

# Know thy customer! Is it easier said than done?

 By [Nicole Zetler](#)

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One of the very first rules you would learn when going into business is to treat your customer as a king. We all know it and we've all said it, yet how many marketers truly understand what makes their customers tick, how to engage them, or even just who it is that their offering is serving? It's difficult to treat your customer like a king if you don't understand what they want.

Yellowwood recently published a white paper on this topic, entitled: How to Know More About your Market than Anyone Else - The Guide to Relevance, which explores what it takes for organisations to know their customers better so they can offer them relevant brands. Being relevant ultimately translates into customers paying attention to you, buying what you have to offer and, in time, building a relationship of trust with your brand.

Most marketers assume that the best way to be relevant is to localise an international trend or get their brands into spaces which may be relevant to their target market. It's much more than that. Getting relevance right requires that you really understand your market - on a deep, intuitive and insightful level. Customers see through the brands that don't, and they speak with their feet.

Given this, how can marketers become more relevant to those that they serve? At Yellowwood, we believe that it's time to go back to the fundamentals and understand that customers are people - human beings that behave a certain way, are often irrational, can be fickle and do things that even they can't explain. Marketers should treat their market like they would treat their peers, friends and family. It's about listening, learning and connecting with them.

## Listen

Listening requires paying close attention to what is happening. Marketers often become too engrossed in business-as-usual and neglect to get out into the market to see what their customers are doing, talking about and how they are interacting with brands.

Ensure that you are really listening to the evolving needs and mind sets of your consumers, whether these are expressed verbally or through behaviours, directly to your company or in conversation with their friends. Companies not keeping a close ear to the ground risk missing an opportunity of a lifetime.

A brand that's getting this right is 5 Gum. In a short space of time, the brand has gained incredible momentum in both the international and local markets and this is largely due to target market relevance. They listen to what it is their market values and enjoys; and has the right social platforms in place to listen to and be a part of their customer conversations.

They don't only listen to what their customers think and say about their brand but go beyond the category. For example, the iconic 5 Gum Experience brand activation is built around the passion points of their consumers.

## Learn

There is no use gathering insights about your customers if you aren't going to share these broadly across your organisation to truly make these 'nuggets of gold' work to guide innovation, and live beyond a research report or PowerPoint deck. It's essential that marketers learn to get insight out of the back office and embed it across the business.

Red Bull has realised the value of having an internal "insight bank" and has told us that 90% of their ideas come from their people. They run regular cross-functional insight-sharing and ideas sessions internally.

## Connect

The final piece of the relevance puzzle is to connect with your consumer. The only way this can be done is for marketers to change their mind-sets. There has been an increasing disconnect with the consumer in recent years - where organisations have come to view them as numbers and not people.

Connecting requires us to view our consumers as the intricate beings that they are, and to look at the consumer in a multifaceted way. It's no longer about which demographic box they tick but it's rather about looking at all the layers which make them tick - from psychographics to context, attitudes to behavioural data.

For example, the recent Dove 'Real Beauty Sketches' campaign tapped into the minds of women and subsequently into a valuable customer insight that women often underestimate their own true beauty. If Dove only considered their market with a demographic lens, they couldn't have come close to having such an insightful and impactful campaign.

Essentially, a brand's ability to succeed is directionally proportional to its ability to appeal to the people it targets. Doing this is not about translating international trends and it's certainly not about fancy gimmicks. It's about relevance. So, get out there and listen, learn and connect - go back to the basics and know thy customer!

## ABOUT NICOLE ZETLER

Staying true to her passion, Nicole's journey formally started at the University of Cape Town when she graduated with a Business Science degree with Honours in Marketing. Being intrigued by the approach of Unconventional Wisdom and Nicole's goal of being challenged on a daily basis led her to Yellowwood in 2011, where she goes back to her puzzle building roots, solving business and marketing problems as a Strategist.

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