



New Techniques to Generate New

The use of laddering and prototyping allows marketing professionals to accurately determine whom to target and how to target them.

By Brian Wansink

Focus groups and cross-tabulated surveys are ubiquitous in marketing research,

but their results are often disappointingly obvious. In contrast, laddering and prototyping analyses use in-depth interviews and structured visualization to generate key insights into consumer behavior. The use of these two techniques gives sharp marketing professionals an edge in accurately determining whom to target and how to target them with a creative marketing mix.

Marketers have traditionally relied on focus groups, surveys, and demographic information to help them develop marketing strategies and tactics for their products. According to Lisa Fortini-Campbell's *The Customer Insight Book*, these techniques are widely accepted, but often fall short of generating key insights about a product and of identifying a target audience in concise and well-defined terms. Two techniques that can overcome these shortfalls are laddering and prototyping. Laddering is a technique by which the core attributes and values that drive product users are identified through a form of in-depth interviews. Prototyping is then used to take these insights and mold them into distinct and workable descriptions of vivid consumer segments. The use of these two techniques allows marketing professionals to accurately determine whom to target and how to target them.

These two methods fit together in a disciplined four-step process of analyzing consumers: 1) why consumers *do not buy* your product, 2) why they *really do buy* your product, 3) who the ideal target segments are, and 4) generating the ideal marketing mix. While the first step can be answered with

focus groups, questionnaires, and interviews, the second step is better addressed with laddering and the third step with prototyping.

The words "buy" and "products" are used throughout this article for consistency, yet they represent a wide range of services, non-profit activities, health behavior, and volunteerism. This basic process has enabled people to answer the following types of questions:

- How can my consulting company attract more high-margin clients?
- How can we turn light users of my brand into heavy users?
- How can I get people to visit my Web site?
- How can the American Cancer Society encourage people to eat more vegetables?
- How can the Philadelphia Institute of Art encourage more people to join?
- How can we increase attendance at my church?
- How can the Red Cross increase blood donation among young people?

Marketing Insights

After providing an overview to the four-step process, this article will then provide detail on how laddering interviews can be conducted to develop insights into what is important to consumers and how a product or service can be meaningfully differentiated from others. It then describes how customer prototypes can be developed in a way that makes targeting efforts as accurate as possible.

FOUR STEPS TO A BETTER MARKETING MIX

The first step in this four-step process is to assess why people don't buy a product. To determine why people don't buy a product, it is sufficient to use well-worded surveys, custom-designed focus groups, and in-depth interviews to develop a list of possible reasons. For most situations, the generic first response why a consumer doesn't buy or use a product will revolve around unacceptable price (value), taste, quality, image, availability, or poor awareness. It is the subsequent answers that become more subtle and more illuminating. The key to understanding why people don't use products sometimes lies in the introspective answers of a few rather than from the initial answers of the majority.

The second step is to determine why people really do buy a product. While surveys, focus groups, and interviews were used earlier, they are less appropriate here. When the objective of this research is to generate marketing insights, these tools often come up short. Common responses to the question of why a person buys, such as "quality" or "low price," do not begin to describe the deep underlying psychological and emotional reasons that influence people's buying decisions. Authors Thomas J. Reynolds and Jonathan Gutman believe that to accurately determine why consumers buy certain products, laddering should be used to examine the in-depth underlying motivators affecting their purchase decisions. Laddering is an interviewing process that seeks to get to the heart of the reasons that people purchase what they do.

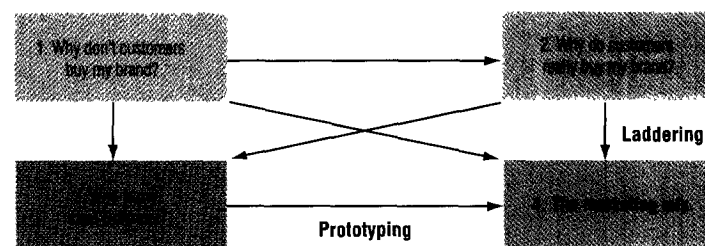
The third step in the process is to identify the ideal customer for a particular product. While it is not uncommon to hear marketers say that "anyone with a dollar in their pocket is a potential customer," such thinking reflects a sales mentality and not a marketing mind. Key marketing insights are best obtained when a person thinks in terms of individual consumers and in terms of what would specifically attract them. Customer prototyping is a quick but effective way to visualize an ideal customer or "champion" for a product that typically represents or closely resembles a specific segment of the real population. By using one's imagination, the prototype becomes more vivid and develops specific characteristics as opposed to the non-descriptive statistics provided by demographics. The more descriptive the information, the easier and more creatively it can be applied to the marketing mix.

