

Defining Your Customer by Consumer Type

In the age of instant information available at everyone's fingertips and a constantly changing retail landscape, it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify and understand who exactly your consumers are and what they are looking to purchase.

Understanding the needs of today's consumers is the key to developing a successful retail marketing strategy. These needs can be defined as products, services or companies a customer requires in order to achieve specific goals or objectives. Typically, these conditions are nonnegotiable, but some may have options or varying degrees of importance. Another roadblock arises when consumers don't have a clear grasp of what their needs are or how to attain them. Assisting them in determining these needs is a valuable service to your customers.

The purchasing population is divided into segments based on a number of characteristics. Typically, they are defined by an age range—such as Generation Xers, baby boomers and tweens. However, I believe that it is easier to define consumers by their purchasing habits, because crossover often occurs between age groups, as well as among the informational, environmental and personal factors that influence their purchasing decisions. The complex consumer landscape can be segmented into four personas:

Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability (LOHAS), UberME, WeRfamily and ValueSeeker.

LOHAS

LOHAS consumers represent 23% of the U.S. population, according to the National Marketing Institute. Defined as conscientious consumers, or "cultural creatives," these educated shoppers make conscientious purchasing and



investing decisions based on strong social and cultural values. Their beliefs include the following.

- **Sustainable economy.** Building with green materials, using renewable energy and resource-efficient products, choosing alternative transportation, and advocating for environmental management.
- **Alternative health care.** Selecting natural health and wellness solutions, naturopathic medicine, holistic disease prevention and complementary medicine rather than traditional practices.
- **Healthy and ecological lifestyles.** Consuming natural, nutritional and organic foods, beverages and dietary supplements; purchasing organic and recycled fiber products, as well as ecological home and office products; using environmentally friendly appliances; and choosing ecotourism and travel.
- **Personal development.** Purchasing products that focus on the mind/body/spirit connection, such as books, CDs, and spiritual spa products and services, as well as incorporating yoga into a fitness plan.
- **Socially responsible investing.** Supporting companies with ethical business practices, social responsibilities and sustainability efforts.

Marketing products to this type of person should focus on honesty, integrity and truthfulness. They care more about what they are buying, and thus pay a great deal of attention to the product ingredients, the company's business philosophy and the brand's dedication to the environment. The LOHAS consumer also will continually educate themselves and remain active in promoting their beliefs throughout the community. They are more likely to approach spa-going as a wellness activity. It is vital to appeal to their sense of a mind/body connection and to offer them unique ways to achieve balance, while doing good for others.

Recently, the number of LOHAS consumers has decreased, although the usage of LOHAS products and services has shown an increase of double-digit rates. Evidently, consumers who don't fit the LOHAS demographic are expressing greater interest in these products and services because of three concepts.

1. The consumer becomes aware of the need for a healthier lifestyle.
2. There is a desire to save money on utilities, such as electricity and gas.
3. The eco-chic allure of environmentally friendly brands appeals to them.

UberME

UberMEs focus primarily on the fulfillment of their own needs and on their egos. Typically residing in a metropolis, this consumer has a tendency to be sophisticated and single, with a high disposable income. They are particular



about their product choices but demonstrate no brand loyalty—often moving onto the next trend before the rest of the population. Obsessive about research, this type will go to any lengths necessary to obtain information and pay any price for it.

UberMEs are the most difficult consumers to market goods and services to because of their constant search for the next new thing. However, technology does not scare them. To effectively market to an UberME, select



THE purchasing population is divided into segments based on a number of characteristics.

products and services with proven, visible results, and emphasize the words “hot,” “new” and “trend.” This group believes that spa-going is for pleasure and pampering, and its members often will indulge in a wide range of treatments, as well as test new products and menu items

WeRfamily

WeRfamily consumers are the most brand-loyal and consistent retail shoppers. This is because speed and efficiency are the most important elements in managing their hectic daily lives. Loyalty results when a



product works, has quality-driven values and is available consistently. These consumers are infrequent spa-goers who view spas as a respite and an experience that is a special treat.

They prefer buying products and treatments in a series or package, which gives them the perception that they are saving in the long run and benefiting from more than one experience. Cost is a concern to some of them, and, for many of these spa-goers, they consider the service to be an indulgence and buying products to be an overindulgence. WeRfamily consumers are open to suggestions from spa team members, and providing them with samples that include supporting information usually will lead to future sales.

ValueSeeker

These consumers make retail purchasing decisions based on pricing and value, not because of uniqueness and other quality-enhancing features that may appeal to the other personas. They usually will frequent a spa if they receive a gift certificate, or if they have heard of a promotion or have received a positive word-of-mouth recommendation from someone they know. Distributing travel sizes that provide an inexpensive sampling method to prove efficacy for new products offers an attractive option for this group. Remember that these consumers want to maximize the value of their purchases.

Meet your customers' needs

By viewing your customers as specific personality types, rather than by age group or market segment, you can meet their needs better by improving your menu selection and marketing accordingly. Cross-marketing efforts also can be implemented that offer unique and innovative problem-solving strategies to satisfy the desires of each group.

When targeting a specific group, it's important to remember a few points. Give consumers self-improvement tools that are understandable, accessible and adaptable. Be realistic when communicating the results of a product or service, as well as what kind of financial investment is involved. Relate products to clients on an emotional level, and emphasize how they affect each of the senses. Enhance the core values of family, connections and experiences by offering discount programs for shared leisure time between family and friends. Don't forget to focus on overall customer service; every consumer—regardless of their personality—is always a customer first.

When you share your expertise with members of each consumer group on a level they can understand, you not only will enhance existing client impressions of your establishment, but also encourage word-of-mouth recommendations that can result in a new client base. ✂