

6. Connecting with Customers

How to Align with your Target Customer



BRAND STORY

Module 6: Connecting with Customers

How to Align with Your Target Customer

Learning Guide | with Bruce Miller

This learning guide captures the full content of Module 6 of the Brand Story course for readers who prefer text over video. All key concepts, examples, and insights from the video are preserved below.

Start with the Customer Experience: The Steve Jobs Lesson

In 1997, Steve Jobs returned to Apple as a consultant after being forced out of the company twelve years earlier. During that absence, he had watched his creation drift into near bankruptcy, battered by poor management and a decade without meaningful innovation — including the embarrassing decision to license Apple’s system software to 75 companies to build Mac clones.

When Jobs returned, he made a decisive diagnosis. Speaking at the Worldwide Developers Conference, he used an audience question to explain the only place a brand story can properly begin:



“To sell \$8 billion, \$10 billion of product a year... you’ve got to start with the customer experience and work backwards to the technology. You can’t start with the technology and try to figure out where you’re going to try to sell it.”

— Steve Jobs, Apple Worldwide Developers Conference, 1997

That philosophy became the cornerstone of everything Apple built under Jobs' second tenure — including the product that changed the industry forever. When Jobs introduced the iPhone in 2007, his framing was pure brand story:

“Every once in a while, a revolutionary product comes along that changes everything.”

“These are not three separate devices. It's one device, and we're calling it the iPhone.”

— Steve Jobs, Macworld, 2007

Jobs didn't start with the processor speed or the antenna design. He started with the experience of holding one device that did everything.

The mistake most companies make is the opposite: build a better mousetrap and hope a market exists to buy it. Jobs' defining gift was his refusal to think that way. He started with the customer experience and engineered backward from there.

Key Insight: *The brand story begins with the customer — not the product. Work backwards from the experience you want to create.*

Brands Work on a Subconscious Level

Consider the Kind Bar. Why would anyone spend two dollars on a granola bar? The rational answer is protein and low sugar. But the brand story goes somewhere deeper. What if no one showed you kindness today? Suddenly a two-dollar hug from a Kind Bar is looking pretty good.

That's how brands actually work — below the level of rational decision-making. To tap into that layer, successful brands use market segmentation: analyzing purchasing power, gender, socioeconomics, and behavior to divide their potential customers into distinct types. Those types are called personas.

Building Customer Personas

A persona is a representative customer archetype — specific enough to feel real, broad enough to represent a meaningful segment. Two examples:

- **Aisha, the Stay-at-Home Mom** who manages the family finances — a persona for consumer financial services.
- **Tom, the Technical Decision-Maker** who rigorously compares specifications — a persona for cloud-based business solutions.



The Danger of Stereotypes

The challenge with personas is avoiding lazy assumptions. Launching an All-American Beer? You might be tempted to target a persona called Joe Lunch-Bucket. But look more carefully at the data, and you'll discover that Joe is more likely named Jose: he works hard, has a large household, and prefers Modelo Negra.

You don't need a formal research budget to avoid this trap. You need to observe the world around you. Demographics are shifting, tastes are evolving, and old stereotypes are falling away:

- Gen Z is less interested in automobiles than any previous generation.
- Burger King is pushing plant-based Whoppers.
- Everyday computing now happens on cell phones, not desktops or laptops.
- Wall Street workers are wearing Patagonia instead of Brooks Brothers.
- Brooklyn hipsters are drinking hard seltzers instead of craft beers.

Key Insight: *You don't need a market research budget. You need to open your eyes. The world tells you who your customer is — if you're paying attention.*

The Real Reason People Buy: The Baby Stroller

When you observe your world carefully, you begin to notice deeper emotional motives behind buying decisions — motivations the customer would never articulate, and may not even consciously recognize.

Imagine you've invented a high-tech baby stroller and want to research the market. You head to the park on a Saturday morning and observe young couples pushing elaborate baby contraptions that cost more than a used car. You notice the shock-mounted wheels, the five-point harness, the leatherette push-bar, the phone charger, one-touch braking, and the reversible seat. The baby looks comfortable — but she'd probably be just as happy in a \$14 sling.

Why did these couples spend \$1,300 on a Bugaboo stroller? Dig deeper, and the emotional truth emerges: the stroller is a visible symbol of their commitment as a couple. The baby is their first major shared project — a marriage milestone — and they want to do it right. The stroller is proof.



The stroller has nothing to do with the baby.

