

Establishing customer needs

Customers are people who buy products and services from other people (usually companies of one sort or another). What customers think, and feel about a company and/or its products is a key aspect of business success. Attitudes are shaped by experience of the product, the opinions of friends, direct dealings with the company, and the advertising and other representations of the company.

Irrespective of whether a business' customers are consumers or organisations, it is the job of marketers to understand the needs of their customers. In doing so they can develop goods or services which meet their needs more precisely than their competitors. The problem is that the process of buying a product is more complex than it might at first appear.

Customers do not usually make purchases without thinking carefully about their requirements. Wherever there is choice, decisions are involved, and these may be influenced by constantly changing motives. The organisation that can understand why customers make decisions such as who buys, what they buy and how they buy will, by catering more closely for customers needs, become potentially more successful.

Target customers

The supermarket industry provides a good example of the way in which different groups of customers will have different expectations. Some customers just want to buy standard products at the lowest possible prices. They will therefore shop from supermarkets that offer the lowest prices and provide a reasonable range of goods. In contrast, some supermarket shoppers are seeking such aspects as variety and quality. They will therefore choose to buy from an up-market supermarket. Additionally some customers will have special tastes such as wanting to buy FAIRTRADE products or organic fruit and vegetables. It is clear therefore that to be successful a business has to have a clear understanding of their target customers and the expectations of this group.

Most markets are made up of groups of customers with different sets of expectations about the products and services that they want to buy. Marketing oriented businesses will therefore need to carry out research into customer requirements to make sure that they provide those products and services which best meet customer expectations in the relevant market segment.