Fourth, armed with the knowledge of who the ideal customer is and why they behave the way they do, a marketer can complete the four-step process and apply this insightful knowledge to the 4 P's (product, promotion, place, and price) of marketing the marketing mix (see Exhibit 1). By doing so, the marketer can target his ideal customer and appeal to the real reasons customers buy. These insights from laddering and prototyping allow specific, laser-targeted, effective marketing campaigns.

LADDERING: WHY DO CUSTOMERS REALLY BUY?

The previous section discussed the inadequacies of the tradi-

EXHIBIT 1 The Four Steps to a Better Marketing Mix



The Four-Step Process of Customer Analysis and Marketing Implementation. This diagram represents the key marketing questions to ask, the relationship between them, the techniques for answering them, and the end goal. The prototyping and laddering techniques will better answer the questions of why customers do and don't buy and allow for specific segments to be targeted in the marketing mix.

tional methods used in creating marketing campaigns. Laddering is an interviewing technique that allows the interviewer to gain insight into the subject's personal reasons for purchasing certain products. These insights can be the difference between a generic, "category average" campaign or a cost-effective blockbuster.

A laddering interview is similar to the classical picture of a psychologist interviewing a patient on a couch and uncovering insights into their lives that aren't apparent to even the patient. The psychologist is trying to get to the root of the problem through questioning. The marketer is trying to find the root reasons for the customer's purchase of a particular product. It is a way of peeling an onion in order to get past the superficial and down to what is really important.

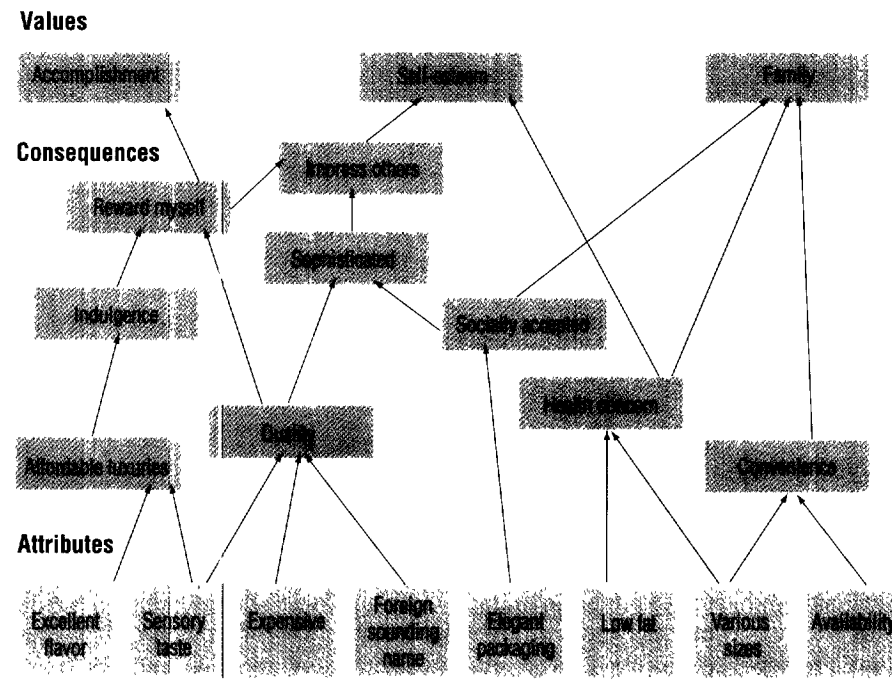
WHAT IS A LADDERING INTERVIEW?

