

Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How

By Jack Miller

Journalism students are taught to report “Who, What, When, Where, Why and How.” Market Intelligence is no different.

Who is buying your products? What is the demographic of your customer base? Who is the decision maker? Is it your customer, or your customer’s customer?

What are they buying? Your products, or your competitor’s? All of your products, or just a narrow slice? High value products or low value products? Are there opportunities to sell more of your product range to these customers? Can you upsell? Are there opportunities to take business from your competitors?

When do they buy? Is it seasonal? Is it consistent? Is it only opportunistic? Some commodity buyers buy large volumes when prices are down, and then abandon the market once they’ve driven the price up. Some consumers only buy on sale. When do your customers buy?

Where do they buy? What channels do different customers use? Direct? Internet? Retail? Distributors?

Why do they buy what they buy? It’s always quality, price and service – but what element of quality, price and service? Must it be lowest price, or competitive price with outstanding quality or service? What element of service? Is it reliability, or super problem solving? What would make them switch suppliers?

How do they buy? How do they decide what to buy? If they buy on service, how do they know who has the best service? Once they decide to switch suppliers, how do they select a new supplier?

The “why” and “how” questions are often overlooked, and are hardest to get a handle on, but may be the most important. Often, many people influence the decision. A good example of this can be found with high-end printing papers. The printer buys the paper from a paper merchant, but an ad agency or designer usually specifies the paper. The marketing mix includes a mill sales rep who calls on the paper merchant, advertising in trade magazines, sampling programs with beautifully printed samples, and expensive specification reps who shows the

samples to graphic designers and ad agencies. And of course there is also the merchant rep who calls on the printer, the printer who actually buys the paper, and the print sales rep who has the primary contact with the print buyers.

Quite a cast of characters! There was quite a great debate about the impact of each player and the value and effectiveness of all of these marketing elements, but no one knew for sure exactly how much impact each element had, or even how the paper selection decision was made. So we found out. We interviewed designers and ad agencies that specified paper in 5 cities, 5 designers in each city, and we did two case studies with each, for a total of 50 case studies. We asked them to detail what paper they selected, why they selected it, and what process they used to make the decision. Who made the decision? Who influenced the decision maker? What materials did they use? How did they use them? We added focus groups in each city to validate the findings of the case studies.

The result? Need to know market intelligence, with actionable findings.

For need to know market intelligence in paper, print, and packaging, email jack.miller@market-intell.com or call 203 925 0326.

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