

## Dick Maggiore: Know thy customer

By [Dick Maggiore Special](#) to The Canton Repository

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Business today is conducted in intensely competitive, technology-driven global marketplaces. Whether you are an international conglomerate or a local mom-and-pop shop, there is no sign of the intensity decreasing.

Rather than just trying to stay afloat, which is a horrible strategy, how do we grow our business?

With any business, it's all about the customer. We all have customers whether we're for-profit or not-for-profit. Our challenge is to understand our customer and what motivations influence their buying decisions.

With some work, most businesses can figure out the demographics of their best customers. It's not always as easy as it sounds — but doable.

If you are a business selling to another business, you are interested in understanding more about that business and the titles or roles of target individuals. Your customers might be production supervisors at large manufacturing firms. Your customers might be owners of small to mid-sized accounting firms. Your customers might be private high school guidance counselors.

If you are a business selling to consumers, you might be interested in age, income level, where they are geographically, gender, education, marital status, home ownership, religion, ethnicity, type of employment and so on.

While this is good and useful information, it's not enough. It's necessary to dig deeper, going beyond the demographics. The key is to change the focal point to a single customer — your prime prospect. We want to know what motivates her.

In taking this step, we moved from demographics to psychographics. We've left the world of numbers and moved to the gray matter. We're now in the mind of our customer in human terms.

Only when we know what is motivating our prime prospect are we able to find our differentiating idea, our position, and then communicate it so that it resonates with her.

What does she care about? Why? What matters most to her? Why? What concerns does she have? We're looking for that emotional glue.

We have to reach our customers at an emotional level. Here are brands that own one idea in the mind of their customers. Notice that each idea is rooted in emotion:

- Volvo owns safety.
- Apple owns cool.
- Coke owns the original.
- Purell owns kills germs.
- Crest owns fights cavities.
- Walmart owns low price.
- Rockport owns walking comfort.
- Jif owns most preferred.
- Pepsi owns the younger generation.
- Papa John's owns better taste.

Some brands own the category itself. That might not sound emotional, but it is. It's leadership. Category leadership is the most powerful position to own. It evokes a strong emotion. We hold the leader in high esteem. We perceive the category leader to be the expert and attach many positive attributes.

- Google owns the search category.
- Otis owns the elevator category.
- Heinz owns the ketchup category.
- Xerox owns the copier category.
- Red Bull owns the energy drink category.
- Gatorade owns the sports drink category.

- Snapple owns the natural fruit drink category.
- Kleenex owns the facial tissue category.
- Batesville owns the casket category.

Owning a word in the minds of your prospects and customers is quite a feat to accomplish, but it comes with quite a reward.

Every business has this opportunity to find and capitalize on its differentiating idea, though sometimes it is hidden.

The understanding of your prime prospect, who she is and what motivates her, is likely to reveal your often hidden differential. Once known, you can focus on the differentiating idea. It will guide decision-making throughout your organization.

Let's look at a hypothetical example: a local newspaper. Who is the customer?

She is an engaged resident who cares about, is curious about and has concern for the community. She also cares about her family's and the community's quality of life. Therefore, she wants to know about local news, sports, business and entertainment, as well as products and services that satisfy her needs and wants.

Only the local newspaper can provide her all this timely, consistently and comprehensively.

Now that we know more about our customer, we're able to produce more persuasive communications and deploy tactics to reach her.

*Dick Maggiore is president and CEO of [Innis Maggiore](#), founded in Canton in 1974 and today the nation's leading positioning ad agency, building strong brands for companies in competitive markets here and across the country.*