



how to **grow**
my business

Understanding the buying roles

and how to communicate with them



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Summary

This ebook will offer practical examples to help you understand the different buying roles and how to communicate with each of their specific needs. Buying roles include:

- Decision-maker
- Influencer
- Blocker
- Champions or advocates
- Buyer
- End user
- Additional B2B roles (Legal, Finance, IT and others)

For some products, the same person may play multiple roles; for others, you may have dozens of people involved in the purchase decision, each with a very clear role. Learning how they think and what message they require to inform their decision will help you accelerate your sales.

decision-maker



blocker



champion



buyer



end user *influencer*



The buying roles

Kate's 4th birthday is coming up. She's a very bright little girl, full of personality. Her brother James is a year older and always looking out for Kate. Kate's grandparents want to buy her a birthday present. Grandpa knows Kate loves chocolate but the doctor told mum to cut down on sugar. Grandpa asks Kate's mum if he can buy the chocolate, but mum says 'not this time'. James tells mum that Kate would love a doll, mum is happy with this choice. Grandma loves the idea too; she actually heard of a special doll called Dolly - it's not made of plastic, it's fun and educational and has great reviews. Grandma can't stop raving about Dolly! Taking onboard everyone else's views, Grandpa goes online and buys a Dolly doll.

This short story illustrates how complex the buying process can be even for a low price product like a kid's toy. Understanding how your customers purchase your product or service and who else is involved in their decision will help you know towards whom you direct your marketing and what message is most relevant for their needs.

Decision-maker

The decision-maker has veto power; they have the final say on the purchase. In Kate's family, mum is the decision-maker. What she says, goes. Even if everyone else is excited about a particular gift, mum knows Kate best and has authority over what gifts Kate can accept.

Notice that in Kate's story mum did not initiate the buying process. **In some cases, you may not be able to reach the decision-maker directly, which is why it is important to communicate with the other people involved in the decision.**



How to communicate with them

The decision-maker will balance all the pros and cons – the benefits you offer, the price, your brand's reputation, any potential issues. If they make a bad decision, they are the ones held accountable. So when communicating with them, you need to offer them proofpoints that you're the best choice, such as customer studies, references, trials.

Decision-makers will listen to influencers and other roles to help inform their decision. Their advice may carry a lot of weight, especially in more expensive or strategic purchases, where it may be difficult to rectify a bad choice. To win the trust of your decision-maker, you need to communicate effectively with everyone involved in the buying process.

Influencer

The influencer plays an advisory role in the buying process, they advocate for the end user. Their influence may be due to a number of factors: their understanding of the end user's needs, their experience, their technical expertise, their close relationship with the decision-maker.

In Kate's story, little brother James is an influencer. He has some insight into Kate's wants and needs and being in a similar age group to his sister, he is in a privileged position to help other members of the family.

How to communicate with them

The influencer cares about the end user and the outcome. You already have some common ground – the category of products or services you offer appeals to them – now you need to convince them that you are best placed to provide the positive outcome they seek.

Start by acknowledging what they know and care about and reinforce why you are the best option. If possible, introduce those influencers to your brand advocates. Go beyond product talk, share your values and all the intangible reasons why you're a good option.



Blocker



Like the influencer, their opinion matters, but unfortunately for you, their opinion doesn't support the purchase. They may think your product is not needed or prefer a competitor. They may prefer a different solution altogether. In the worst cases, they may not trust you as a vendor or have had a bad experience working with you in the past. They stand in the way of your sale.

In Kate's story, if you are selling chocolate, then the doctor is a blocker. His expertise matters to Kate's mum (decision-maker) and his opinion shifted the purchase.

How to communicate with them

Your focus when communicating with a blocker is to change their mind about you. Ask them how you can improve or what would bring more value to them and truly listen to their concerns. If they had a bad experience with you in the past, be humble and show exactly how you will or have already addressed those issues. The blocker wants reassurance that you can overcome their first impressions.

Sometimes you can't change the blocker's mind, but you can "neutralise" their negative comments by being prepared to address concerns when asked.

