

Consumer Behavior Exercises

The purpose of these exercises is to broaden your understanding of consumer behavior by bringing you face-to-face with customers. The first step is to find a person who is not a member of this course, and who has recently bought a product or service of the kind defined for each exercise described below. An alternative is to interview an institutional/industrial buyer.

Your task is to conduct in depth interview of about 30-60 minutes in length with each customer. The goal of the interview is to understand the decision process that governed the purchase of the product or service in terms that can be useful to a marketing manager.

The list of questions on the back of this sheet is intended as a broad guide for structuring your in depth interviews. The format should not be followed dogmatically. Nor is the list necessarily complete and exhaustive of the types of questions you need to ask, or the level of detail for which you need to probe. Rather you should try to stimulate a lively and open discussion around these key question areas from which you can: (a) develop a deep understanding of the purchase decision process; and (b) surface the factors, in the environment and in the customer's psyche, that really determined why the customer acted the way she/he did.

Prepare a report briefly (1-2 pages) and concisely for each interview for submission. You will also be called upon to report to the class on your key insights.

Exercise (A). A mundane product or service costing less than \$5.

Exercise (B) A product or service costing over \$100 that performs a utilitarian function.

Exercise (C) A product or service costing over \$100 that, the customer feels, reveals something about the kind of person she or he is.

General Discussion Areas

Your task is to audit the choice process.

Who is the decision-making unit?

- Who bought the product or service?
- Identify all those who played a role in the decision process. What role did they play?

What motivated the purchase?

- What problems did the product/service solve? What functions would it facilitate?
- What attributes seemed important?

Characterize the decision.

- Was it a first time decision? A review of a previous decision? A casual decision? Was the amount of deliberation appropriate to the decision?

Characterize the decision-making process.

- What triggered the process?
- Was there an information search? How was the search conducted? How much information was collected? What sources were used? When in the process was information gathered?
- How many alternatives were evaluated? Why those?
- How was the final choice determined?

Where did the consumer buy?

- Why there?
- Which came first: where to buy or what to buy?

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Exercise (D). A mundane product or service costing less than \$5.

Exercise (E) A product or service costing over \$100 that performs a utilitarian function.

Exercise (F) A product or service costing over \$100 that, the customer feels, reveals something about the kind of person she or he is.

General Discussion Areas

Your task is to audit the relationship between the customer and the product/service.

How would you describe the consumption experience?

- How often is the product used or consumed? Who uses it? When? Where? How often? What feelings and opinions surround the consumption experience?

What type of relationship does the customer have with the product or service?

- How long has the relationship been going on? How has it evolved and changed over time? What terms best describe the relationship: good, bad, mixed, ambivalence, dependency, casual, partners, exploited, exploitative, good friends?

What kinds of things have gone wrong in the relationship?

- Stock outs, unavailability of parts or service, inappropriate communication, quality lapses, violations of norms or expectations or values?

What positive surprises have occurred?

- Exceptional service, welcome communication, performance above expectations, affirmation of values.

Is the customer satisfied or dissatisfied with the product or service?

- What factors influence the level of felt (dis) satisfaction? How were expectations formed? Did the product exceed them or fall short? How?

What is the meaning of this product or service to the customer?

- How does the product fit into the consumer's life? What role does it play?

What role does the brand play in all of this?