What’s the Motive?

Buying Motives

What they really want

Learning the truth

Head vs. heart
What's the Motive?

**Why Customers Buy**

The reasons that customers select one product over another are based on their needs and wants. A **need** is something required or essential that is lacking (you need food to survive), while a **want** is something that’s desired but may or may not be essential (you want a cheeseburger). All people have needs and wants, but not all people need and want the same things at the same time. This difference in people’s needs and wants accounts for the variety of goods and services that are available.

So, why should you as a salesperson be concerned that people have needs and wants? Because people buy goods and services to satisfy their individual needs and wants. In other words, people buy the benefits that goods and services offer—benefits that fulfill their needs and wants.

**Objectives**

A. Describe customer buying motives.

B. Demonstrate techniques for identifying customer buying motives.

When you need—or want—a new pair of jeans, why do you buy the pants that you do? Do you buy them because they are:

- Comfortable?
- Low-priced?
- Popular with your friends?

Your reason for buying the jeans is what drives your purchase decision. It’s what motivates you. But, your next-door neighbor or coworker may be motivated to purchase new jeans for entirely different reasons. Each person is unique, and each has his/her own motives for buying. What are buying motives? Why are they important? And, how do they impact what you do as a salesperson? Read on to find out!

People don’t buy goods and services because of the products’ features; customers purchase these products because of the benefits that the goods and services offer.

Keep in mind that benefits are not the same as features. Product features are the characteristics of a product, such as iPod touch’s two cameras. Benefits are the advantages those features bring you, such as using your iPod touch to make video calls to friends or to shoot an HD-video of your brother’s piano recital.
In addition to knowing that customers buy benefits, you also need to understand that customers frequently buy the same product for completely different benefits or reasons. One customer—an artist who wants to be stylish, let’s say—might buy a pair of boots because they look trendy. Another customer, a college student, might buy an identical pair to keep warm during long winter walks across campus.

Needs and wants change as people change—which means that the benefits that they seek from goods and services change as well. When Gisella bought a car to drive to her first job, she needed to get from point A to point B—nothing more. Later, when Gisella was promoted to supervisor, she wanted a car that would present a professional image, in keeping with her new position. Gisella’s initial reason for buying a car was to simply get to work every day. Later, she bought a car to “look the part” of a person whom employees should respect.

To be a successful salesperson, you must be able to determine the benefits or reasons each customer has for buying. The reasons or benefits that cause customers—both individuals and businesses—to make purchases to satisfy their needs and wants are called buying motives.

Customers can be aware of their buying motives. For instance, a construction business that buys hard hats and safety goggles to protect its employees is aware of its buying motives. However, it is also possible for customers to make a purchase when they are not aware of their real buying motives. For instance, a person might say that he is purchasing an athletic club membership to get in shape, but this individual’s actual benefit of joining the club is the opportunity to meet other people.

As a salesperson, you must determine customers’ needs, wants, and buying motives. Then, you can tailor your sales presentations to appeal to each customer.

Three Key Drivers

Every purchase is driven by at least one buying motive, although most are driven by many more. Three common types of buying motives are rational motives, emotional motives, and patronage motives. Let’s take a closer look at each one individually.

**Rational motives.** Rational buying motives drive customers to make purchases on the basis of reason, judgment, or logic. These customers carefully weigh the pros and cons of different products and then decide what to buy. Therefore, customers are typically aware of their rational buying motives. Examples of common rational buying motives include:

- Dependability
- Durability
- Economy or price
- Good workmanship
- Increased production
- Increased profit
- Low maintenance
- Safety
- Simplicity

Industrial, or business, customers—always in search of ways to reduce expenses and increase profit—base most of their buying decisions on rational buying motives. Products that they commonly purchase based on rational motives include raw materials for manufacturing, parts for production, supplies and equipment for operations, and vendor contracts.
Rational motives don’t just drive businesses, though. More and more retail customers are also using rational motives for buying. They are motivated by rational thinking when they buy such products as the lowest-priced gasoline (for the price), the longest-lasting backpack (for the durability), and the most dependable cellphone service (for the dependability).

