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BUYING behaviours are a completely different way of thinking about customers.

Unfortunately, they appear superficially similar to personality types and behavioural styles, which have been inappropriately used in sales processes for over 80 years.

Now, don't get me wrong. I am a huge fan of personality typing in recruitment and placement and of behavioural styles in teamwork, personal and professional development and leadership.

It's just that, often, these tools are asked to perform tasks they were never meant for.

For example, what's the use of analysing a client's personality type when that same personality type has been known to exhibit entirely different buying behaviours in different sales environments?

Buying behaviour versus behavioural styles

Buying behaviour is more closely related to behavioural styles because it involves two of the same parameters:

- How "friendly" the customer perceives the environment to be; and
- How much personal power he believes he has in this interaction.

Yet, buying behaviour and behavioural styles are different because buying behaviour involves two further parameters: past experience and buying beliefs.

■ Past experience

Past experience is a huge determinant in buying behaviour.

People retain long memories of sales interactions — particularly unhappy ones — and these significantly influence their approach the next time they have to buy what they see as a similar product.

You need to be aware that products that the client sees as similar can appear totally unrelated to you.

For example, you might see absolutely no connection between purchasing new software for business and buying a replacement kitchen appliance. But to your client, they are virtually identical.

They are both situations where he has little knowledge or interest in the product,

In the mood to buy

Recognise the five buyer behaviours and customise your sales strategy accordingly



Your customers' buying behaviours are usually influenced by their past experiences with similar products. PHOTO: REUTERS

no confidence in being able to make the right choice and he resents having to spend the money in the first place.

■ Buying beliefs

Regardless of one's personality type, everyone has set beliefs about how he needs to act in a buying role. Often, these beliefs vary depending on the product.

I have known people who are generous as saints when dealing with their local shopkeeper but act like Genghis Khan when buying a new car.

This all comes back to their beliefs about the trustworthiness of a particular industry.

Sometimes, these are based on past experience, but, more often, they are driven by stereotypes.

They expect real estate agents to embellish the property and motor vehicle salesmen to be loose with the truth — so they are cynical and untrusting.

They expect waiting staff to be knowledgeable and honest with their food and drink advice, so they follow their suggestions on the chef's special and a wine to match.

I'm not saying these stereotypes are justified, but that is the reality.

Five buyer behaviours

■ Emotive

These buyers are driven by impulse and emotion.

Their past buying experiences have been mostly positive and pleasant. They probably have more "bad" buys than the average because of their impulsive nature, but they don't tend to dwell on the negatives.

Their belief is: "I'm only here once, so I might as well enjoy it. If I don't, it won't be there next time."

■ Offensive

These buyers are always trying to keep you on the back foot.

Their past buying experiences have been generally positive, in their eyes. They remember every negative one as a defeat.

Their belief is: "This is win-lose...and I'm not going to lose. Nothing personal, it's just business."

■ Cautious

These buyers need proof of claims and past evidence of success.

Their past buying experiences have been disappointing because the sales staff were, in general, unprofessional.

Their belief is: "If they expect me to spend my money with them, they better get it right!"

■ Appeaser

This type of buyer says whatever you want to hear and hides negative thoughts and emotions from you.

Their past buying experiences have been generally positive, with one or two stand-

out negative experiences.

They don't believe they have the confidence to confront a pushy salesman.

■ Altruistic

These buyers are driven by their desire for fairness and concern for others.

Their past buying experiences are less relevant, as they tend to see each buying challenge separately.

Their belief is: "If I'm fair and reasonable with people, in general, they will be the same with me."

An important question to ask

There is one question you should ask as early as the relationship will allow: "How did it go when you bought your current...?"

Or "What was it like for you the last time you got something like this?"

Any question that uncovers a customer's past experience and his level of trust gives you valuable information about how you should build the sales relationship with him.

And if it's negative, that's okay, because you have a fantastic opportunity to create a unique impression and quickly build trust by treating him in the exact opposite way to what he expects.

Understanding how customers like to buy provides the most useful information in helping them to buy — not be sold to — in the way that they prefer.

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