

# Marketing to a Captive Audience

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Do you have a choice about receiving a marketer's message when you are in the drive-through line at a bank, in the checkout line at the supermarket, in an airplane at 35,000 feet or when you are on hold for tech support, customer service or claims processing? Can you opt out of unwanted advertising when you are riding in a taxi, bus or elevator—or even using the restroom? In those situations you are a captive audience, a marketer's dream come true. Or is it?

The companies, supermarkets, technology and insurance firms and banks whose lines you are in or phone lines you are on have a responsibility. Conversely, if you work for one of those companies as a marketer the responsibility is yours. There are three aspects to this responsibility:

1. **To the customer** -- to not abuse their attention and patience as they are trying to achieve their own purpose.
2. **To your company** -- not to drive away its customers.
3. **To your brand** -- to stay true to its promise and maintain the brand experience.

No one likes to feel out of control. When your customers' attention is required to stay in line to buy something or get information, their environment is under your control and not theirs. They have no ability to opt-out of your communication. What you do as a marketer with that environment can determine whether the customer has a good or bad experience. If you are force-feeding your brand to create awareness among that captive audience, what message are you sending?

Each of knows someone, or has our own story, about a specific merchant, retailer or service company that crossed over the line by communicating to the point of alienating the prospect or customer. Consider the situation on a Saturday morning in a bank drive-through line. Tellers search each customer's account to find if they are in a low interest savings account. The tellers then highlight options for higher interest accounts on a sheet of paper and put it into the pneumatic carrier. Transaction time increases, thus backing up the lines and creating a less than ideal banking experience. The real question is this: Did those customers in the drive-through line view the information on higher interest accounts as helpful or as an inconvenient and unwanted message?

When it comes to marketing, knowing your audience is everything. Successful marketers increasingly are creating and delivering personalized, relevant marketing communications and providing open channels of communication to fully understand their audience.

Moreover, customers have come to expect communication that is customized to their specific wants and needs because technology makes it possible. Savvy marketers use transactional, demographic and psychographic data to better target their messages and choose the right communications medium to use. The hope is that by making messages relevant, the receiver is more likely to read it, internalize it and take the intended action.

The only way to know if such a marketing conversation pays off for you is to test one of your programs

and provide a mechanism for the customer to provide feedback. A simple test for the bank could consist of selecting branch offices with similar demographics. Split the group into thirds. Push high interest accounts to the drive-through customers for two weeks to one third and mail information about high interest accounts to another third. Leave the last group alone as a control group. At the end of the test check how many customers migrated to higher interest accounts in response to the push marketing and the direct mail campaign compared to the control group. Check to see if the test branches had changes in account closure as a potential negative effect of the program. Review customer complaints for the same period. Monitor customer feedback and be sure to listen to the conversation. Through such a test you can not only see which tactic is most effective, but you can also weigh its effects on the customer experience.

As marketers you do have a choice about how and when and where to present your offers to your customers and prospects. Some offers are worth testing with a sample of customers to determine their value. But, for any marketing program, visualize yourself in the airplane, the checkout line or the drive-through first to see if you would rather have the message pushed at you. Then you might want to explore alternative methods of interacting with your customers to give them a good experience with positive results for you.

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