

# Clone Your Best Customers

By Marcia Yudkin

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Two businesses -- a women's clothing boutique and a mail-order operation -- recently consulted me about the same dilemma. Each had achieved satisfying sales through channels that didn't allow for further growth. They needed a fresh marketing program that would yield a steady stream of new customers, and they were confused about where and how to advertise.

Like Dorothy with the ruby slippers in the Wizard of Oz, they already had most of what they needed for a solution, but they didn't know how to use what they had. They needed to investigate who their buyers -- especially their highest-spending and most frequent patrons -- were. In doing so, they'd learn how to clone their best customers.

The general principle: Discover the characteristics of your current customers and use that knowledge to reach more shoppers just like them.

The clothing store already knew the age range, income level and some cultural interests and hobbies of its clientele. I suggested that they find out which newspapers, magazines and TV and radio programs their buyers read, watch or listen to, as these might prove prime advertising vehicles. Once ads are running in many places, you can also ask customers which media outlet persuaded them to come into the store, although many buyers don't remember this information.

The mail-order operation had little knowledge of the income or the educational level of its purchasers, since orders so far had come in through the anonymity of the Internet. However, it was relatively simple

for them to send a follow-up questionnaire by e-mail, which asked a buyer's age, educational background, employment status (employed or self-employed), income bracket and profession. The brief questionnaire also asked how satisfied they were with their purchase, generating glowing testimonials along with a few complaints. Questionnaire answers would help this business intelligently choose where to advertise.

To the clothing store, I suggested marketing strategies besides advertising for cloning its best customers. Since many store regulars were involved with charitable organizations, the store could let buyers know, through a postcard to its mailing list or a flyer slipped in with purchases, that it might produce a fashion show to benefit their favorite charity. Most likely, customers' dearest non-profit organization appealed to others who would also be attracted to the boutique's distinctive style of clothing.

Since many patrons had creative hobbies, like painting, music, weaving or writing, it made sense to appeal to others who spent spare time on the arts. I suggested selecting a different customer's creative work to feature in the store every month. I envisioned a display of one woman's pottery or poetry, with a color photo of her wearing the store's clothing. Surely the woman in the spotlight would bring in friends like herself and patrons would urge their creative women friends to apply for the honor.

Scientists say human cloning isn't quite on the horizon, but in marketing cloning techniques like these already produce new customers!

Marcia Yudkin [marcia@yudkin.com](mailto:marcia@yudkin.com) creates cost-effective, creative marketing plans for clients all over the world. You can learn more about her reputation-enhancing marketing plan service at <http://www.yudkin.com/marketingplan.htm> and view excerpts from a sample plan at <http://www.yudkin.com/sampleplan.htm>

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