A laddering interview is a closely related series of questions that determines product attributes, consequences, and personal values behind a consumer's preferences. These components are closely linked to each other. The objective is to show how their linkages are related and in doing so you can create a meaningful "mental map" of the consumer's view toward the target product. By combining the maps of similar consumers, a large more exhaustive map can be developed.

The answers people initially give as to why they prefer a product are often attribute-related, but these attributes are closely related to the personal consequences they have for them. Exhibit 2 illustrates a hierarchical value map. This is a graphical description of a laddering interview that is used to show the relationships between the attributes, consequences, and values. Each attribute, consequence, and value was found by questioning the interviewee based on previous responses. This allowed the interviewer to slowly "climb the ladder" to reach the real reasons this particular person buys Häagen-Dazs ice cream.

In general, when first asked why a product was purchased, responses are often shallow and attribute-related. These responses are what "sound right" to the consumer, and they typically describe the physical characteristics of the product (such as color, taste, price, size, name, and so forth), but not the real reason the consumer purchased the product. Nevertheless, it is from these attributes that an interviewer can begin to move toward the values behind these purchases through probing questions that examine some of the consequences of why consumers responded the way they did. These responses reveal the consequences of the purchase.

EXHIBIT 2 The Hierarchical Value Map for Häagen-Dazs



This also begins to reveal more personal reasons for purchasing a product, rather than describing the physical characteristics of the product. Often the insights gained here can be directly used to formulate a marketing campaign. In the five following interview excerpts, one can notice the initial statement was always attribute-related. By following up with “why” questions, however, much more useful information was uncovered.

- “I buy Maybelline cosmetics because it is a good brand name at a reasonable price.”
-Why is it being reasonable priced so important to you?
-“Well, buying a quality product that isn’t high priced makes me feel good about myself because I am spending my money wisely.”
- “Its got awesome graphics.”
-Why are game graphics so important to you?—“The game becomes more realistic and I feel more immersed into the game. It’s almost like I am there.”
- “Oh, Häagen-Dazs tastes great and it’s low in fat.”
-Why is food low in fat important to you?—“I like to watch my weight and live a healthy lifestyle.”
- “I like to eat Honey Bunches because it tastes good and it fills me up in the morning, so I’m not hungry an hour later.”
-Why is it important that you are not hungry an hour later?
—“First of all, I have more energy and tend to get more accomplished at my job. And simply, not having to stop work to eat something keeps me working and I get more done at work.”

- “Johnson & Johnson’s non-allergenic soap is really gentle on my skin and I can buy it almost anywhere I go.”
-Why should a soap be gentle on your skin?
—“Since its gentle to my skin, my skin doesn’t dry up. I have this self-image of having very soft and delicate skin.”

Asking “why” questions to the initial answers given by consumers results in statements that begin to reveal more about the involvement a customer has when making a purchase. These are now no longer merely statements about the product, but thoughtful personal reflections that are one step closer to finding the values people had when purchasing the items. Consequences are key to the marketing platform—it’s from the consequences of a laddering interview that a marketing campaign is developed.

Often, there are many consequences revealed by a consumer about a purchase he has made. Questions are continually asked until a value is revealed. This value may present itself after as few as two questions or as many as 20 questions. Again, it depends upon

the questions asked by the interviewer as well as the consumer’s involvement with the product. A person should not expect to find a consumer’s personal values behind a purchase in three abrupt questions, rather he/she should be prepared to invest 40 minutes to 60 minutes in each interview.

CONDUCTING A LADDERING INTERVIEW

A laddering interview is not as easy as the hierarchical map shows it to be. Often times, the right questions are hard to come by, the interviewee may be nervous or uncomfortable with the line of questions or the interviewee simply isn’t the brand champion they claim to be. The key to conducting successful laddering is practice. Like anything, a skill like laddering takes time and practice to perfect. Yet, most good marketers can do a laddering interview with little time and patience. The following paragraphs will give step-by-step instructions to begin interviewing a prospective brand champion.

