

## What Your Car Audio Can Teach You About Marketing

Stand next to any road, and every so often a young person will go by with the latest rap CD blaring. If it happens to be a cold day, he (it is always a he) may have the windows up. Then, all you will hear is the thud of the overworked bass speaker in the back. After he turns 30, the young driver probably won't even be able to hear that, if he continues this unwarranted assault on his ears.

That big bass bin can't handle the vocal sounds, and the front speakers would melt if they had all those thumps going through them. So the car audio separates out the various frequencies using filters, sending only the bass to the big bins in the back, and only the higher and more delicate sounds to the little speakers at the front. Both, and especially the bass, are then amplified so they are audible in the next county.

Marketers have borrowed the same terminology as a way of looking at how their business treats its customers. Marketing graduates will often talk about 'Filters' and 'Amplifiers' almost as if they actually understood them.

### Filters

A filter in marketing speak is anything which prevents your customer from doing business with you. Some filters are 'natural' – if you provide personal training services for example all of your clients will need to be within easy reach. This natural, geographic filter means that you are unlikely to sell to someone in another country.

Others are constructed. Mercedes Benz dealers the world over have large, bright, glassy establishments. They tend to intimidate anyone who can't afford the prices, acting as a natural, probably intentional, filter.

Filters can also be fairly subtle. If you send out a mailing by post, research shows many are discarded without even being opened. If you have a leaflet delivered, the 'open an envelope' filter is removed, so people can't help reading it, even while they are trying to throw it away.

### Amplifiers

An amplifier is anything which increases the ease of doing business with you. Any business which decides to take payment via credit cards, for example, will find the number of people who can do business with them is amplified compared to when only cash was acceptable.

Marketers probably won't admit it, but filters and amplifiers are opposites of the same thing. Removing a filter has an amplifying effect, and vice versa.

I insured my car the other day over the Internet. The first few sites I tried only supported Internet Explorer. That, at least to me, is a filter and I went somewhere a little more Firefox friendly!

Many corporate web sites insist you provide a lot of information before they will send you that 'free' White Paper you are interested in. No doubt that information is required by someone in the business, but it filters out a lot of otherwise interested people who simply won't take the time to fill out the form and inevitably receive all the sales calls afterwards. After all, they can't be sure they're even a prospect before they read the White Paper!

Apple has potentially filtered out a large portion of their target market for iTunes by only accepting credit cards. Most under 18s won't have a credit card, and they are the major buyers of chart music. The 'Music Store Card' is an attempt to turn this filter into an amplifier.

### What Filters and Amplifiers Mean to Your Marketing

Importantly, this way of thinking allows you to look at all of your marketing, online and offline, in a critical way to improve your response rates and your sales. Every time you look at any aspect of your business, ask yourself if this filters out customers you want to serve, or if you can amplify the target market by improving the process.

Perhaps you could send postcards or use leaflets instead of putting brochures in envelopes. Don't insist on a customer's life history before you will allow them to buy from you. Make your web site informative and easy to use, rather than slick, 'cutting edge' and hard to understand. If you are providing services, make it clear on your site where you are and the distance you will travel. Use local town and county names as keywords to filter out people who will never be able to buy from you, but to amplify the chance of attracting locals.

If you do this consistently, over time you will get your filters and amplifiers to attract profitable customers to you, not send them away to your

competitors, never to return.

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