

Research Paper: Consumer Motivation (5-2)

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While customers have different motivations for consuming the things they do, all consumers have motivations that guide them to want, and purchase certain goods or services. Some motivations for consumption could include the need for status, social acceptance, security or individuality while other motivations are unconscious and can be utilized by marketers to hook consumers into buying a product they never knew they always wanted.

The Viennese psychoanalyst, Ernest Dichter, was a leader in the field of qualitative marketing research in the early to mid 1900's. Dichter suggested that consumer motives were oftentimes triggered by suppressed unconscious needs (as cited in Ziems, 2004, p. 210). Unfortunately, many of Dichter's theories that have proven to be effective marketing strategies have been mostly forgotten in modern advertising (as cited in Ziems, 2004, p. 210). Marketing campaigns that have used Dichter's theories on consumer motives to market products such as cars, furs, cell phones and even paper towels have shown success by increased sales.

Dichter understood that individuals in different age groups or demographics cared about different things, and had varied unconscious motives and needs. In an extensive study completed on the car market in 1939, Dichter discovered that young people in their 20's want "new beginning's and liberation" when they purchase a car in order to nurture their need to feel free to escape life, or just get-up-and-go whenever they please (as cited in Ziems, 2004, p. 211). Older people age 35 and up, however are looking for features like "practicality and safety" when purchasing a new car as they have families to care for and feel the need to act responsibly (as cited in Ziems, 2004, p. 211). While this might sound like common sense, Dichter also discovered some not so obvious consumer motives when it comes to buying cars. For example, Dichter suggested that older men age 35 and beyond that purchased a convertible were actually suppressing the desire to keep a mistress (as cited in Ziems, 2004, p. 211). That explains a lot!

Is there more to motivating consumers than unconscious desires? Sure. According to Alex Michaels, the founder of Prelude2Cinema, the only real way to hook a consumer into buying a product is to touch them emotionally (as cited in Hein, 2006, para. 42). But, beyond mere emotional appeals there is the very real and tangible model of needs proposed by Abraham Maslow in his Hierarchy of Needs pyramid. Maslow's theory indicates that most consumer motivations can be attributed to where they fall on the pyramid of needs he developed. The lowest level on Maslow's pyramid begins with basic "physiological needs" (drinking fluids, eating, sleeping, etc.), and climbs all the way to the highest level on the pyramid to the "need for beauty" (as cited in Lindquist & Sirgy, 2003, p. 250-251). Maslow believed that a person moved through each level of need sequentially. In other words, once the needs in one category were met completely, a person would move up to the next most immediate category, and his or her purchasing motivations would change as a result of the new category to which he or she would become a part of (as cited in Lindquist & Sirgy, 2003, p. 250-251).

So what does all of this information about consumer motivation really mean? The answer to this question can be found by applying the information above to a specific business situation. Women-Love-Us is a fictitious women's cosmetic company that boasts the highest sales revenues in the cosmetic industry. Entering the marketplace with a bang, their newest product, *Timeless*, is an anti-aging serum that targets women in their early to late 30's. Women-Love-Us accepts the significance of consumer motivation to product marketing success and uses the theories of respected psychologists to create their marketing campaigns. The marketing concept Women-Love-Us used to hook their target audience into trying their new product included a combination of both unconscious and functional marketing tactics to motivate women to buy their product.

First, Women-Love-Us acknowledged that the women in the segment they were targeting want to be viewed as young and attractive. They decided not to use a traditional model as the

face for their product and instead used the viewing lens of a camera to capture others responses, which made the potential consumer the *model* in the advertisement. By using a camera to secure the reactions of others, this company was able to put the potential consumer in the starring role where *they* were attention-getter, not some 20-something supermodel. This created an opportunity for women who were the potential consumers of Timeless to experience what using the product might be like from a purely egotistical point of view. While “staring” as the lead role in the advertisement, these women got to experience glances from attractive men in their late 20’s to mid 30’s, and even enjoyed smiles and looks from young attractive women.

Women-Love-Us was able to create the illusion that the unconscious desire their target segment harbors—to be noticed—would be fulfilled by using the new Timeless product. They realized that their customer base had an unspoken fear of becoming old and invisible, and their new Timeless product promised to conquer that fear. By pledging to turn back the clock and create the illusion of youth and beauty that will attract the attention of others, Women-Love-Us developed a marketing concept that motivated their consumers to purchase, and become loyal customers of the Timeless product.

In essence, the consumers who purchased Timeless weren’t really purchasing an anti-aging serum, but rather the *concept* of youth and beauty that the product’s marketing campaign produced. By not using a model in the traditional sense, the potential consumer became the model in the advertisement. The consumer was the *face* of the product.

By combining the great theories of past psychologists with the wants and desires of today’s consumers, marketers can move beyond basic advertising into a world of unconscious and conscious desires, fears, and needs to successfully market their products. It is not enough to promote a product as filling a functional need (Use make-up? We sell some.), it has to touch the consumer on a deeper level that evokes identification with the product. The consumer needs to feel that they are somehow linked to the product, and that it produces a favorable image of them and who they want to be. This will motivate the consumer to buy, and keep buying a product. At least until something better comes along!

References

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