The laddering interview will be like playing psychologist with your interviewee acting as the “patient.” You will be analyzing the consumer’s purchase through a series of questions in an attempt to reveal the personal reasons for which the consumer made his purchase. All you need is patience and a good framework for conducting an interview.

The first step in effective laddering is to choose a brand champion, who could be either a heavy user or a very brand-loyal consumer. This is a person who likes one brand’s product over any other. This person would go to great lengths to find the product of the specific brand they champion. The purpose of initially interviewing brand champions is that they are uniquely capable of articulating the key aspects of the product they most like. Knowing this can show how to turn moderate consumers into champions.

Good questions to start out with are ones that get the customer talking about the product. You may or may not gain any insights other than what you can see by the physical properties of the product, but it will help put your brand champion at ease and get them accustomed to answering your questions about the product in question. Some examples are

- How long have you used the product?
- How frequently do you use the product?
- Where do you buy the product?
- What do you like about the product?
- Why do you think this is a good value for the price?
- What other products would you consider and why?
- What would it take for you to switch?

The whole purpose of this first round of questions is to find what properties of the product caused the interviewee to purchase and champion that brand. Once you have identified several attributes of the product and answers begin to become repetitive, it is time to move on.

Your questions should always link to the previous response given by the interviewee. In this manner, you begin to construct a ladder establishing links between the attributes, consequences, and values. The second round of questions is a good time to begin asking why certain attributes are important. When a consequence is found, sometimes it is good to keep delving deeper into that consequence toward finding the underlying value—the real reason the purchase is made. This requires the interviewee to reflect upon the purchase and, therefore, it's important to keep rolling with the idea. Stopping and returning to a consequence at a later time will often result in the interviewee losing their train of thought about a given consequence. This can make it difficult for both you and the interviewee.

Exhibit 3 offers a list of “do’s and don’ts” that can serve as a good foundation with which to start conducting laddering inter-

views. In the end, your own practice and experience will give you the best framework for what question should be asked at any given moment during the interview.

The ultimate goal of laddering is to develop an insightful and extraordinarily effective marketing campaign. Laddering is an excellent tool for discovering why customers really buy and also for developing a list of key insights that will be the platform from which a marketing campaign can be built. As an illustration, Exhibit 4 describes the laddering method for a couple of products and their implications in marketing strategy. Given the insights and characteristics necessary for a good marketing plan, our next step is to describe our target market. This can be accomplished through the use of customer prototyping. Prototyping will allow you to determine what segment to target as well as where and how to reach them.

WHO IS MY IDEAL CUSTOMER?

To effectively target customers for a product, it is crucial for a marketer to first understand who that customer really is. Mentally visualizing a prototypical member of a market segment is critically important when generating marketing mix insights. Customer prototyping is closely linked to the laddering interview process and is a method to elicit this mental picture of the ideal customer. Prototypes, once generated, can then be used as the basis for focus groups or questionnaires to gain a further insight into the ideal customer. The ultimate application of this knowledge to the marketing plan of a product can make the campaign more rich and effective.

THE GENERAL IDEA OF CUSTOMER PROTOTYPES

No matter how much a marketer, advertiser, or consultant knows about marketing and advertising, he or she will never know as much about the bagged concrete industry, or the accounting profession, or the retail meat channels as the people in these industries. Without reams of computer printouts of demographic and sales data, how can they possibly know their customers? Instead of knowing them statistically, these people often know their customer vividly and individually. Consider Craig, the marketing manager for a company that produces bagged concrete. If we were to ask him to describe some of his best customers, he would probably name a specific person and proceed to describe the person in detail.

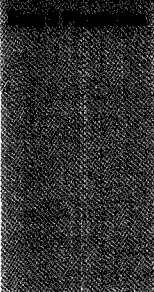
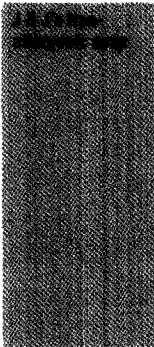
The specific person Craig mentions probably represents (with small variations) a generalizable and much larger segment of his company’s market. That is, if Craig describes “Tony Bower at Plymouth Industries,” Tony is probably representative of a much larger segment of customers (or potential customers). As a result, the more that Craig talks about Tony—his motivations and aspirations, what he does in his free time, who he wants to impress, where he wants to be in 10 years, why he buys Craig’s bagged concrete, and so on—the more insights we begin to gain about this basic segment of which Tony unknowingly is a part.

