

# Know Your Customers: Funeral for a Dog

Do you know your customers? I mean, really *know* them? Do you know what they think, how they live, where they shop, and what they buy? If you do, then you are in touch with the people who buy your goods and services. If not, you may be surprised to find your business losing money to other businesses that have studied your customers and are in touch with their wants and needs.

Demographics is the study of people -- of what they do and how they live. Demographics can tell you everything from how often those people change the oil in their cars to how much toothpaste they buy in a year. There is great demographic research today for any product or service you can imagine.

In a small business, you can do research on every one of your customers. Simply ask each one what they want and whether they think you could do a better job providing your service or products. Most small businesses are afraid to ask their customers what the business could do for them. Some business owners do not want to hear the answers. However, if you understand that a business exists only to provide what the customer wants, then it would be ridiculous to operate your company in a communications vacuum.

When Uncle Adrian wanted to teach you something about customer research, he would tell you the story of a man who wanted a funeral for his dog.

You see, Uncle Adrian had a friend who sang in the choir of the Presbyterian Church and lived alone except for an old yellow Labrador retriever. The man and his dog were inseparable. Finally one day the old dog died and the man went to the church and asked the pastor to hold a funeral for him.

“What?” exclaimed the outraged preacher. “This is the Presbyterian Church. We are known as the finest church in town! Only the best people attend our services. We do not give funerals for dogs here! Why don’t you go down the road to the Baptist church? They might hold a funeral for your dog.”

“Well,” replied the man, “I certainly understand you not wanting to conduct a funeral for my dog. I was going to donate \$75,000 to the church in the dog’s name after the funeral.”

“Oh!” exclaimed the preacher. “You didn’t tell me that your dog was a Presbyterian!”

Knowing who your customers are will help you serve their needs better. Targeting those customers who really want and need your goods or services will save you marketing money.

Stop for a moment to think about your customer. Who exactly *are* your customers? How do they think? How do they live, work, and play? How does your product or service fit into their lives? How will you contact them, and how often do they need you? Spend some time talking with your customers, and you will discover what they want.

Then you better check to see whether they have an old yellow dog that go everywhere with them. You just might want to provide services for their pets too!