

# DESIGNING THE RIGHT PRODUCT FOR YOUR MARKETPLACE

By Jeff Williams

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From the end of World War II until the late 1970's most Americans spent the majority of their money on basic goods and services with little left for luxury type items. Giant factories turned out millions of products whose style, color and size were often determined by what made the machines work most efficiently. There wasn't much concern about what the customer really wanted.

Japanese auto producers forced reverberating changes in the way consumers went about considering their purchases. Suddenly in the mid-1970's a flood of cars hit America with features never before available at popular prices. Toyota and Honda revolutionized the concept of "user friendly" products - incorporating a high standard of quality with easy to use features, all at affordable prices.

### Today's Customer Is Smart...And Demanding

Suddenly, consumers realized that someone did take their interests into consideration when designing products. In fact, a critical element in Japanese auto production since the late 1960's has been extensive consumer research and surveying, particularly in the area of durability and reliability needs.

The customer of the 21st Century has learned from buying user friendly products such as Sony televisions, Panasonic stereos, Apple computers and Honda autos that they can be demanding and that manufacturers will respond. This has produced a new brand of customer that is educated, very aware of prices and very demanding.

She wants quality, variety, durability, excellent service and a very good price all at the same time. She has a mind of her own and will talk about her interests and needs if you ask.

The process of asking customers what they want before you design your product or service is called being "market driven" because you are guided in your product development decisions by the customer's wishes.

Today the most successful new businesses are those that ask enough questions and listen carefully to the answers.

### Understand Basic People Needs

It is sometimes frustrating trying to get honest information out of people, because they can't always

express why they buy the way they do. You can bet safely, however, that their need is one of several basic motivations of all people, such as:

- Convenience
- Comfort
- Friendship
- Security
- Status
- Health and Well-Being
- Savings
- Love
- Style
- Profit

When you are trying to figure out your desired customer, put yourself in their shoes and think about what needs would motivate you to buy your product or service. There are usually two or three primary needs your product or service can satisfy and several lesser needs. When starting your product/service design, it is critical that you use your market research to focus on the primary needs and wants of your prospective customers.

#### The Product Description Worksheet

As we discussed earlier, the successful new business owner first surveys potential customers to identify their wants, needs and dissatisfactions. Questions about how often they buy, how far they would travel to buy, how much they might spend for your type of product or service are also asked.

You then separate the facts gained into groups, such as: pricing, packaging, location, assortment, etc. to organize the information in preparation for beginning a custom design of your product or service. You will make assumptions about the potential customers behavior and come to some conclusions about how you can present yourself as someone who will respond to their needs and wants.

To help you put together your product design strategy, you can use the fill-in worksheet below.

\* Instructions:

1. Learn in detail 5-6 wants/needs of your target customer.
2. Add information from library research, trade associations, etc. about customer demographics, location, buying behavior, etc..
3. Take the profile you are creating and decide what specific product/service features this leads to. Express each feature as a user benefit - you must satisfy the age-old demand of potential buyers: "What's In It For Me?"

#### Product/Service Description Worksheet

Customer Want/Need	Product Feature	User Benefit
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		



Reference Box:

Jeff Williams worked for big business for years, until he decided to take his career in his own hands by establishing his practice as a small business trainer and coach. Since 1988, he has guided more than 3,000 people to successfully go from employee to boss. For those seriously considering self-employment, he is pleased to offer his free, monthly telegroup: "Are You Ready To Leave Your Job?". Register at: <http://www.bizstarters.com/ready2leave.cfm>  
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