**Emotional motives.** Emotional motives drive customers to make purchases based on their feelings, emotions, or impulses. Customers may not even be aware of these motives, which are often influenced by advertising and current styles. Examples of common emotional buying motives are:

- Adventure
- Affection
- Appearance
- Change/variety
- Comfort/convenience
- Fear
- Health
- Leisure time
- Pleasure
- Recognition
- Security
- Social approval

Who buys for emotional reasons? Most of us do. Take James, who is the lead guitarist in his band, for instance. He recently purchased an expensive new electric guitar that he just *loved*, even though he couldn’t really afford it. In other words, he purchased it for emotional, not rational, reasons. He wasn’t concerned with how economical or reliable the guitar was. He just wanted to feel important. By buying the new guitar, James hoped to gain prestige and confidence.

Raj is another example of someone who buys for emotional reasons, although he doesn’t know it. Raj wants to lose some weight, but he has a weakness for ice cream. So, when his friends invited him to go out for ice cream with them, he couldn’t resist. Raj told himself that his decision was rational—that he deserved a banana split for running two miles that morning—but he really just wanted to eat ice cream instead of salad for dinner. Customers like Raj think their decisions are rational, when really they are not.

**Patronage motives.** A third type of buying motive is known as patronage motives. Because of patronage motives, a customer makes purchases from one business rather than from another. These motives can be either rational or emotional. Common patronage motives include:

- Customer services and policies
- Courteous sales force
- Product quality
- Product assortment
- Business location and appearance

Suppose that Claire manages a tax preparation business. During the tax season, her employees often work until 9:00 or 10:00 at night. On long days such as those, Claire frequently brings in dinner for her employees. Claire’s favorite place to buy dinner for her staff is at the pizzeria next door to their office. Even though the pizzeria’s prices are a bit steep, Claire is willing to pay the higher price because the pizza is delicious and the restaurant is nearby. In other words, Claire’s pizza purchases are based on patronage motives.

**Mixture.** Rational, emotional, and patronage buying motives are not mutually exclusive. Sometimes, a customer is driven by several buying motives of different types. For example, at her local coffee shop, Mare concludes rationally that she should purchase an iced coffee because it is inexpensive and nonfat. But, because she loves the flavor of the shop’s pricey fat-filled peppermint white chocolate mocha, she chooses to buy it instead. In essence, she is basing her purchase decision...
on her dominant buying motive—a desire to enjoy a yummy drink, even though it’s fattening and expensive. This dominant buying motive has the greatest influence on her buying decision, even though she has other, more rational motives for buying the iced coffee instead.

Summary
Salespeople need to know customers’ buying motives—why they buy. Three common types of customer buying motives are rational, emotional, and patronage motives. A customer may have more than one buying motive, but typically the dominant buying motive drives a particular purchase.

1. How are needs different from wants?
2. Describe the difference between features and benefits.
3. What are buying motives?
4. How do rational buying motives drive customer purchases?
5. How do emotional buying motives drive customer purchases?
6. How do patronage buying motives drive customer purchases?
7. Why is the dominant buying motive important?
It’s All in What You Do

Just as a doctor shouldn’t write a prescription before diagnosing a patient’s illness, a salesperson shouldn’t recommend specific products or attempt to close the sale before pinpointing a customer’s reasons for buying. And, just as the doctor uses certain techniques to determine what is wrong with a patient, the salesperson should use certain techniques to determine the customer’s buying motives. These techniques include:

- Observing the customer
- Listening to the customer
- Showing interest in the customer
- Asking questions

The Details

Observe customers. When you, as a salesperson, encounter customers, watch what they do. Observe their:

- Actions and reactions
- Mannerisms
- Facial expressions

By taking the time to do this, you can learn about customer style preferences, tastes, attitudes, and potential interest in specific selling points.

When observing actions and reactions, look for insight into a customer’s dominant buying motive, which may translate into a style or model preference. But, beware of jumping to conclusions, such as, “The customer can’t afford the upscale model.” Looks can be deceiving!

