

# DETERMINING NEEDS

To make your sales presentation meaningful to your customers, you need to know their needs early in the sales process. This step in the sales process is important because it is the foundation of the marketing concept, which stresses the importance of satisfying customer's needs and wants. It is the salesperson's job to uncover their customers' problems or reasons for wanting to buy. In some instances, their motives or needs may be quite obvious, but that is not always the case. It is your job to determine those needs so you can offer one or more solutions. The solutions will come from the features and benefits of your product or company policies.

## WHEN TO DETERMINE NEEDS

The sooner you know your customer's needs, the easier it is to build your sales presentation around the selling points that are important to your customer. In organizational selling situations, customers' needs can be determined when qualifying a prospect, which is well before ever meeting the customer. With loyal customers, a review of sales records and buying patterns before making an appointment to visit with the customer may shed some light on current needs.

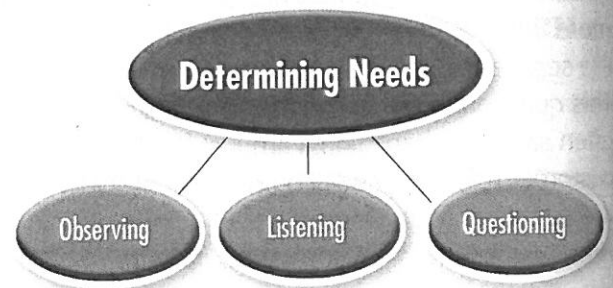
In retail sales situations, the earliest you can determine your customers' needs is during or immediately after the approach. The service and merchandise approaches lend themselves to asking customers a question about their needs. With the greeting approach, the very next step would be to ask customers a question to uncover their reasons for visiting the store.

In both situations, the salesperson should continue determining needs throughout the sales process. Why? Because as customers learn more about the product, their needs and wants may change. Think of determining needs as peeling away layers of information that you need to get to the heart of something. In some cases, the original needs are based on limited information about a product. Once customers learn that they can check the scores of their favorite sports team from a certain cell phone model, their needs may shift.

They may view the Internet connection feature of the cell phone as something they want, too. Thus, their original needs changed once they had more knowledge about the capabilities of a cell phone model they originally thought they wanted. It is important to assess what customers tell you they need or want in a product at the beginning of the sales process. After they learn more about a product's features and benefits, reassess their new needs and wants.

## HOW TO DETERMINE NEEDS

To be an effective salesperson, you need to be **astute** in determining customers' needs and wants. Three methods that will help you become astute in determining customers' needs are observing, listening, and questioning. Each technique provides the salesperson with necessary information during the entire sales process. Thus, they are used in conjunction with one another.



### OBSERVING

As previously noted, observation can be helpful in organizational sales situations when visiting customers in their places of business. Anything observed in the business may provide insight into what a customer needs.

In all selling situations, seasoned salespeople learn to read their customers by observing them. **Nonverbal communication** is expressing oneself without the use of words. Facial expressions, hand motions, eye movement, and other forms of nonverbal communication can give you clues about a customer's interest in a product. For example, the length of time a customer looks at or handles a product in a store can give you an initial idea about their level of interest in the product.

How long a customer holds the product during a sales presentation (if at all) can indicate how strongly he or she feels about the product. At the other end of the spectrum, a raised eye brow or frown may communicate dislike for a product's feature.

The key to observing is the proper selection of facts. You want only those facts that are important to the sales process. Avoid stereotyping people or drawing conclusions from your observations before getting additional facts. For example, a person dressed in shabby clothes may be more financially secure than someone dressed in more expensive-looking clothing.

## LISTENING

Listening is one of the most important interpersonal skills you need to practice in selling. Giving customers your undivided attention and listening with empathy are two specific skills that will encourage your customers to talk freely. They will feel you are truly listening.