Of course, developing this “customer prototype” of Tony accounts for only one segment of the market. That is, if Craig were asked, “What other types of good customers do you have?” we would be off onto another segment.

EXHIBIT 3 Do’s and Don’ts of Laddering Interviews

Do's	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask questions that would reveal personal feelings. • Ask questions that cause a person to think and respond with a sentence, not a yes or no. • Keep asking “Why?” • Question a customer's response for their experience. • Allow the questioning to flow until the customer has fully finished their thought. • Ask questions that give the interviewee freedom to answer in whatever way they see fit. • Place the person's face and gestures as they answer the question and listen to the tone in their voice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DON'T RUSH! • Don't ask questions that can be answered in one word. • Don't force the interviewee to answer the question in a certain way. • Don't expect to get to a value in three questions. • Don't assume that a person means something other than what they say. • Don't force the issue. Some of the consequences may not lead to where you want to go. Change topics and start again. • DON'T GET DISCOURAGED!

EXHIBIT 4 Laddering Insights and Their Application to the Marketing Mix

Product	Key laddering insights	Marketing implications
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My friends come over and we spend an evening working together through a game or playing against each other. • Challenging games require more critical thinking and decision making. It feels more like a puzzle rather than a game. • Some games are suited to adults only, so I don't feel like I am playing a "kids game," but taking part in a high quality adult entertainment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up gaming kiosks in nightclubs in large cities such as Los Angeles and New York • Get Joey and Chandler to play Playstation on <i>Friends</i> • Set up store displays away from other game systems and in untapped outlets such as bookstores • Target magazines such as <i>Maxim</i>, <i>SI</i>, <i>Playboy</i>, and <i>Wired</i> with "mature" ads
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's dependable and trustworthy • Well, I am concerned about my skin and keeping it healthy - J&J takes those worries away • I guess it's because I feel like a responsible parent and that is really important to me • It makes me look as though I spend days at the beauty salon, like I'm a very sophisticated person. I am just smart about the products that I use. • Shoot, I can find it anywhere, so I never have to worry about not being able to get it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free sample size soaps in childbirth bags given out during childbirth classes • Offer the soap in bulk sizes at "bulk prices" to appeal to family consumption • Sell the soap at health stores • Have doctors distribute free samples during visits • Set up POP displays that illustrate a muddy child washing his face while a mother looks on with a smile of approval

Customer prototyping is useful for generating hypotheses about customers that can be further examined with other marketing research techniques such as focus groups or questionnaires. However, it can also be an effective starting point for developing an innovative marketing program when no time exists for involved planning. This method has been used to see how accurately brand managers can predict which of 261 adults are most likely to be members of a public radio station. The accuracy of these predictions is then contrasted with the accuracy of predictions generated from conventional segmentation methods. These results showed that those using prototyping were nearly twice as accurate (87% vs. 45%) as those using typical segmentation methods.

PROTOTYPE ANALYSIS VS. SEGMENTATION ANALYSIS

In contrast to the previous illustration, many marketing decisions are instead driven more by databases than by a personal understanding of the customer. According to Fortini-Campbell, when told the importance of "really knowing your customer," many marketers and advertisers would claim they already know their customer. Consider this manufacturer of piecrusts:

Our primary target customers for frozen pie crusts are women 35 to 60 with a high school plus education living in the Midwest and Southeast, making \$20,000 to \$35,000 per year and with 3.2 children who no longer live at home but visit two times per month.

They may even say they know their target customer "so well" that they can say

Forty-three percent of category purchasers use our brand; 32% are Brand B users, and 25% are Brand C users. Forty percent of our market is heavy category users, and 85% are loyal. Only 60% of the nonusers are brand loyal, and we draw more switchers from Brand C than Brand B when we advertise heavily. When we price promote, we draw from both brands equally.

