THE DECISION SEQUENCE

MARKETING BUILT AROUND HOW PEOPLE DECIDE

Your buyer doesn't recognize themselves

How to describe who you serve

Why naming a category tells
a buyer nothing about whether you understand theirs

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How to describe who you serve

The importance of telling the visitor that you understand their category (not yours).

Gates. **Relevance: primary.** Credibility: secondary. Proof: no. Safety: no. Access: no.

Buyers identify by the problem on their desk this week. Your CRM files them by size and sector, and no buyer has ever recognized themselves in a revenue band.

Describe the condition. The category sorts itself out afterward.

The symptom

Somewhere on the website there's a line that says who the firm serves. Mid-market firms. Fortune 500 clients. Growth-stage companies.

Now read the three paragraphs underneath it and look for a problem anybody currently has. Usually what's there's the firm: years in practice, offices, disciplines, a sentence about partnership that took a committee two weeks to approve.

The buyer arrived carrying something specific. A restatement. A close that keeps slipping. A board question they couldn't answer last Thursday. They scan for the shape of that thing, find a category they happen to belong to, and leave without deciding anything.

Nobody left in disgust. The page just gave them no reason to stay...which reads the same as indifference from the other side of the screen.

Why it keeps happening

Because size and sector are the only cut the firm can see from the inside.

Revenue band, employee count, industry code, region. Those are the fields in the CRM, the axes on the pipeline report, the basis for how territories get assigned and how next year's budget gets argued. It's a reasonable way to run a business. Every operational question a firm asks about its market has an answer in that vocabulary, so the marketing inherits the vocabulary too, and nobody stops to ask whether the buyer speaks it.

The buyer doesn't. Nobody wakes up identifying as a mid-market manufacturer. They wake up identifying as the person who has to explain the variance by Friday.

Many established firms stumble right here. They carry real experience, then wrap it in language so broad that the buyer can't locate the relevant piece inside the specific situation. Somebody at that firm has solved this exact problem four times. The description makes that impossible to find.

The market can't value what it can't see.

What the buyer is doing at the Relevance gate

Deciding, quickly and mostly without noticing they're deciding, whether the firm lives inside their problem or somewhere outside it.

That's intellectual proximity: the sense that the advisor understands the problem from inside the client's world. The firm notices the tradeoffs, and the part of the decision that never makes it into the formal scope. Its language fits closely enough that the buyer doesn't waste the first meeting correcting the frame.

That last clause is the whole test. Every experienced buyer has sat through the opening twenty minutes of a meeting explaining their own situation to someone who showed up with the wrong assumptions. They price that tax into who gets the meeting at all.

The sorting models now standing between a buyer and a shortlist have the same difficulty. A description built from firmographics gives a retrieval system nothing specific to attach to an actual query, which is how a firm reads as a generalist without ever deciding to be one.

Geography might still earn a look. Understanding earns the next step.

The correction

Rewrite the audience line as a condition.

Write down what's happening to the buyer. A CFO holding a restatement. A managing partner whose quarter-end close takes three weeks and two apologies. A general counsel who learned about the problem from a client rather than from her own team. Each of those is recognizable in about four words. No revenue band has ever managed that.

Then run the order underneath a peanut butter campaign that most people remember and almost nobody has taken apart. *Choosy Mothers Choose Jif.* Four moves: **Attribute. Identity. Behavior. Brand.**

Describe the buyer in a way she'll be proud to accept. Choosy. Connect that description to the role she takes most seriously, the one she'd defend in an argument. Turn the attribute into a behavior, an actual thing a person like that does. Then, last and briefly, name the product. The product itself is almost absent from the idea, and that's the point.

For a professional-services firm the same four moves run cleanly. The attribute is the judgment the firm credits the buyer with. The identity is the role they'd defend to their board. The behavior is what a person carrying that judgment does about the problem. Your name goes at the end, where it belongs.

The mothers who lived inside that identity read those four words and heard a description of themselves. Everybody else sees four words on a jar. The two groups aren't looking at the same object, and only one of them is in the room.

So pick a problem narrow enough to be recognizable. Your broader range doesn't go anywhere. Stop leading with it, because leading with it's what buried the useful part.

Then the harder move. Name the sentence the buyer wants to be able to say about themselves after they hire you. Set aside whatever you'd like said about the firm. What matters here is what they want to be able to think about their own judgment when the engagement is over.

Become the firm closest to the problem.

Before and after

Before. *We serve mid-market manufacturers and distributors throughout the Southeast, bringing more than thirty years of combined experience across audit, tax, and advisory.*

After. *If your monthly close takes three weeks and ends with two apologies, and the board has started asking why the numbers keep moving after they're presented, that's the situation we're built for.*

Run this on your own material

Read three things you already own. The first sentence of the homepage. The last three emails your team sent to prospects. The opening slide of the deck.

Count how many open with the buyer's situation and how many open with the firm's biography. You'll know the answer before you finish counting, which is itself worth something.

Then try to write that sentence, the one the buyer wants to be able to say about their own judgment afterward. One line. If you can't get it down in one line, stop working on the language and go do the research, because the problem isn't in the copy.

Signals you've cleared it

Advance when a reader hits a line that says the thing the internal team hasn't been able to say.

They get it.

Nobody has earned trust at that point. What's been earned is a reason to keep going. It shows up in the first call, when the prospect opens with detail instead of context, and in the inbound, when several unrelated companies arrive describing the same condition in nearly the same words.

Hold when prospects still spend the opening of the meeting teaching you their industry. Hold when the inquiries come from everywhere in the category and nothing in them repeats. Hold when three people inside the firm describe the audience three different ways in the same week, because the market won't be any clearer about a firm than the firm is about itself.

Where this connects

Story from the Field · *The Four Words That Defined a Good Mother*, on describing the buyer before naming the product.

Research Library · Entry 01, bounded rationality, on why buyers stop searching before they've compared everything.

Next move · Relevance clearing opens Credibility. Go to *How to introduce your team*.