



Listen to the Customers, Then Speak to Them Individually

Situation

If it's important to your business, chances are you'll find it on eBay. From information technology to medical equipment to industrial machinery, eBay's reputation as the world's biggest online marketplace carries on throughout the business spectrum. Even as eBay was becoming the No. 1 online consumer marketplace, the company was realizing the enormous potential of the business market. And it knew that it would require specialized marketing to launch eBay Business.

Marketing Challenge

There are an estimated 20-million to 25-million small-business owners (defined as having 20 or fewer employees) in the United States. The potential was obvious but the unanswered question was, "Why aren't more of them using eBay?"

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Solution

The methodology applied was gap analysis. And indeed, the research identified a huge gap between users and non-users. Business people who had used eBay were passionate about the experience. But those who had not experienced it expressed doubt and even fear about large-dollar transactions online.

Research also showed that the most trusted source of information to small-business owners was other small business owners. So the strategy became a peer-to-peer communication—letting eBay evangelists share their experiences in their own words. The other secret to the campaign was understanding the mind-set of the entrepreneur—positioning eBay not just as a way to save money, but as a way to help them build their dreams. The ads captured this with headlines such as, “If it wasn’t for eBay, I’d still be dreaming about this place instead of owning it.”

And since credibility was so important to the strategy, audience segmentation became essential, presenting an industry peer to each different segment—contractors talking to other contractors, restaurateurs talking to other restaurateurs, etc.

Outcome

One year after the campaign launched, business sales on eBay doubled from \$1 billion to \$2 billion. In three years, that number had grown to \$5 billion.

Just as important, eBay was named by the Network of City Business Journals as one of the top five small-business brands.

