

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/how-to-find-customers>

Target your customer and their needs, says Tristan Harris, founder of Apture. His company recently hired a community manager to target ideal bloggers to beta test their products. Jeff Seibert, founder of Inereo Solutions, Inc., agrees that you need to build a specific customer profile then find out where they hangout online. Summing it up, the underlying philosophy in getting customers, explains Josh Reeves, founder of unwrapped, inc., is to be scrappy, opportunistic and have a strategy in getting that customer. When you're at a coffee shop, bring up your company. "You never know where that conversation will lead."



Transcript

So, our customers are publishers.. So, we have big brands like New York Times, Washington Post.. And our customers are simultaneously end-users, people who just browse the Internet.. So, I think we do two things.. We do user tests regularly.. So, we try to bring in users from Craigslist.. We invite people in.. We pay them.. We given them Jamba Juice cards.. And we get feedback on the product..

And then, in terms of publishers, I'd say we don't do as much as we would like, in part because during our particle development cycles, we are a little bit more secretive about what we're doing until we're ready to go out the door.. But we actually recently hired a community manager whose full-time job it is to seed our early beta users with our products, early beta publishers, not the New York Times but small blocks, and seed them with the software, give them basically some period of time to use it.. And we have these surveys that determine product market fit.. And we assign one person to do that full time.. But if you ask me that as an entrepreneur starting the company, we didn't do anything like that.. We literally developed a thing in a vacuum.. And three months after we started the company, flew out to the Washington Post and showed it to the folks there.. And then, we had an ongoing cycle for about six months before we launched, where during the time that they were configuring their servers to run our software, we actually just communicated with them about once every two weeks and got feedback on developing the product as we were preparing to ship it.. It's very odd actually, because we basically sold the product and they agreed to buy before it was actually ready.. So, for the next six months we co-developed it and got feedback on what to make it..

But I think we have unique strategies.. I think the first step is ask specifically as possible to find exactly who your customer is.. And a lot of more consumer-y Internet startups face that challenge.. I mean, specific.. Feel free to give them a name, give them a job, give them every attribute you can come up with for them.. And then, figure out, "OK, where would Bob, my customer, hang out online and how I do find him there?" And so, we spent a lot of time because when we were just getting started, our customers were small businesses or freelancers, people who were, yes, using it in a business mind set but really not big businesses because we had no hopes of convincing them to use the product at that point.. So, they behave like consumers and they are also just on the Internet reading stuff.. So, we try to find where they hang out.. And it was a lot of posting in forums, trying to get the blogs that they might read to write about us.. We did a bit of Google AdWords simply to bring in people to the sites so we could look at where they were clicking around, what were they interested in, what were they reading..

And so, it's a long process.. It's very difficult.. And I don't think we learned any magical secrets through it.. It's just a lot of work posting everywhere you can online and trying to get people to come to your site.. Yes, I would definitely agree with everything they've said.. I would just add that the underlying philosophy here as a take-away is you want to be scrappy.. You want to be really opportunistic, you're going to have a strategy for how to get that customer.. And then, when you're randomly seeing someone in a coffee shop, you want to bring up the company and pitch them on your products as well.. Because as a startup, you again have limited amounts of time of the day and resources to go contacts or these potential customers.. And you'll never know where that conversation might lead..

So, it should always be in your mind.. It's a big part of your life.. Yeah, I couldn't agree more with Josh.. For us, it has probably been three things.. One is the book.. So, it turns out writing a book is a really great way to generate leads.. And it

just so happened that the book came out just as Facebook was taking off.. And so, it has been really top-of-mind for a lot of businesses and people that we wanted to really target for our business.. So far, just about all of our customers and everyone in our pipeline has come through either the book or they heard me speak while I was on my book tour.. So, that has been great..

So, if any of you want to write a book, I highly recommend it.. And then, the second way has been, especially since our product is really geared toward social media, we've used Facebook and Twitter, and those technologies really reach out to people and find people who already talking about the things that you're selling.. They describe their problem on Twitter, anybody can search that, and you can respond with your solution.. Now, obviously, you don't want to go in with the hard sales pitch.. But if you can genuinely help them and I think many people, as we've seen, they're genuinely grateful.. And then, the third one, just like Josh said, anywhere and anyhow and anyway that you can.. One of our vertical groups that we're going after are real estate agents.. So, you better believe that every single realtor who has put up a sign with their phone number or their email address in my neighborhood, I contacted.. And so, when you're walking around, you'll see people who might be interested in what you have to sell or might be interested in giving you feedback.. And it's all about starting to talk to them and being genuinely curious on what their problems are..

And I also literally hug my customers in bars and on a ski lift in one case.. So, it s like Josh said, anywhere you are, you talk about your product because you're obsessed with it.. It turns out some people react well to that, some people don't.. We like the ones that react well to it...