During conversations with your customers, you can pick up clues about their needs and wants. That information will be helpful for the product presentation. Here is an example:

Customer: "My copier is ten years old. It prints black-and-white copies. When I need color copies, I take my work to a copy center and pay for them. As my business grows, I find that I need color copies more and more."

From these statements, you have learned that the customer is looking for a quality color copier for business use. Since the copier is for a small but growing business, upgraded and advanced features may be important to this customer.



**Observing** Paying close attention to details that the customer communicates, verbally and nonverbally, increases the likelihood of closing the sale.

## QUESTIONING

Before you can listen to customers, you must get them talking. One way of engaging a customer in conversation is to ask questions.

Not all customers can clearly express their needs and motives when making a purchase. In such a situation, well-chosen questions can help you uncover needs and buying motives while putting the customer at ease.

## Career Chatroom

### Tom Petro

Senior Director  
Corporate Communications and  
Marketing  
J.D. Power and Associates

#### What do you do at work?

J.D. Power is a global marketing information company. We measure customer satisfaction, and provide data and services to businesses. I manage a staff of 16 people and am responsible for all direct marketing activities, developing and maintaining our Web site, e-mail marketing, marketing literature, and videos that provide an overview of the company's services. Additionally, my department manages meetings and conferences.

#### What is your key to success?

Be proactive. Look for problems to solve. Always look at the next level to make things better. Think of ideas to increase sales. Also, dial in to your company's strategy and see how your ideas fit into the company.

#### What skills are most important to you?

Knowing how to navigate in a working office environment and being resourceful. Internships in a working office will give you that experience.

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Read more about this career and get a Career Exploration Activity.



When you begin determining needs, first ask general questions about the intended use of the product and any previous experience with it. Build your questions around words like *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *how*, and *why*. You might ask the following questions of a prospective customer who wants to purchase a copier:

- ▶ What type of copier are you presently using?
- ▶ Why is that copier not meeting your needs?
- ▶ How many copies will you be making every week or month?
- ▶ Do you need a copier to also serve as a printer?

### How to Refine Questions

Once you have an idea about the customer's general needs, then you can ask more specific questions relating to the product. These might include inquiries about size, color, and any special features desired. In the case of the copier, you might ask questions about the need to enlarge or reduce the size of the original and whether the customer needs to collate or staple copies. Does the customer want to make color copies or will a copier that makes only black-and-white copies be sufficient? Does the customer plan to use the copier at home or for business purposes? You may need to find out how soon the product is needed, what kind of space it will be housed in, and whether the customer might need to have the copier delivered. The more you know about a customer's problems and needs, the better. This knowledge helps in the process of coming up with solutions to customers' problems and needs.

## Determining Needs

Printers come in many sizes. Depending on a business' needs, there is a printer to fit those needs.

**How do questions you would ask a customer who uses printers at home differ from the questions you would ask a customer who uses printers for business?**

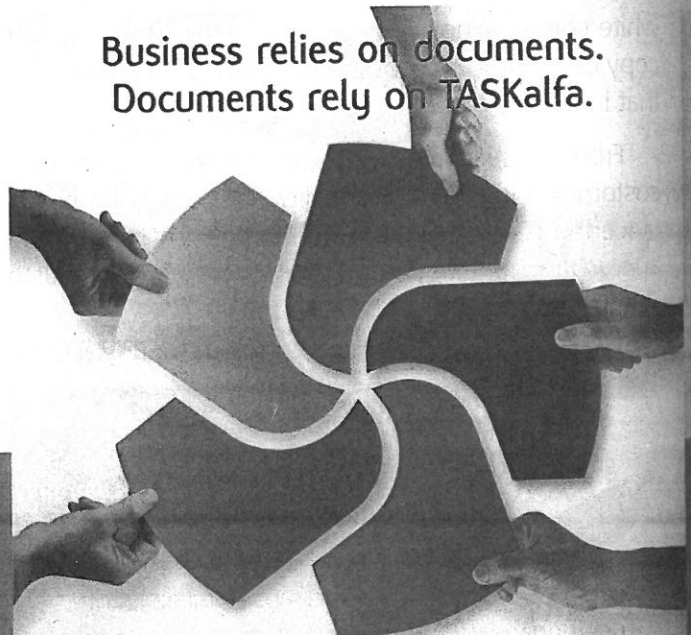
Questioning is a very important skill and must be done carefully. Always be sure to keep in mind that customers may be very protective of their privacy. Privacy concerns may include cost and price. For example, customers can get upset when asked, "How much money do you want to spend?" A customer may not want to share details about his or her budget or financial situation. Whenever possible, it is better to ask how a customer intends to use a product and to discuss any past experience that person might have had with something similar. Those kinds of details keep the focus on the customer, the product, and how best the salesperson can help. That information should be enough to help most customers select a product that not only suits their specific needs but also fits within their personal price range.



