

Customer profiling technology:

the core of the Customerwise method of customer story production

Here we have two customer stories (click on the images to jump to the actual customer stories).

One generated three times more inquiries (inquiries via the company's website) than the other.

The image displays two examples of customer stories on a website. Both examples feature a header with the company name '建設業許可.com' and the phone number '0120-10-7893'. The left example shows a man speaking, with a text overlay that reads: '近所の行政書士に相談をしました。『建設結果は建設業許可が取れない』との回答が。しかし、山内さんに相談すると、スムーズに申請が進みました。その理由は... 有慶会全平高工業 代表取締役 平高剛樹'. The right example shows two men in an office setting, with a text overlay that reads: 'あの時、紹介おかげの行政書士の言うことを聞いていたら、今ごろ会社はつぶれていました。山内先生のおかげで生き残りました。' Below the images, there are sections of text and a navigation bar. The left example has a section titled '■ 平高工業さんのビジネス状況' and the right example has a section titled '■ 建設業の概要 ~ 千葉県の中小建設会社'.

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The customer story on the left was created by the client; the one on the right by myself. The one on the right elicited three times more responses (inquiries).

It may seem to you that there is no great difference between these two examples. But from the viewpoint of a prospective customer, who is seriously thinking of purchasing the product, the difference is considerable.

The photograph, the standfirst copy and the main text of the one on the right all incorporate devices that are calculated to induce a response from a prospective customer are embedded in.

It is not that the text reads well, or that the photograph is particularly good (in fact, the person I interviewed did not want me to take a full-face photograph, so, with some difficulty, I was obliged to take a photograph from the side.

The secret to this high response rate is "customer profiling". This is the skill of building up an accurate image of the reader (the prospective customer) and assuming the role of a prospective customer and conducting the interview from that viewpoint.

If an accurate customer profile can be built up in advance, the interviewer can serve as a kind of "stand-in" for prospective customers. In this way, the interviewer is able to see things from the reader's viewpoint (that of a prospective customer), and to write up the customer story from that viewpoint too. This means the customer story will automatically elicit a response from prospective customers.

I do this profiling work in collaboration with the client, before going to interview the customer. I ask the client many questions, form predictions and assumptions, outline those predictions and assumptions, build up predictions and assumptions, and gradually build up an accurate, concrete, three-dimensional image of the prospective customer.

On one occasion, I had a writer observe the process and set down on paper what exactly I do.

1. Preparation
 - Research on client, products and competitors
 - Notes on expected answers and projected ideal story, testimony and photograph
2. Visit
 - Preparation for visit, making mental preparations, travel
3. Introduction
 - Greetings; verification of positioning, establishing who will take the lead.
 - Clearing up ambiguities, warning interviewee that they may find questions uncomfortable.

4. Interview (skills)

- Apology for own ignorance, outline scope of desired responses
- Brief outline of questions to be asked and specific expressions, explanation of purpose
- Proposal of predictions and assumptions
- Verification validity or otherwise of assumptions and their accuracy.
- Verification of terminology (are terms general or industry-specific, can they be expressed another way?)
- Proposal of categorization, verification using figures
- Verification of maximum range, historic high and low
- Verification of concrete examples and some part of the examples being eliminated or not
- Description of perceptions, logic of persons appearing in story, direct speech approach
- Communication of degree to which customer is convinced
- Confirmation of shared perceptions

5. Interview (points to be covered)

- Brief explanation of the product
- Check 4 Ws.
- Companies: industry, size, area, whether product is used company-wide or only in certain divisions, who proposed adopting the product
- Individuals: age, sex, area, sensibilities, thoughts, points interviewee believes are important, annual income
- Have there been any unexpected buyers?
- Confirmation of purchase motivation. Under what circumstances does the customer form a desire to purchase?
- Confirmation of benefit to customer. Necessary purchase or elective purchase?
- Individuals: check which sense the product appealed to.
- Companies: has the product contributed to sales growth, reduced costs or reduced risk?

- Is the product something you would buy once in a lifetime, or would you make repeat purchases?
- Is maintenance required?
- Are the person who controls the finances and the person who makes purchasing decisions one and the same?
- Spontaneous purchase or forced purchase?
- Self-motivated purchase or purchase motivated by others?
- Purchase of materials or single unit purchase?
- Confirmation of budget, price, units, unit price, number ordered, value of order
- Confirmation of customer's purchase decision-making process.
- Confirmation of actions, people consulted, method used to overcome difficulties, reasons for concern
- Confirmation of visible and invisible competition
- Three areas in which the client's product beats the competition
- Sales issues: to whom does the client wish to sell the product in future?
- Confirmation of how customer story is to be used
- Confirmation of "ideal story"
- Confirmation of imprinting effect and barrier lowering effect
- Turning interview into story
- Description through reality, perceptions, emotions, thoughts, actions
- Confirmation of validity of story
- Outline of ideal customer. Reconstruction of word-of-mouth scenario
- Description of ideal entry and exit points for reader (prospective customer)

6. Proposal

- Agreement of ideal entry and exit points
- Description of ideal testimony
- Drawing up concrete questions to elicit ideal testimony
- Description of ideal photograph in specific terms
- Creation of catchphrase

I choose a combination of these items, according to circumstances, and discuss them with the client, along with the products business resources available at the time, current conditions (how much the client is currently selling and to whom), and client's hopes for the future (how much they would like to sell and to whom), etc., and so finalize the "customer profile".

Ultimately, the difference between the two customer stories at the head of this page is that one was produced on the basis of rigorous "customer profiling", while the other was not. Customer story production is 90% preparation. Advance profiling decides everything.

The core strength of the Customerwise method does not lie in interviewing skills, nor the ability to take great photographs or write well, but in customer profiling.