

The people who understand customers

mobilcom-debitel is the third largest provider of cell phone contracts, yet consumers felt the company was small, and new business was sluggish. It was only when a comprehensive analysis of the customer structure was conducted that some surprising insights emerged, and this led to the company adopting a consistent new direction.

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The history of mobile telecommunications in Germany exemplifies how the substance of brands can be worn away within a harsh competitive environment, and price becomes the essential differentiating factor. The consequence? It's not only the offers, but also the images of the biggest providers that are getting closer and closer.

mobilcom-debitel was also obliged to face up to this challenge. With approximately 14 million customers, the company is the third largest provider in the German mobile telecoms market, having emerged in 2009 after the merger of several companies. Nevertheless, customer surveys revealed that the company was perceived as rather small.

Something needed to happen, so people began to wonder about a fresh corporate identity. One thing was obvious: This would only be successful if mobilcom-debitel were to make customers' needs its top priority, above everything else.

Yet what exactly are these "customer needs"? The different segmentation approaches that had hitherto been used may have described mobile telecoms customers, but were virtually unable to deliver any valid and concrete statements about the crucial questions: Why does a customer opt for mobilcom-debitel? Why do they choose this tariff? Why do they use this particular channel for this, and why should it be this precise model of cell phone and no other? The same applied when it came to existing customers: Why does a customer extend their contract — or not? As a result of these shortcomings, employees were unable to make proper use of the available customer information within strategic and operational processes.

In order to come up with a psychogram of our customers, we chose the GRIPS typology that has been developed by Vocatus. It is based on empirical psychological research with over 30,000 datasets from more than 20 countries and a dozen sectors, and sub-divides customers into five "decision-maker types". It satisfied three criteria that mattered to mobilcom-debitel: Firstly, it is comparatively intuitive and self-explanatory. Secondly, it can be deployed in a wide variety of areas within the company. Thirdly, the insights gained from the behavior-based categorization provide demonstrable added value.

We surveyed more than 20,000 of our own customers and those who use rival providers; we also made 5,000 test visits, and conducted numerous focus groups relating to product development and tariff optimization as well as new sales concepts. We tested all our means of communication, right through to an assessment of our customer service.

At the end, we also checked how successful this new segmentation was by using some key figures which are collected within phone-based customer care. The outcome: Customer satisfaction and the closing rate increased markedly, the latter for example by around 25%. At the same time, the duration of calls was reduced, as was the volume of credits allowed in order to provide scope for negotiation when extending contracts.

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Throughout a period of almost 12 months, management and the marketing department drove forward the biggest rebranding exercise in the company's history. The new advertising campaign was based on insights gained from a comprehensive customer analysis; when it was launched, every employee needed to understand what made the two newly defined customer types tick — and when they were likely to agree cell phone contracts. Market research played a key role in all of this.