Suppose we could find 100 women who fit this general description, then ask them to write down 10 characteristics to describe themselves. Not one would say

Hi, my name's Susan, and I'm a 35 to 60 years old with a high school plus education and 3.2 kids who no longer live at home but visit two times per month. I also like to think of myself as a heavy user of piecrusts compared to people who live in the Northeast or people who live in large cities. Although I'm pretty brand loyal when I shop for piecrusts, I guess I would shop around if I had a really big coupon. You could say I'm more a switcher when it comes to laundry detergent than with frozen pie crusts, and I'm definitely a variety seeker when it comes to breakfast cereals. Well, I guess that about covers it.

No consumer sees herself or himself as simply a bundle of statistics. As Fortini-Campbell writes, "Statistics alone do as much good describing people as a ruler does measuring a beach ball." It does not wrap around the ball, and it says nothing of when and where it is used. Nor does the ruler tell us anything about what people feel or think when they are playing with the ball. Yet when attempting to identify target markets, marketers often make no attempt to move "past the data" and use any method other than the ruler.

As opposed to segmentation analysis that is conducted with demographic data, customer prototyping attempts to paint a realistic multi-dimensional portrait of an individual that represents a subsegment for a particular product. It gets to the heart of why people buy or are good customers because it describes those people in real terms. It suggests answers to the deeper motivations and aspirations behind the purchase. The key distinction to make between the use of demographic segmentation analysis and prototyping analysis is that the use of demographics describes the "typical" customer across a broad spectrum while prototyping describes the "ideal customer" or "brand champion" in very specific terms. What this provides for the marketer is a greater understanding of the people who buy and how to influence their decisions by appealing to their lifestyle and their wants and needs. Exhibit 5 (see pg. 34) illustrates sample segments that 23 brand managers generated when 12 used segmentation analysis and 11 used prototyping analysis to try and predict the types of people who would be most likely to join a public radio station. Whereas the prototypes look like portraits of consumers, the segments look more like stick figure drawings.

LIMITATIONS OF PROTOTYPING

The value of prototyping lies in developing a richer understanding of the lifestyle and the basic needs and wants of a prototypical segment of consumers. This customer prototyping process

EXHIBIT 5 Customer Profiling vs. Segment Analysis

Sample insights from segmentation analysis	Sample insights from target prototyping
"Yuppie" Segment <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highly educated• White-collar professional• High income• Appreciates the "fine things"• Cultured• 30-50 years of age• Young children	"Establishment" Segment <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highly educated• White-collar professional• High income• Appreciates the "fine things"• Cultured and sophisticated• 50-60 years of age• Children are grown

provides an opportunity to exercise one's creativity in an effort to generate hypotheses about the motivations and behaviors of individual customers. Although the focus is on individual customers, the marketing-related insights that follow are invariably relevant to larger segments of customers. Beyond a current customer (recall Tony Bower), the customer prototyping technique can focus on an "ideal customer," or on "the kind of customer who is a great word-of-mouth champion," or "the kind of customer who is a heavy user," or the "nonuser." It has also proven useful when prototyping the type of customers who can most easily increase their usage rates of a mature brand, or the ones most likely to be innovators of a new product idea.

Is there a risk of this approach being too narrow? Possibly, but just as conventional segmentation methods often simplify a market by over-generalizing across too many different types of segments, the customer prototyping approach makes our thinking more specific. When the continuum ranges from "Everyone-to-Someone," we do better by looking at a number of very specific, but very richly prototyped "Someone" segments than looking at "Everyone" segments that are too general. In an ideal situation, any intuitive insights one generates should be followed up with a quantifiable research plan that can either confirm or disconfirm these insights, and it can also be used to determine the relative size of these segments.

Another potential limit to this method is the interviewer may be limited in their creativity by their background. A marketer who grew up in a rural area, for example, may not have the insights into the reasons an inner-city mother buys the brand of shoes she does. The reverse is also true. Our personal background heavily influences the degree to which we understand the psychology of people of different races, religions, ages, or geographic backgrounds. Incorporating the use of several interview-

ers and striving for a wide range of diversity in terms of their individual backgrounds remedies this problem.