Champion

Champions or advocates are the ones saying good things about you when you're not in the room. They get what your business is about, they understand the benefits you can bring, they either heard good things about you from people they trust or experienced it themselves. They are passionate about your products or services and willing to speak out.

In Kate's story, Grandma is an advocate for a particular brand of dolls called Dolly that she sees as superior to other brands.

How to communicate with them

You should make your advocates feel like a part of your team, show constant appreciation for their loyalty. They want to see you do well, so get them involved in your success. Share roadmaps and future plans with them and listen to their suggestions, get them involved in your marketing, ask them to speak on your behalf, let them know when they helped you find a new customer.

Your relationship with your champions should be like a partnership: both sides should feel like they are getting something out of it. A loyalty program or a referral scheme may help incentivise your customers, but most of all, always treat them with respect and appreciation.



Buyer

That's the one holding the wallet. If you are a B2C business, your buyer will likely have other roles too (they may also be the end user, the decision-maker or an influencer, for example), but not necessarily, as it was Grandpa's case, in Kate's story.

If you are a B2B company, your buyer may be completely detached from any discussions about the product and their only role may be to buy it at the best value possible.

How to communicate with them

Tell your buyer about the **value** you offer. Notice that value and price are two different things. They will naturally be interested in the actual price but also on the cost vs. benefit compared to other suppliers, money-back guarantees, return policies, financing and payment terms.

If you are not able to demonstrate your overall value to the buyer, they might make their decision entirely based on price, which is not ideal.



End user

That's the person (or group of people) actually using your product or service. Even if the end user is not involved in the buying process at all, as is Kate's case in our story, their experience means everything. All the other people involved in the purchase are looking to address a problem, a want or a need that the end user has. If the end user doesn't like your product, you will either get a return or you may lose sales in the future.

Grandma will no longer be an advocate if Kate's dolly breaks on the first day. Influencers may become future blockers and advise others to steer clear from your product.

How to communicate with them

A common mistake most vendors make is to talk about themselves and their products too much. First of all, discover what your end user cares about - either by speaking to them directly or by conducting research. Understand their needs before you start bragging about how great your product is. Talk instead about how you can deliver value and solve their problem. Offer them great customer service, whether it's by phone, email or social media. Depending on the nature of your products, you may want to offer support or create an end user forum or community.

Happy end users can become your advocates and encourage others to buy from you, they help build your brand reputation.



Additional B2B roles

When the purchase is for a company rather than a person, there are some other additional buying roles to consider, such as:

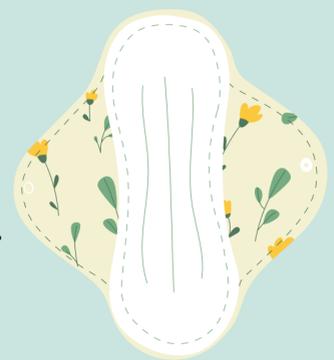
- **Budget holder:** which department is financing the purchase?
- **Legal:** does the vendor meet all the legal requirements? Are contract terms fair?
- **Finance/ Procurement:** has the vendor been vetted and registered in the ERP system? Are their payment terms in line with what the buyer expects?
- **IT:** does the product meet internal IT requirements? Will it require integration with other systems? This is especially important for technology products, even if the end user is HR, Marketing or Sales, and not the IT department.
- **Cybersecurity and data privacy:** does the vendor meet all the cybersecurity standards and follow all data privacy regulations, such as GDPR?
- **Public relations:** does the vendor share the same ethical values as the buying company? Will it look good on them to purchase from you? For example, if the Greenpeace were to make a large purchase from a vendor that pollutes the ocean and this became public it would be a PR disaster for them.
- **Executive support:** are the executives in the company aware and supportive of this purchase? Executives can sometimes become blockers if not involved early on. This is specially important with very expensive or strategic investments.

