

Target audience profiling: why TAP is so important

WHAT IS TAP?

A target audience profile—or TAP—is a written and very detailed appraisal of your customers' characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors. TAP information typically falls into two categories: demographics and psychographics.

- Demographics describe *who* your customers are. Examples include age, gender, industry, professional title, professional vocation, location, marital status, income, education level, and nationality.
- Psychographics describe *why* your customers act as they do. For example, you may determine that you have *price-sensitive customers* who choose the least expensive option. Or *trend-conscious customers* who prefer the newest, most fashionable option. Or *early-adopters* who are open to choosing new, unproven options.

WHY SHOULD I DO TAPS?

Sharing high-quality customer profiles across your organization pays off in several important ways:

- Make better, more consistent customer decisions about how to best market and sell, including which products and services to offer and how to most effectively communicate
- Reduce confusion among functional areas through a common business foundation for decision-making
- Treat customers more consistently because everyone is working from the same comprehensive information
- Save time and money by minimizing missteps and rework stemming from inconsistent customer knowledge
- Improve overall marketing focus and communication effectiveness

WHO NEEDS TAPS?

TAPs are traditionally used mostly by marketing communications departments (Marcom). Indeed, Marcom needs detailed customer profiles to generate effective communications. But TAPs merit a much wider audience.

Everyone in marketing needs—and should demand—this level of information. A clear and accurate understanding of one's customers fosters better market research, better products and services, better marketing strategies, and better communications. In fact, good customer information extends beyond marketing into virtually every functional area of your company.

TAP FUNDAMENTALS

How many TAPs should I create?

The answer depends on your business and marketing strategy. Typically companies target multiple customer segments and thus need multiple TAPs. There is no one comprehensive TAP that contains all your customer information insights.

If you're trying to increase the average revenue per current customer, then you need to profile existing customers. If you're preparing a communications plan for your expansion into new market segments, then you need to profile prospective customers.

Which customers should I profile?

Everyone involved in the purchase process should be profiled. Customers can usually be segregated into two categories: decision makers and influencers.

Decision makers might include “Mom” or “CIO”. Influencers might include “teenager” or “systems analyst”. You must understand the specific characteristics of each and the relationship between them. What are their relevant needs, goals, beliefs, fears, and selection criteria? Where do they get information? Who initiates the purchase?

How detailed should a TAP be?

The level of detail depends on the breadth of the customer segment under consideration. TAPs can be prepared for an entire company, for a product line, or for a particular product.

The greater the breadth (i.e. company-wide), the more general the information will be. TAPs for a particular product or service should be quite specific.

WHERE CAN I FIND CUSTOMER PROFILE INFORMATION?

TAP information should come from multiple sources, and the process has a lot in common with market research.

Typical sources include:

- Existing TAPs
- Marketing and sales staff's customer knowledge
- Third-party research reports and articles
- Conversations with customers

Read On The Mark's market research articles about *secondary research* and *primary research* basics for more information. Secondary data is gathered from external sources. Primary data is gathered by conducting surveys and focus groups. For TAP research, secondary research techniques are applied much more commonly than primary techniques due to the cost difference between research techniques; however, primary research can produce much more tangible insights than secondary research.

Closing the gaps

Regardless of how much information you gather, it's usually not enough. You'll almost always have to make some assumptions and estimates based on your experience. It's just part of the process.

Present your educated guesses as a range. Estimating the average age of your customers? Say "between 25 and 35" instead of "30". Are they price-sensitive? Say "somewhat to very" instead of "yes". Doing so acknowledges uncertainties while giving decision-makers something specific to work with.

SOME PARTING ADVICE

- Use, share, and update your customer profiles often. TAPs should be a living document. As your understanding of your customer changes, you should consider updating your strategies and policies in response.
- Don't rush the customer profiling process. The information you provide will be the foundation for many significant decisions. It's worth doing well.
- Don't assume your organization already has a thorough understanding of its customers—thus making target audience profiling unnecessary. Few companies actually know their customers that well.
- Talk to some customers. Under the right circumstances, they are often willing to share.
- If you would like a TAP template to get you started, please contact **On The Mark** at Connect@OTMmarketing.com.

MORE ABOUT ON THE MARK

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- **Envisioning possibilities:** Super-smart, competent marketing consultants
- **Raising the bar:** Experienced leaders that continuously deliver innovative yet meaningful business impact
- **Making it happen:** Driven, accountable marketing experts that are focused on results...not our egos

On The Mark's full-time and part-time consultants strategize, plan, and execute a wide range of business-to-business marketing programs. Our conscientious, can-do approach combined with our extensive marketing expertise make us smart and fast on our feet. Clients rave about our results and how easy and hassle-free it is to do business with us. If you'd like to learn more, please contact us at Connect@OTMmarketing.com.