Let customer mannerisms clue you in to how they feel. A relaxed-looking customer may only be “window shopping.” A focused customer may have an issue to resolve—perhaps through an appropriate purchase. Pay attention to nervous or impatient customers. They may be uneasy or irritated about something you can correct.

As you deal personally with customers, pay close attention to their facial expressions. A frowning customer may not understand what you are saying, may disagree with a particular point, or may feel grumpy due to a previous incident. It is up to you to determine what the frown means. Look for satisfaction, interest, doubt, or disapproval. These will guide you toward the appropriate sales presentation.

As you pinpoint customers’ buying motives, you can adjust your sales talk to suit individual customers. You can detect which selling points appeal most to them—and then stress these points during your sales presentation.
What’s the Motive?

**Listen to customers.** Looking and listening go together. Stop talking so you can hear what customers are saying to you. It’s not worthwhile to talk all the time—or to be thinking about what you’re going to say next while customers are speaking. Instead, listen closely to deduce the customers’ buying motives.

Also, show customers that you want to listen. Though you might be skilled at doing two things at once, multi-tasking does not demonstrate listening. This means you should avoid doing other things while customers are speaking, such as straightening your work area or looking for information on your laptop. Instead, maintain eye contact. Look and act interested. Remove all distractions, such as ringing cell phones. And, focus on understanding what customers are saying.

Be patient, allowing adequate time for customers to express their desires. Interrupting can cause customers to feel pushed or pressured. And, criticizing customers’ viewpoints can cause them to feel defensive. You’ll need to maintain self-control at all times—especially when difficult customers insist on their own views. Just let them talk. Disagreement, and its resulting anger, can stop communication altogether. Remember that your job is to sell, not to prove that you are right.

**Show interest in customers.** As you listen, demonstrate your interest in customers. Put yourself in their shoes, and see things from their point of view. Be empathetic, saying, “I see what you mean” and “I understand why you feel that way.” But, don’t just say the words; be sincere. Your genuine interest in customers will show through, and it will help them feel comfortable enough to reveal their true buying motives. Customers who feel you are really interested in solving their problems are on the path toward making a purchase.

**Ask questions.** Questioning is an important means for discovering customers’ true buying motives. First, think about the product itself and its advantages to customers. Then, base your questions on the most common buying motives for the product you are selling. Listen carefully to customer responses to identify other motives that may be driving your customers. Finally, ask questions that help you to determine your customers’ dominant buying motives.

While questioning can give you a complete picture of a person’s wants, needs, and buying motives, avoid asking questions for the sake of asking them. Have a purpose in mind. Use questions only when they are needed, and make sure you understand clearly what the customer is telling you.
Here are some tips for effective questioning:

- Ask questions that are short, simple, and direct—so you will receive clear answers.
- Ask only one question at a time—so you will receive only one answer at a time.
- Ask general questions, not personal ones—so you will avoid embarrassing or threatening the customer.
- Ask questions that require more than a “yes” or “no” response—so you will learn more about the customer’s motives.
- Ask “fact-finding” questions—so you will learn which characteristics/benefits are most important to the customer.
- Ask “feel-finding” questions—so you will learn why a characteristic/benefit is especially important to the customer.
- Ask questions that call for a positive, not negative, response—so you will maintain a positive tone during the conversation.
- Ask questions in a courteous, tactful manner—so you will show customers that you respect them and their feelings.

Keep in mind that customers do not need to answer your questions thoroughly for their answers to be useful. You can learn a lot from ignored questions and incomplete answers. Just change your approach, and continue the conversation.

### The Benefits

Successfully determining customer buying motives benefits customers, salespeople, and the businesses involved. Customers benefit when their needs and wants are satisfied—and when they feel good about making wise buying decisions. Salespeople benefit when they successfully complete sales and gain confidence in their ability to close deals. Businesses benefit as income increases with additional sales—and when satisfied customers come back to purchase more items. Satisfied customers return fewer products and are more likely to tell others about their pleasant purchasing experiences.

### Summary

Salespeople need to pinpoint customer buying motives to bring about successful sales transactions. Techniques for determining buying motives include observing, listening, showing interest, and asking questions. Using these techniques effectively benefits customers, salespeople, and the businesses involved.