Some examples

Here are some examples to help you understand the buying roles, their concerns and the type of communication required:

Sanitary pads

- **End user:** The vast majority are females from age 12 to 55. The end user will most likely also be the **decision-maker**.
- **Buyer:** It will depend on the age range. For girls younger than 15, the buyer is probably the end user's mum or female legal guardian. Ladies over 15 often purchase it for themselves.
- **Influencer:** Again, age will have an impact. Younger end users are still adapting. They will listen to their friends and female relatives' opinion. Their culture and religion may also weigh on their selection. Older end users already have a lot of experience with the product and rely less on influencers to make their decision.



How to communicate with them

Younger users will be mostly concerned about comfort and discretion, whereas older users may also consider ethical and environmental aspects. Companies selling sanitary pads should be aware of the cultural and religious aspects of menstruation. Some sellers choose to directly address the taboo with humour as a way to stand out in a very commoditised market, but this choice may also "backfire" so it's important to analyse the pros and cons.

Flowers



- **End user:** mostly women over 18.
- **Buyer:** when the flower is for personal use, not for an event, the buyer is typically the decision-maker. Both men and women buy flowers, but men typically spend more on bouquets as gifts, while women tend to buy cheaper flowers, either loose or in a small bunch. Online flower shoppers are typically men.
- **Influencer:** cultural traditions around special occasions like Mother's Day, weddings and anniversaries will influence men, whereas women may buy flowers regularly for decoration.

How to communicate with them

Research shows that men over 35 are responsible for the majority of online purchases and that they buy flowers as an occasional gift. Their main concerns are quality, convenience, delivery punctuality and end user experience: they want to impress the recipient. Women tend to buy flowers in person from the supermarket or high-street florists. Their priorities are quality, fragrance and freshness and they are more sensitive to price. They may buy flowers as gifts to other women or just for home decoration.

When communicating with their audience, a florist could address those care abouts in different ways:

- They can use language to demonstrate that they meet all the requirements, such as quality and punctuality;
- They can challenge the cultural perceptions and stereotypes around giving flowers. For example, an ad encouraging men to buy flowers without a special occasion or an ad suggesting flowers as a gift to men.

Corporate giveaways (B2B)

- **Decision-maker:** depends on the size of the company. For medium and large companies, it may be a marketing manager or director. For smaller companies with less than 50 employees, it may be the CEO.
- **Budget holder:** Usually the marketing department. It could be HR if the gift is for employees.
- **End user:** most corporate giveaways are offered to customers, so your customer's customers will be the ones actually using your products. Your customer may be able to give you more insight into who they are.
- **Buyer:** for a medium or large company, it could be a marketing or events manager/ assistant, office admin or a purchasing assistant.
- **Influencer:** anyone who has a customer-facing role may influence the selection: account managers (sales team), other members of the marketing department, executives. Competitors may also serve as inspiration.
- **Blocker:** a senior executive could block the purchase due to budget constraints or concerns around bribery laws.



How to communicate with them

Companies buy corporate giveaways for several reasons, such as:

- Help customers remember their brand, so preferably an object that they will use frequently and/or keep within sight.
- Make high-value customers feel appreciated.
- Encourage potential customers to attend a meeting.

Members of the marketing team will look for useful, creative and quirky objects. They will purchase corporate giveaways in bulk and often need to stick to a budget, so cost per unit is definitely a factor. Your ability to produce and deliver on time is also crucial.



Final thoughts

There's a common methodology used to qualify marketing leads called **BANT**, which stands for: **b**udget, **a**uthority, **n**eed and **t**imescale. In simple words, you need to verify that who is buying from you has the money, the authority to make the purchase, needs your product or service and is interested in purchasing now or in the near future. Sometimes, a single person will tick all these boxes, and in that case it is simpler to communicate with them; others there will be multiple people involved, as outlined in this ebook.

Think about your product: is the person buying also the end user? Are they the ones considering the alternatives and making the final decision, or does someone else do that for them? Who do they listen to before they make their final choice?

If you have already been selling for a while, look back at your sales from the past 6 months and see if you can identify these roles. If you are just starting a company and you're not sure yet, do some marketing research and speak to other sellers in the same industry. You can't communicate effectively without knowing who you are speaking to.

For more business and marketing advice, go to our website or follow us on social media.



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