

Are you really “reaching” customers?

Customer contact is an age-old issue. Today we have email, phone, text, tweet, and mail. That is contacting a customer. But did you “reach” them?

Yes there are tools to see if the customer received our email, we have voicemail so we can confirm the call got through, but that’s not what I am talking about. If you want to really reach a customer then think in terms of human emotions, not pathways or channels.

In the early days of marketing, companies like The Fuller brush company sent army’s of sales reps out to go door to door to sell products. Yes this was a time when “The lady of the house” was at home. But the purpose was to talk to the customer 1 to 1. To sell them products by using a demonstration. A savvy sales person learned early on to appeal to the ego of the target customer, in this case a woman. In a now very sexist pitch the sales rep would show how much more beautiful a wife could be with their products and this was the most important function of a wife. Think for a minute beyond rolling your eyes and asking did women really think this way? Yes they did. And that is how Fuller brush people made a living selling high priced brushes.

So too were the door to door vacuum cleaner sales reps who showed women how much faster and cleaner their home would be with the latest and greatest vacuum cleaner. More time to look beautiful when your husband came home. And your home would be spotless. Your husband would be proud of!

Not to sound like a sexist piece, let’s not forget the aluminum siding sales men or “tin men of the ‘50’s and 60’s They came in with all sorts of tricks like they were looking for a house to feature in Life or Look magazine and yours would fit the bill if only it had aluminum siding!

Or the infamous trick – We chose the Jones’ house down the street but they can’t come up with all the money so we have time and materials in case you want their spot on the list of homes to consider for a magazine feature! What hard workingman of the house wouldn’t want his home featured in a prestigious national publication?

These sales reps relied on hitting a specific target – basic human emotions

We as humans are driven by just a few basic needs. Food and shelter, love, and the most powerful, ego. Yes ego. Be the first on your block to have aluminum siding – you will be the trendsetter. Look beautiful for your husband when he walks in buy a Fuller brush. Want the cleanest house on the block? Neighbors will be envious – buy our vacuum cleaners. We all want to be looked up to. To be admired, to be the person all others want to be. Make that target feel special and you convert them to a sale. Provide them a gateway to return and you have a customer.

First step get their attention

Save money. The easiest and very effective way to get attention. Most people like to save money. At first retailers and other brick and mortar operations posted signs on their buildings. Then more savvy marketers posted signs on heavily traveled street corners and walls. In addition, advertisements were placed in newspapers then came the coupon. An ingenious invention when you think of it. Advertisers made a target cut the coupon out of the newspaper. A precursor to interactive marketing. What this did was to serve as a reminder to the target to purchase the advertised items. When one went to the trouble of

cutting out the coupon and carried it with them, it was a good chance they were going to cash in on their savings.

Around the early 1950's a centuries old idea reemerged. Delivering a special message to homes. And the direct mail advertising industry was born. For just a few pennies per household advertisers could send special offers or sale information to homes with great success. At first the thrill of getting mail especially to people who did not work away from their home was the highlight of their day. Envelopes were opened and letters were read. Coupons that were inserted into the envelopes were like gold dropping out of the sky. Response was well worth the investment. Success tales of direct mail raged through the advertising industry like an out of control forest fire. Soon, so many companies were using direct mail that the thrill of opening a letter became a task. Headlines were read and letters were thrown out. Yes the party hit a lull. Savvy advertisers developed ways to increase visibility from printing envelopes with color, and bold text with urgent messages like last days to save. As we moved more into the computer age targeting became the rage. How do we only send these offers to people that are interested and capable of buying our products? No matter how good the offer, how powerful the copy, and how brilliant the graphics are, the cost to send your advertisement of special savings of dog food

To a house hold that does not have pets is a waste. There were some that professed that there was the possibility that the information would be passed on to some one who could use the information, but that was conjecture and un provable. Or as we marketers say un measurable.

So now what? The Internet!

The pathway of sending millions of advertisements through this electronic marvel that could land the information and special urgent offers at people finger tips within minutes of creating the message. Email marketing was born. Response rate was low but technologies sped fueled the fires. Dashboards were created that enabled marketers to see who was opening the emails and at what intervals. Special targeted messages could be sent all at very low cpm. You could create and send offers every day for less than one direct mail program would cost. And you knew who was opening the email and when they were purchasing. Until once again, the thrill of receiving email turned into the irritating need to delete hundreds of unwanted emails every time you logged on to your mail provider.

But we made advancement

Like a magazine subscription advertisers asked customers to sign up for special offers. Very savvy. Now they can collect information about yourself that you give up for free or for a special gift. Information that pioneers in direct mail marketing would have given anything to have. And we can get it for very cost and effort.

That can generate a transactional relationship. Your coupon or sale item today. Then price shopping with someone else's tomorrow. Maybe with customer rewards you can keep that customer coming back to build points. But when the points are gone, what do you have?

This is a different world that before the advent of the home computer.

People's needs have changed, their buying habits, but not their emotions.

They are as intact as they were before fire was invented. And that is what you have to get to in order to reach a customer.

So how do we do this? Simple, let's get back to basics.

Let's take the local gas station.

Circa 1960. Gas was about .20 a gallon. There were gas wars; if you drove down a street you could see gas from .19 to .21. And people did to shop for the lowest price. With inflation we are talking current times of \$3.85 a gallon to \$4.00 a gallon. Fifteen-gallon tank that can amount to \$2.25 savings. Look at that number. Is it really worth driving 10 more minutes to save \$2.25? Many people think so especially if you buy a tank a week figure 52 times a year that amounts to \$117. dollars. Well worth the 8.6 hours you spent searching every week to save that money. By the way that is about \$13 an hour. Back in the day, savvy gas station owners were mechanics. Those who bought gas from them got their cars fixed faster than the ones that shopped gas. I know this to be factual as part of my job working in a service station was to see which customers went down the road to the gas only station. Back then; cars needed repair on an almost constant basis so you really did not want to anger your mechanic. Again – emotion. Fear a powerful way to reach a customer, until they no longer fear you. The key was keeping the fear going. In the 1980s' we had a gas crises. The evening news featured film of gas stations with lines of cars for blocks waiting to get gas. In those days we drove big heavy cars that got about 12 miles per gallon. Buying Japanese made cars was for those un patriotic sorts or those that did not mind taking their lives in their hands because of the thinner gauge metal, powerful engines, and small breaks. Until we saw neighbors driving these cars past the gas station line without need of filling up. Suddenly, these foreign cars seemed inviting to those who were in fear of getting gas. Ads went up everywhere, and miles per gallon entered our vocabulary.

Even when the government acknowledged that cigarette smoking was harmful to peoples' heath, it was not the warning on each pack of cigarettes that made headlines. It was the gory pictures of people that had disfiguring surgeries due to cancer that inhibited many people from smoking. The captions read from this is due to smoking to do you want to look like me?

Basic emotion. This is what you need to harness in order to reach customers. And here are a few ideas

Over the past decade I have worked with data. Propensity studies targeted emails, snail mail that all blasted of offers for products and services that we think that person needs. We can't see the response. We may know that the email was opened but was it read? If so how much was understood? We cannot see the face of our intended customer. Even sending out surveys, are we certain the questions were answered honestly? The respondent just pushes a button and our initiative to contact them is over. People hide behind the computer because it is easy to do, and has no repercussions. No one on the other side can say through the peep hole wait one more question, or look at your face and read your expressions.

If the first line turns you off, we are done. Our only measurement is response and cannot ask a question like why not? A great jumping off point for a savvy sales pro.