences observed in masculine versus feminine cultures (Lomas, 2020). Masculine cultures are motivated by machismo and striving to be the best, while feminine cultures are motivated by enjoyment (Lomas, 2020). Culture can also influence consumers' desire for indulgence (Lomas, 2020). In some countries, tech companies may need to appeal to wants, while

others may need to appeal to needs. Also, in some cultures marketing needs to appeal to consumers' desire for individuality while others need to appeal to a desire for socialization and connection to others (Lomas, 2020).

Consumers' Needs and Strategy

Consumers' needs are constantly evolving, as should companies' marketing campaigns (Chron Small Business, 2020). A marketing strategy may change for several reasons, to wit; prior tactics were ineffective, the strategy was geared for the wrong target audience, outside forces (e.g. conditioning or culture) led to the need for a change, or customers' needs have evolved, to name a few (Chron Small Business, 2020). Perhaps the most evolutionary of these is the perpetual changes which occur in consumers' needs. A great example of this could be seen during the pandemic; the courts needed to continue to process criminal, civil, and family trials and hearings but were trying to keep up with evolving CDC guidelines. One way they complied was through the use of remote video conferencing software such as Zoom. Technology companies shifted their marketing strategies as consumers were suddenly in the market for HD web cameras, microphones, and video conferencing software licensing. During this time, remote- and distanced- working became more and more common. Technology companies had to change marketing strategies as consumers were seeking voice-over-internet-protocol (VOIP) telecommunications solutions and networking equipment such as modems, routers, switches, and hubs. Technology providers such as Linksys and Netgear needed to change their strategy and technology stores such as Best Buy had to change their advertisements to reach consumers in a new and different way as their needs evolved.

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