THE CUSTOMER PROTOTYPING METHODOLOGY

The key to a useful and insightful customer prototype is to visualize a person as vividly as possible. An accurate and creative description that can later be used to apply to the 4 P's of marketing is the end goal. While the detailed method can be found in my past articles (see the additional readings section on pg. 36), the basic process is outlined below.

- Recall (or imagine) an ideal customer (or decision maker). It is important to give this person a name so you are thinking of an individual and not a cloudy generalization. The vivid reality of an actual person will give the prototype more meaning.
- Describe this person in recognizable detail. To do this, ask yourself some of the following speculative questions to get started:
 - Why does this person really use the product?
 - What is important to this person?
 - Whom does this person want to impress?
 - Where would this person like to be in 10 years?
 - What would be this person's ideal weekend?
 - How does this person want his or her family to view him or her?
 - How does this person want others (colleagues, boss, strangers, etc.) to view him or her?
 - What is this person most proud of?
- Recall another type of model customer (and describe).
- Repeat this process until you have a series of prototypes that begin to overlap. This will begin to describe the segments most applicable to your product or service.

Your description can be either narrative in style, as if you are writing a story about the person, or it can be a bulleted list of characteristics. This will greatly depend on your preference and personal writing style.

The application of the prototyping insights to the marketing mix is where the real value lies. As illustrated in Exhibit 6, each of the 4 P's should be considered when applying prototyping insights. Prototyping is most valuable in determining to who and where products and their messages should be targeted. Laddering is really what determines how to appeal to these ideal customers. As is important to note in Exhibit 6, even though multiple prototypes are being described, marketing insights can be developed which jointly target multiple prototypical segments.

A quick, inexpensive first step in any attempt at qualitative research is to use the data we have been collecting all our lives—data about human nature—to begin drawing a customer prototype of specific target markets. Such an approach has been empirically shown to deliver deep and accurate insights about current customers, thus enabling a researcher either to conduct

EXHIBIT 6 Key Marketing Insights Elicited Through Customer Prototyping

Product	Key customer prototyping insights	Key marketing insights
Classic Clothing	<p>Prototype 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jonathan is a young up and coming lawyer Following in his father's footsteps Has tradition of wearing stylish clothes such as LaCoste, Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfinger Enjoys other people in his law firm noticing him <p>Prototype 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alex is the daughter of working class parents She has worked her way up the corporate ladder to become a product manager at Goodyear Wanted to "get out" of her blue collar roots Tries hard to fit in and impress the other people at work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advertisements should stress simplicity, comfort and "classic" styling while appealing to a sense of success and ruggedness. The classic style will appeal to those of P1 for their tradition and P2 by "fitting in" to the tradition Online services and E-commerce to provide busy users to shop and find information on the web Keep prices higher than other top of the line clothing to keep image "elite" Use conservative and exclusive channels to maintain sense of social level. Ex: ads in opera, cigar, and liquor magazines Use seasonal and specialty catalogues for changes in dress for sport, travel, etc.
Volkswagen Jetta	<p>Prototype 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Steve is a married man in his 30's who lives in the city and is a supervisor with an income of \$45K and no children Seen by others as friendly, unassuming, has depth in personality, quiet and trustworthy It is important to do a good job, be stable, not be trendy and to have his own style Likes impressing his boss and his small circle of friends <p>Prototype 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carl is single, in his 30's, makes \$35K as a financial analyst Sees himself as unique, individualistic, practical and knows what he wants Others describe him as different, unorthodox, dependable, opinionated and decisive Likes to impress his close friends and his many siblings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The design should appeal to the comfort of the driver and should be simple in nature. The prototypical consumers are not complex people who need complicated machines Offer a wide variety of accessories to make vehicle stand out Dealerships could use a virtual reality system that would allow the customer to construct their vehicle from the various components and options Advertising on channels such as CNN, CNBC or BBC where more sophisticated viewers will be watching Price should be set at an affordable level without giving a "cheap" impression The horn should be loud and authoritative in sound to express driver's personality

more focused quantitative research or to build on these insights to think of more effective marketing applications

