

IDENTIFYING THE IDEAL CUSTOMER

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In the same way that a print buyer seeks out the best print service provider (PSP) for his needs, printers should search out the right kind of customers to target their marketing efforts at. While the buyer probably looks for quality, efficiency of service, reliability and cost, the PSP is often happy to sell to whoever comes knocking on his door. And, in many ways, quite rightly so! Who would ever advocate turning away business?!

With the luxury of an unlimited marketing budget or unlimited resource, we could market our products and services to anyone, anywhere that had any requirement for print. But, sadly, that's never the case. So, instead we need to target our efforts and marketing spend, to the right audience. To those that we are most likely to convert – for example that we have industry experience of, that geographically are well placed to work with us, that have a requirement for our specific offerings, and, not least, are financially stable.

That means, instead of shouting to the same crowd as your competitors, approach selected prospects and have a tailored, informed conversation with them about their business challenges and needs. Demonstrating value in this way is typically far more effective than competing in a price war to win customers who, if buying wholly on price with a view to print as merely a commodity, are unlikely to build a long term relationship with your business.

In a fiercely competitive market, the temptation to position a print business in its marketing collateral as 'a printer of everything' actually has a negative impact. Despite having the capabilities to print anything on request, being 'all things to all men' and so too general about what is on



offer, leaves a potential customer wondering what is so special about this printer? What sets him apart? Why would I choose to use this supplier over another?

Finding a niche and defining a unique selling point (USP) to differentiate from competitors is key. We can do this by simply looking at where our existing strengths lie, at what we are producing at the moment, and for whom, and then using these to attract new and repeat business.

The following may help you to recognise your existing specialism and pinpoint your target market:

Identifying a specialism/differentiator

Considering what you predominately produce will help to identify any inherent specialism that has perhaps been overlooked in the wider objective of 'getting things done'. Simply taking a walk around your print room environment could help to highlight your demonstrable experience,

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consequently enabling you to tailor your marketing messages towards a more defined audience who specifically needs what you are selling.

Example:

Printer A was looking to grow his business and increase revenue by bringing on board new customers and by selling additional work to existing clients. Previously his marketing collateral had simply communicated that he was able to print anything at a reasonable price. That was true, but what printer wouldn't say that they were capable of doing exactly the same thing? His messaging was identical to that of his competitors and so he set about defining his USP to use it in his future messaging and marketing activity.

He knew that the large number of pallets in his warehouse stacked high with freshly-printed and finished staff handbooks ready for despatch to a local fast food chain was one of his most profitable jobs. But previously he'd just seen them as that – a print job. To the buyer (who by no means considered himself a "print buyer") these staff handbooks were a critical tool for his training team and an integral part of the personnel function.

Printer A's USP quickly moved from being 'a printer who prints anything/everything' to that of a 'specialist provider of employee communications'. Because, most importantly, that was what the customer perceived him to be.

Defining your specialist audience

Once Printer A's specialism was defined, he needed to look at how he could target his marketing spend towards others like this customer in the employee communications sector, and reach businesses whose demand for this kind of print was high.

He began doing so by using data to his advantage. He refined the search for his ideal customer by using the profile of the customer he already had. He used criteria such as vertical market (take-away restaurants) company size (to ensure volume of work) and geographical location (to enable him to target those closest to him and build more personal relationships) and the likely role of the buyer (in this case HR/Personnel).

Getting it right

The data provided him with a snapshot and an understanding of the buyer persona he was dealing with. It meant that not only did he know where to target his marketing materials, but how he should tailor the messaging, content, terminology and the benefits the buyer was looking for.

He recognised that he would not be 'speaking to' a print-savvy procurement person, or to someone that would be interested in the technology or equipment in his print room. He realised he needed to adopt language they would understand. For example, what Printer A might have called variable data printing (VDP) his customer would understand as 'personalised printing'. That promoting 'short-run' would fall on stony ground, while 'one-day turnaround' would be perceived as being a great benefit. Using technical or industry-specific jargon could easily result in a disconnect of communication, potentially putting the customer off or scaring him away.

The caveat

Focussing his efforts towards a specific market didn't mean that Printer A was unable to accept work from other customers. Rather it simply helped him to avoid diluting his capabilities as a result of more generalised marketing messages.

Seasonal spread

Another thing to consider is gearing up marketing activity for seasonal peaks and troughs and plotting these across the year to ensure consistent business. For example, if much of your work is in the education sector and the summer months are your busiest, think about specifically targeting prospects where demand would be at its greatest outside of those times. Perhaps looking at the holiday industry where the run up to Christmas and in to the New Year is renowned as being frantic for direct mail and brochures.

To find out more about defining your USP and planning your marketing spend, take a look at the Top Tips guides on the **Selling and Marketing Digital Print** page of Digital Dimensions.