

Selling to Business Owners: Key Messages and Market Insights

Although independent, small businesses represent an enormous market (99% of US firms), most experienced marketers fail to sell to them because they don't understand what really motivates owners and CEOs to buy.

What kinds of businesses are we talking about?

In part, these are local businesses that fall under the 30 or so traditional leading headings in the traditional directory business:

Attorneys

Auto Repairing and Service

Financial Services

HVAC Contractors

I.T. Integration and Service Providers

Manufacturers

Movers

Pest Control Services

Plumbing, Electrical, and other Contractors

Retail (Boutiques, Florists, Fashion)

Technology and Software Development

etc.

The marketing messages to any of these businesses are essentially the same – because each of them is controlled by the same kind of decision-maker, whether that's the owner, the CEO, or a licensed professional.

The marketing tactics may change with the times, as these small businesses need to reach their customers through digital marketing and in some cases compete with online giants. That said, the emotional process of the owner or CEO before making a decision to buy has not changed, because it exists at a deeper level. In fact, the decision gets made for reasons owners or CEOs are not even aware of!

Our research shows that most CEOs and owners make purchase decisions in a similar fashion, regardless of the kind of business they operate or the category of the purchase.

Marketers often think that business owners and CEOs respond best to promotional campaigns around price. While CEOs may emphasize price, they usually decide based on other factors entirely, and primarily on their sense on how to optimize the future. Many price-focused messages actually alienate them.

Market success requires an understanding of the core beliefs and underlying processes that drive an owner's engagement. These include:

- > Business owners evaluate quality, value and price based on their vision of the future, not their present circumstances.
- > Business owners are risk averse and will purchase if they believe the decision will prevent problems that threaten their business growth or progress.
- > Business owners will buy from firms that demonstrate personal accountability and offer iron-clad proof that the purchase will not disrupt their business.

Again, these factors are usually unconscious; business owners aren't necessarily aware of them.

We have benefited from the study of emerging businesses for more than 25 years, including studies involving more than 2,000 interviews with business owners and CEOs. These research projects have resulted in increased revenue, market share, customer retention, product launches and other results for client companies that sell to business owners, including Verizon, FirstCare, Berkshire-Hathaway, and others.

These studies uncovered:

Hidden characteristics that drive all important decisions

How CEOs evaluate quality, value and price

Why providing choices are important in the owner's decision to buy

How product benefits must be framed

What assurances are required to create action, and other important factors

The Seven Key Beliefs

To sell successfully to the local small-to-medium business, marketers should understand the seven key beliefs of business owners:

1. My business is unique.
2. I must be given choices.
3. I am the only person who can decide for my business.
4. I am working to materialize a dream that only I can see.
5. Spending money is necessary when it can prevent problems that distract me from building my business.
6. Value is more important than savings.
7. I expect to be treated as I treat my customers; I expect my suppliers to always be accountable.

The task for marketers is to craft a marketing communications program that uses this wisdom to shape the marketing message and the sales presentation.

For a no-obligation consultation to discuss whether or not we may assist you in meeting your revenue goals, please contact johnf@absciencemarketing.com