But how useful are these customer-prototyping insights? These prototypes help to make customer segments vivid, i.e., knowing the age and the switching patterns of a customer segment are not equivalent to being able to visualize that segment. Visualizing a prototype within a segment enables a sharp marketer to form hypotheses that can either be used as a basis for further research or as a basis for modifying products, distribution, pricing, or promotion efforts to be more effective

TRANSLATING RESULTS INTO A BETTER MARKETING MIX

Prototyping and laddering answer all the key questions needed to improve our marketing mix. Prototyping answers the who, where, and when questions. Laddering answers what and how. Consumer prototype insights tell you whom to target, where to target this person, and when is the best time to reach them. Laddering will then give you insights on what to say and how to say it.

By using prototyping and laddering you can develop marketing campaigns for everything from consumer package goods

like Ivory Soap to non-profit campaigns such as the Peace Corps. Exhibit 7 (see pg. 36) shows how prototyping and laddering insights for three products were turned into marketing implications. These pieces of information will make the marketing puzzle easier to solve.

Prototyping and laddering necessitate a different degree of speculation and interpretation than a table of cross-tabulations. Is it valid to speculate this way? We must remember that the value of laddering and customer prototyping lies in uncovering some basic needs that might motivate a customer, and such a discovery is not likely to be found in demographic percentages or in aggregate scanner data. This is true regardless of whether we are investigating heavy users, non-users, ex-users, high potential users, word-of-mouth prone users, product champions, or innovators.

A last advantage of laddering and customer prototyping is no one needs to know you do it. In its most public use, customer prototyping can be a stimulus for brainstorming on an entire creative team. In its most private use, laddering and prototyping can be a part of one's own creative black box of marketing.

The insights generated can either serve as a departure point for further research and hypothesis testing, or they can be used

EXHIBIT 7 Using Prototyping and Laddering Insights to Generate Marketing Implications

Product	Key prototyping insights	Key laddering insights	Marketing implications
Direct TV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinks he is a "techno-junkie" • Sees himself as the first to own the latest technology among his friends • Expensive toys make him feel sophisticated, even if his background says he isn't • Friends see him as energetic, "everybody's friend" • Very easygoing; lives in the now and loves life and everything it offers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling of escape • Connected to the modern world • Recoup social fatigue • Lets me do what I want • Learn about different things; feel more intelligent • It is as if I am continuing my education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create in home demonstrations like Mary Kay called "DIRECTV Parties." • Set up kiosks in technology fairs. • Create DIRECTV kiosks in stores like "Best Buy," "Circuit City," and "Radio Shack" that allow hands-on consumer interaction on the store floor. • Purchase commercial spots in Star Trek reruns and on the Discovery Channel. • Purchase ads in Smithsonian and other technology oriented magazines and journals.
Saturn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Down to earth family person • Highly values reliability in themselves and things they own • A family is an important responsibility not to be taken lightly • Respects the value of the dollar • Hard work is the key to success • "Do unto others as you would want others to do unto you" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel sensible and proud of decision to buy • Sense of security • Responsible • Special and important; feel rewarded • Intelligence and acceptance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus the advertising as an investment, not a car purchase. • Place information packets in banks alongside information about home buying, IRAs, life insurance, etc. • Send personal letters to potential customers that are unique and hand-signed by the Saturn dealer. • Keep price midrange such that car must be worked for, but not out of reach.
Cut Your Own Christmas Tree Farm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family life is important • Traditions are very important • Looked at by others as a provider • "Keeping up with the Joneses" ideology is strong in area where consumer lives • Wants children to learn from experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High self-esteem • High-class Image • Environmentally Conscious • Fulfilling obligations • Comfort and Stability • Responsibility for family and family duties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow busy customers to tag their trees as early as Thanksgiving. • Offer cross-partnering with selected churches, restaurants, and beauty salons. • Send a newsletter to previous customers. Include pictures of decorated trees. • Sponsor a "Best Decorated Tree" contest

to develop new ideas for product development, distribution, pricing, or promotion. Generating these insights is a form of research. Implementing them is marketing. ●

ADDITIONAL READING

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