

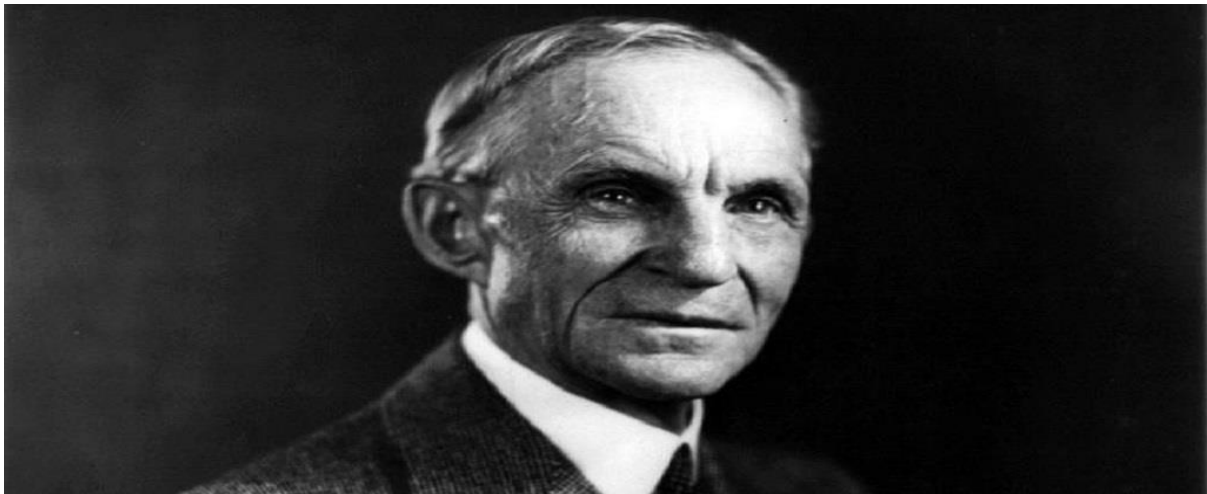


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CUSTOMERS DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY WANT



"If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses" Henry Ford

Why is it that people often say to give the customer what they want? More often than not, customers don't actually know what they want. They may not be able to realise potential solutions to problems which they currently have, may not see the need or desire for something in their life, or may not be able to envisage new ideas. Additionally, in some instances, customers may find it difficult to articulate what it is they need or want.

If you were to ask customers what they do want, their response is more than likely going to be about something that already exists in the market. In fact, what customers tell you they want, and what they actually want may be two different things. As Henry Ford, business magnate and Founder of Ford Motor Company stated, "If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses" which suggests the risks of relying on consumer input during the innovation process.

Yes, most customers know what they like, what they don't like, what their problems are, and what they don't need. However, they don't know what it is that you can produce for them that they may end up wanting. Many people do not realise the need for something until it actually exists.

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As Steve Jobs, American Entrepreneur and Co-Founder of Apple Inc. said, “A lot of times, people don’t know what they want until you show it to them.” Jobs held the perception that you must determine what customers are going to want, before they figure it out. He also believed that you must read things which are not on the page yet, meaning that you must come up with new inventions.

Jobs’ innovative products, including the iPod, Mac, iPhone and iPad have enhanced or created product categories. Such ground-breaking products were not created by asking people what they need or want. It is likely that Apple identified problems that people wanted solved, and subsequently found a solution to these problems through producing a new product. If the likes of Steve Jobs had relied on customers’ input, his inventive products would probably not exist. Solely depending on customers’ ideas will not allow your company to get ahead of competitors.

There are a number of examples where companies have listened to what the consumer wants; however, in the end it didn’t go to plan. Walmart listened to their customers’ request of decluttering the stores’ aisles which were packed full of products, by reducing excess inventory stacked in the aisles. As a result, Walmart’s sales significantly dropped, by approximately \$1.85bn. In another instance, Coca-Cola discovered through customer surveys that they preferred the sweeter taste of Pepsi, and decided to change their solution and replace their old formula. After a few years and substantial losses, they discontinued the new coke and reintroduced their original formula, branded as Coca-Cola Classic.

Customers don’t know what they want until you show them what that is. You need to show the customer that they have a need for something, and give them a reason to purchase your product or your service. Take the time to gain an understanding of customers’ ideals, habits, routines and needs in order to gain insight into their life. Find out what consumers want, without directly asking them. Such insights will enable you to refine your product or model. Customer’s views or ideas should not be utilised to dictate the solution and tell you what you should create or offer to consumers. It should only be used to identify problems that exist and to guide product developers, marketers and entrepreneurs. After all, it isn’t the job of the consumer to tell you how to solve their problems.

Customers don’t know what they want. They need you to show them what it is that they want.

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