

Introduction

What if there were a distinctive set of steps that most consumers went through before deciding whether to make a purchase or not? What if there was a scientific method for determining what goes into the buying process that could make marketing to a target audience more than a shot in the dark? There are six stages to the consumer buying process, and as a marketer, you can market to them effectively.

Source: <https://www.business2community.com/consumer-marketing/six-stages-consumer-buying-process-market-0811565>

1. Problem Recognition

Put simply, before a purchase can ever take place, the customer must have a reason to believe that what they want, where they want to be or how they perceive themselves or a situation is different from where they actually are. The desire is different from the reality – this presents a problem for the customer. However, for the marketer, this creates an opportunity. By taking the time to “create a problem” for the customer, whether they recognize that it exists already or not, you’re starting the buying process. To do this, start with content marketing. Share facts and testimonials of what your product or service can provide. Ask questions to pull the potential customer into the buying process. Doing this helps a potential customer realize that they have a need that should be solved.

2. Information Search

Once a problem is recognized, the customer search process begins. They know there is an issue and they’re looking for a solution. If it’s a new makeup foundation, they look for foundation; if it’s a new refrigerator with all the newest technology thrown in, they start looking at refrigerators – it’s fairly straight forward. As a marketer, the best way to market to this need is to establish your brand or the brand of your clients as an industry leader or expert in a specific field. Methods to consider include becoming a Google Trusted Store or by advertising partnerships and sponsors prominently on all web materials and collaterals. Becoming a Google Trusted Store, like CJ Pony Parts – a leading dealer of Ford Mustang parts – allows you to increase search rankings and to provide a sense of customer security by displaying your status on your website. Increasing your credibility markets to the information search process by keeps you in front of the customer and ahead of the competition.

The Consumer Buying Process

3. Evaluation of Alternatives

Just because you stand out among the competition doesn’t mean a customer will absolutely purchase your product or service. Customers want to be sure they’ve thoroughly researched prior to making a purchase. Because of this, even though they may be sure of what they want, they’ll still want to compare other options to ensure their decision is the right one. Keep them on your site for the evaluation of alternatives stage. Leading insurance provider Geico allows customers to compare rates with other insurance providers all under their own website – even if the competition can offer a cheaper price. This not only simplifies the process, it establishes a trusting customer relationship, especially during the evaluation of alternatives stage.

4. Purchase Decision

Somewhat surprisingly, the purchase decision falls near the middle of the six stages of the consumer buying process. At this point, the customer has explored multiple options, they understand pricing and payment options and they are deciding whether to move forward with the purchase or not. That’s right, at this point they could still decide to walk away. This means it’s time to step up the game in the marketing process by providing a sense of security while reminding customers of why they wanted to make the purchase in the first time. At this stage, giving as much information relating to the need that was created in step one along with why your brand, is the best provider to fulfill this need is essential. If a customer walks away from the purchase, this is the time to bring them back. Retargeting or simple email reminders that speak to the need for the product in question can enforce the purchase decision, even if the opportunity seems lost.

5. Purchase

A need has been created, research has been completed and the customer has decided to make a purchase. All the stages that lead to a conversion have been finished. However, this doesn’t mean it’s a sure thing. A consumer could still be lost. Marketing is just as important during this stage as during the previous. Marketing to this stage is straightforward: keep it simple. Test your brand’s purchase process online. Is it complicated? Are there too many steps? Is the load time too slow? Can a purchase be completed just as simply on a mobile device as on a desktop computer? Ask these critical questions and make adjustments. If the purchase process is too difficult, customers, and therefore revenue, can be easily lost.

6. Post-Purchase Evaluation

The Consumer Buying Process



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Just because a purchase has been made, the process has not ended. After a purchase is made, it's inevitable that the customer must decide whether they are satisfied with the decision that was made or not.

If a customer feels as though an incorrect decision was made, a return could take place. This can be mitigated by identifying the source of dissonance, and offering an exchange that is simple and straightforward. However, even if the customer is satisfied with his or her decision to make the purchase, whether a future purchase is made from your brand is still in question. Because of this, sending follow-up surveys and emails that thank the customer for making a purchase are critical.

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Page 1 of 2.

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