### Reading Check

**Predict** How do you think salespeople determine their customers' needs?

Business relies on documents.  
Documents rely on TASKalfa.



### Productivity is: TASKalfa

Document imaging is essential to business productivity. For every company. For every individual. The TASKalfa Color MFP Series delivers fully-networked document imaging capabilities that are efficient, affordable, and flexible. High-speed scanning from the optional dual scan document processor. Advanced paper handling, including heavy paper stock for professional-quality document output. A simple-to-navigate user-friendly touch screen control panel. And a wide array of advanced finishing options. All backed by Kyocera's award-winning ultra-reliability. Making sure everyone in your company is as productive as possible. That's TASKalfa's #1 Priority. To find out more, visit [www.kyoceramita.com](http://www.kyoceramita.com).



**KYOCERA**

## Question Do's and Don'ts

Here are some other "do's and don'ts" guidelines for questioning customers:

1. Do ask open-ended questions that encourage customers to do the talking. **Open-ended questions** are those that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer.  
For example, you could ask, "What do you dislike about the copier you're presently using?" The answer to such a question will provide valuable information about a customer's needs.
2. Do ask clarifying questions to make sure you understand customers' needs.  
To do this, use opening lines such as: "Let me see whether I understand what you want," or, "Am I correct in assuming that you're looking for a product that can . . .?"

3. Don't ask too many questions in a row. This will make customers feel as if they are being cross-examined.  
Give the customer plenty of time to answer any questions you might have, and be sure to listen carefully and respond thoughtfully. A good salesperson learns how to develop a professional yet conversational manner.
4. Don't ask questions that might embarrass customers or put them on the defensive.  
For example, when selling skis, it is often necessary to determine the customer's weight, but a customer may feel uncomfortable giving this information. In such a situation, you might have the various weight classes listed. Then you can simply ask which is the customer's category. In this way, you avoid having to ask the person, "How much do you weigh?"



## After You Read

## Section 13.2

### Review Key Concepts

1. **Discuss** the importance of knowing how to ask the right questions.
2. **List** three retail approach methods.
3. **Identify** when salespeople should determine customers' needs.

### Practice Academics

#### English Language Arts

4. Work with a partner to prepare and perform a skit that demonstrates how to properly approach and determine the needs of a customer in the market for a pair of running shoes.

#### Mathematics

5. Based on your analysis of the customer's needs, a premium of \$1,800 per year is required for long-term health care insurance for your client. You want to offer a quarterly payment schedule. There is a surcharge of \$30 per quarter for this service. What are the quarterly payments?


**Math Concept Using Symbols** You can use algebraic symbols to represent unknown quantities and write equations to solve problems.

**Starting Hints** To solve this problem, let  $q$  represent the quarterly payment. Use it to write an equation to fit the situation described in the word problem. The equation should show that  $q$  equals the yearly premium divided by four to determine the quarterly premium, plus the \$30 surcharge.

For help, go to the **Math Skills Handbook** located at the back of this book.

**NCTE 4** Use written language to communicate effectively.

**NCTM Algebra** Represent and analyze mathematical situations and structures using algebraic symbols.

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Check your answers.