

4.16: Steps of the Buying Process

Learning Objectives

- Outline the steps of the buying process

There are a number of different models that describe the process or steps consumers engage in as they prepare to make a purchase, often depicted as a sales funnel. In this section, we'll evaluate three: AIDA, path-to-purchase, and the consumer buying process.

AIDA describes the buying process largely from the marketer's perspective. It stands for:

- Attention
- Interest
- Desire
- Action

That is, an advertiser grabs a consumer's *attention*, making them aware of the product or service that can satisfy that individual's identifiable need. Then, through the description of features & benefits, the consumer's *interest* is developed to the point of *desire*. At this point, the consumer becomes the actor and takes *action* to purchase the item.

The AIDA model is enduring, having been developed in the early nineteenth century. But, it certainly has limitations. Most notably, it regards the consumer as passive throughout the majority of the process. By comparison, marketers are the actors, sending messages to stimulate consumer demand.

In reality, consumers are driven by their individual wants and needs, not simply responding to the messages of advertisers. Advertisements can make consumers aware of offers or explain how products/ services satisfy an unmet need. But, they cannot create demand where a consumer want doesn't exist. More explicitly, no marketer, regardless of how insightful they are, can create an ad so compelling that it can force people to buy something they do not need.

Further, the AIDA model shows that the consumer experience ends at action, implying that on-going engagement either does not occur or is of minimal value for the consumer or firm. Of course, we understand this isn't true, given the value of service contracts, repeat purchases, and enduring customer loyalty. Thus, any model that describes the buying process should account for post-purchase activity.

Another model, the path-to-purchase model, refines the AIDA model to account for the influence of technology, specifically the rise of mobile access and e-commerce. The path-to-purchase model has come into use within the past decade, identifying four stages:

1. Awareness
2. Consideration
3. Conversion
4. Evaluation

Unlike the AIDA model or the sales funnel concept, which often show the buying process as linear, with consumers moving forwards or backwards from one step to the next, the path-to-purchase model is reflected as a wheel or web to account for the customer journey (how consumers access, process, review, revisit and process information across channels). It's important to note that consumers shop across multiple channels and access a host of sources for information. In accessing, considering, and consuming this information, the buying process moves dynamically, not in a straight-line.

Like the AIDA model, the path-to-purchase model describes the consumer as passive in the very first stage of awareness, where influencers can trigger interest or want. Again, advertisements, influencers, and other media can make consumers aware of offers or explain how products/services satisfy an unmet need, however, they cannot force interest or create demand where it does not exist. We need to understand consumers as seeking solutions to unmet needs, not as targets to be manipulated.

Recognizing the limits of AIDA and the path-to-purchase model, it's worthwhile to consider another representation of the buying process a consumer follows, which is represented by these six stages:

1. Recognition of an Issue or Need
2. Information Gathering

3. Evaluation of Options or Alternatives
4. Selection
5. Purchase
6. After-Purchase Evaluation

(Note: this model is often reflected in seven steps, where Identification of Alternatives and Considering Options are two distinct steps. For our purposes, we've combined them as Evaluation of Options or Alternatives.)

Recognition of an issue or need means that the consumer becomes aware that their current condition is not consistent with what they want. Next, the consumer begins to *gather information*, seeking out options that could satisfy their want. Once they've collected sufficient options, the consumer can begin to compare them, *evaluating options or alternatives* and making judgments about which is the best fit to satisfy their want. Ultimately, the consumer makes a *selection* and *purchases* the product/ service to satisfy their want. *After purchase*, and usually some consumption, the consumer *evaluates* whether they were satisfied.

Specific to *evaluation*, there are a number of dimensions on how to assess satisfaction. These include if the good/service performed as expected, if it satisfied the want, if it was easy to use, if it was an appropriate value, if the consumer was well-supported, and if the purchase process was relatively frictionless. These *after-purchase evaluations* are vital considerations because they mix both objective and subjective assessments. Further, they measure relative customer satisfaction, which can influence repeat purchases, loyalty and referrals.

Regardless of whether referencing AIDA, the path-to-purchase model, or the consumer buying process, it's clear that consumers pass through a number of stages of engagement and activity, as they prepare to make a purchase. In doing so, we can begin to understand the activities and needs of the consumer at each step. Further, we can identify how best to approach the consumer to provide information and position our goods/services as the preferred choice.

? Practice Questions

<https://assessments.lumenlearning.co...essments/9164>

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