

6. MEANS-END ANALYSIS

If you have taken a marketing course, you've heard the old adage, "Customers don't buy features; customers buy benefits." Some consumer behaviorists maintain that this is not the end of the story—that benefits are frequently not an end in themselves, but merely a means to achieving some valued end state that is important to the consumer. In other words, we might rewrite the adage to read: "Customers buy features that bring them benefits that get them closer to valued end states." These valued end states may include things such as self-esteem, safety/security, good health, freedom, happiness, peace of mind, belongingness, achievement, and social approval.

For instance, a customer might state that one of the reasons she bought a car is because it is red. When asked why the color red is important to her, she says that the color red is important to her because it means that the car is more likely to be noticed. So now we know something about one of the features (the color red) that is important to her and her perception of the benefit that has been gained by that feature (being noticed). If we stopped the line of questioning here, however, we would not have a complete picture of this consumer's purchase motivations with regard to this feature. Note that at least two realistic possibilities exist with regard to the underlying reason that this benefit, "being noticed," is important to this consumer. If asked, "Why is being noticed important to you?" she might respond, "Because it makes me feel good about myself when others notice me." In this case, we would conclude that the benefit "being noticed" is important to this consumer because it leads to the valued end state of self-esteem.

<u>Feature</u>	<u>Benefit</u>	<u>Valued End State</u>
color red	being noticed	self-esteem

On the other hand, the consumer might respond that the benefit of "being noticed" is important to her "because it means that other drivers are more likely to see the car, and therefore I am less likely to be in a car accident." In this case, we would conclude that the benefit "being noticed" is important to this consumer because it leads to the valued end state of safety.

<u>Feature</u>	<u>Benefit</u>	<u>Valued End State</u>
color red	being noticed	safety

Obviously, these two different responses lead the consumer behaviorist to very different conclusions with regard to the consumer's purchase motivations.

The process that is used to identify the underlying links between features, benefits, and valued end states is called a "Laddering Interview," and consists primarily of repeatedly asking a consumer to identify why something is important to him/her. In fact, this questioning is repetitive to the extent that it typically feels awkward for both the interviewer and the respondent. This push to identify the underlying reasons that a consumer sees a feature or benefit as important, however, is at the core of the laddering interview. A hypothetical laddering interview follows.

Interviewer: Why do you buy this particular yogurt?

Consumer: Well, it's nonfat, and it's got all that calcium in it.

Interviewer: Why is nonfat important?

Consumer: I'm on a diet, and being nonfat is important because it helps me to control my weight. But I don't like the taste as much as the full fat kind.

Interviewer: Why is controlling your weight important to you?

Consumer: I think that when I control my weight other people respect me more.

Interviewer: You said earlier that the fact that this yogurt is nonfat means that you don't enjoy the taste as much as full fat yogurts. Is this important to you?

Consumer: Yes—very much!

Interviewer: Why?

Consumer: Well, I suppose because enjoyment leads to happiness, and happiness is pretty important to me!

Interviewer: Earlier you mentioned that one of the reasons that you purchase this yogurt is the calcium it contains. Why is this important to you?

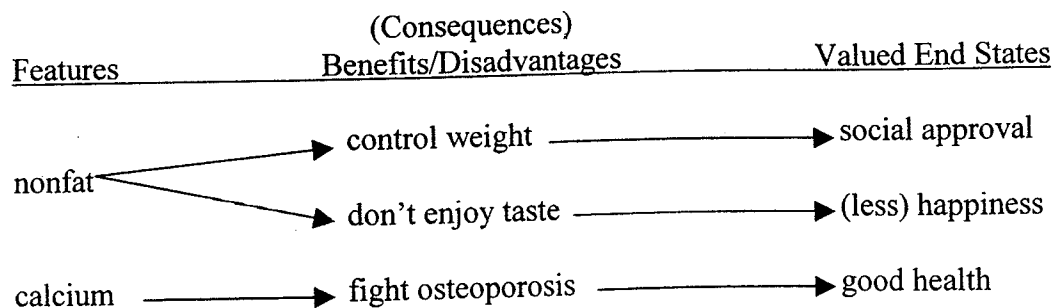
Consumer: I've read that the calcium can help fight osteoporosis.

Interviewer: Why is this important to you?

Consumer: I want to be healthy—doesn't everyone?

Interviewer: I suppose so. Thank you very much for the interview.