Key Insight: *Customers rarely buy for the reasons they state. Look beneath the rational purchase justification for the emotional truth that actually drives the decision.*

Case Study: Beyond Meat and the Target Customer

Beyond Meat is a plant-based meat substitute created by CEO Ethan Brown, driven by a mission to reduce the environmental, health, and animal welfare costs of conventional meat production. The company grew rapidly, landed major fast-food partnerships, and prepared for one of the most-watched IPOs in recent memory.

But before ringing that opening bell, Brown had to answer a critical question: who is the target customer?

The instinctive answers were wrong:

- **Vegans?** Wrong.

- **Eco-progressives?** Wrong again.
- **Meat eaters?** Yes.

The **Beyond Meat prospectus** put it plainly: under the tagline “Eat What You Love,” the company described its success in appealing to “a broad range of consumers, including those who typically eat animal-based meats.” Beyond Meat wasn’t built for vegetarians. It was built for carnivores who might want a break.



The Beyond Meat Personas

To understand why this positioning made sense — and where it had limits — it helps to map out the range of potential customers:



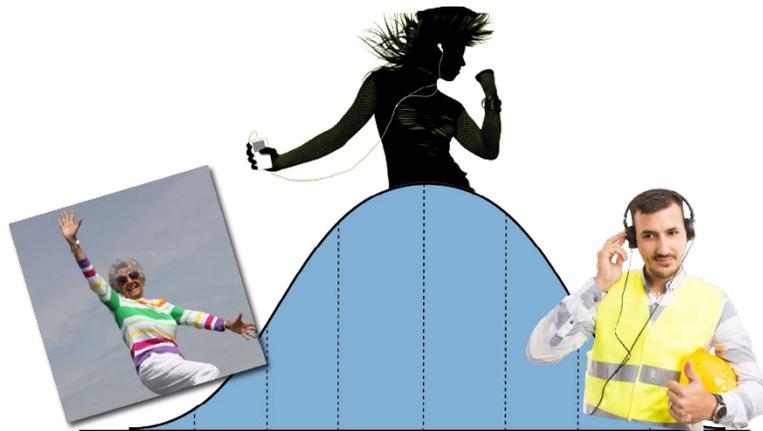
Clockwise above: Cal, Mary, Yolanda, Vicki, Gunner, Clint

Cardiac Cal	A medical-device rep with rising blood pressure and an expanding gut. Loves red meat — but his cardiologist wants him to quit.
Gunner the Mechanic	A meat lover with zero interest in veganism. His wife is curious about eating healthier. Gunner may or may not follow.
Vegan Vicki	A hard-core vegan and PETA member who craves a burger but remains steadfastly meat-free.
Mary the Mommy	No diet ideology — just a time-crunched parent seeking wholesome food options for her family.
Yolanda the Yogini	Studies wellness trends, drinks kombucha, and practices yoga. Attracted to health-forward products.
Climate Clint	Lies awake at night worrying about methane emissions from cattle destroying the planet.

When you apply scrutiny to this list, the field narrows quickly. Beyond Meat is a highly processed product — a fact that disqualifies it for **Vegan Vicki**, **Yolanda the Yogini**, and **Climate Clint**, all of whom would find the ingredient list disqualifying. wife discovers the same thing and moves on.

That leaves two genuine targets: **Cardiac Cal**, who loves the idea of a burger that tastes like the real thing, and **Mary the Mommy**, who is looking for quick, reasonably wholesome options for her family. They represent the top of the bell curve.

The Bell Curve Principle



Apple sold the iPod using young hipsters as its brand persona — the top of the bell curve. But the brand's reach extended far wider: plenty of older consumers also bought iPods to listen to jazz or classical music. The bell curve includes every potential customer, but your brand story should focus on the center — the people who most clearly represent your ideal customer.

What happened to Beyond Meat? Despite the blockbuster IPO — trading at 163% above its offering price — sales eventually plummeted. Positioning the brand toward meat eaters alienated core vegetarian and vegan consumers, who together represent only about 10% of the market but who drive cultural credibility. And the product's highly processed nature became a liability as health scrutiny intensified.



Beyond Meat has since launched a cleaner product, Beyond Steak, in response.

The Beyond Meat story is still being written — but it already stands as a vivid illustration of why getting the target customer right is not a marketing exercise. It is a business-critical decision.

Key Insight: *Your target customer is not everyone who might buy your product. It's the person at the top of the bell curve — the one your brand story speaks to most directly. Get that right, and the rest of the curve follows.*