After reviewing this interview, the researcher would “map” what are called “Means-End Chains” to illustrate the relationships uncovered by the laddering interview. The means-end chains derived from this interview would likely appear as follows:



Notice that the interview, and therefore the map, may identify more than one product feature. In this particular case the map identifies two product features that are important to this consumer: nonfat and calcium. Note also that one feature may lead to more than one consequence, and that some consequences may be positive (or benefits), while others may be negative (or disadvantages), which in turn can lead to greater or lesser attainment of valued end states.

One of the most difficult aspects of mapping a laddering interview is making sure that each and every relationship is valid and an accurate representation of the statements made by the consumer. The arrows in the map represent clear, identifiable links between a feature and a consequence or a consequence and a valued end state. Unless the link is readily apparent from the laddering interview, it should not be mapped—*these relationships should never be assumed by the interviewer.*

Part 1

In this section you will find the transcript of a hypothetical laddering interview related to the product category of cell phones and service.

Interviewer: Why did you purchase this particular cell phone and service?

Consumer: The main reason was because of the instant messaging capability, but I also really like the funky colors of the changeable faceplates.

Interviewer: Why is the instant messaging capability important to you?

Consumer: Because it means that I can chat with my friends on IM anywhere and anytime. I spend more time talking with my friends on IM these days than I do on verbal phone calls. Unfortunately, having the instant messaging capability also means that I pay a lot more per month—that's the downside of the instant messaging feature.

Interviewer: Why is being able to chat with your friends on IM important to you?

Consumer: I really love that feeling of connection with other people; that's really important in my life.

Interviewer: You said earlier that the instant messaging feature means that you have to pay more per month for the service. Is this important to you?

Consumer: Of course!

Interviewer: Why?

Consumer: It makes me feel bad about myself when I spend more than I know I should on something.

Interviewer: Earlier, you said that you really like the different colors of the changeable faceplates. Why is this important to you?

Consumer: It keeps me in fashion.

Interviewer: And why is being in fashion important to you?

Consumer: I feel like others look up to me when I stay in fashion

Interviewer: Any other reasons for choosing this cell phone and service that you can think of?

Consumer: No—that's about it.

Interviewer: Thanks very much for the interview.

Task, Part 1

Using the following template, Create a Means-End Map that contains the Means-End Chains representing the relationships uncovered by the previous laddering interview related to cell phones and service.

<u>Features</u>	<u>(Consequences)</u> <u>Benefits/Disadvantages</u>	<u>Valued End States</u>
-----------------	--	--------------------------

Part 2

Those in the advertising profession employ these means-end maps through the use of a model known as the MECCAS (Means-End Conceptualization of the Components of Advertising Strategy) model. The MECCAS model requires that the components of one or more of the identified means-end chains derived from a laddering interview are utilized in the development of an ad, such that:

1. The product feature identified by the consumer becomes part of the “message elements” of the ad or brand attributes that are depicted in the ad.
2. The benefit associated with that feature by the consumer becomes the “consumer benefit,” or the major positive consequence of using the brand, as depicted in the ad.
3. The valued end state identified by the consumer becomes the “driving force” of the ad or the end goal that serves as a motivation for purchase.
4. The way in which the valued end state is associated with, or linked to, the identified brand attributes is called the “leverage point.”
5. The type of advertisement employed to communicate all of these points is called the “executional framework.”

For instance, in the yogurt example used previously, an advertiser may choose to focus on the first means-end chain identified in the map (in this case, nonfat—control weight—social approval). Typically, advertisers focus on a means-end chain that has a positive result and is of high importance to the consumer. To continue the example, the yogurt ad might show two women eating yogurt—one is eating the advertised brand, which is nonfat, and the other is eating a competitor’s brand, which is not nonfat. The ad then depicts these two women stepping on scales at home; the woman who ate the advertised brand has a big smile on her face while the one who ate the competitor’s brand looks discouraged. The next scene shows the two women walking down a public street; the woman who ate the advertised brand of yogurt is receiving approving looks from bystanders while the woman who ate the competitor’s yogurt is not. In this case, the parts of the MECCAS model would be:

1. Message Element(s): yogurt that is nonfat.
2. Consumer Benefit(s): controlling weight.
3. Driving Force: social approval.
4. Leverage Point: the nonfat feature is linked to weight control through the smile of the first woman when on the scale, and weight control is linked to social approval through the approving looks of bystanders that only the first woman receives.
5. Executional Framework: comparative advertisement.

Task, Part 2

Develop an ad utilizing the MECCAS model. The ad should be based on one of the means-end chains that you have identified as part of the map you created in Part 1 of this case (related to cell phones and service). Be sure to describe the ad fully, and also be sure to identify the five parts of the MECCAS model (as is done in the yogurt ad example previously).