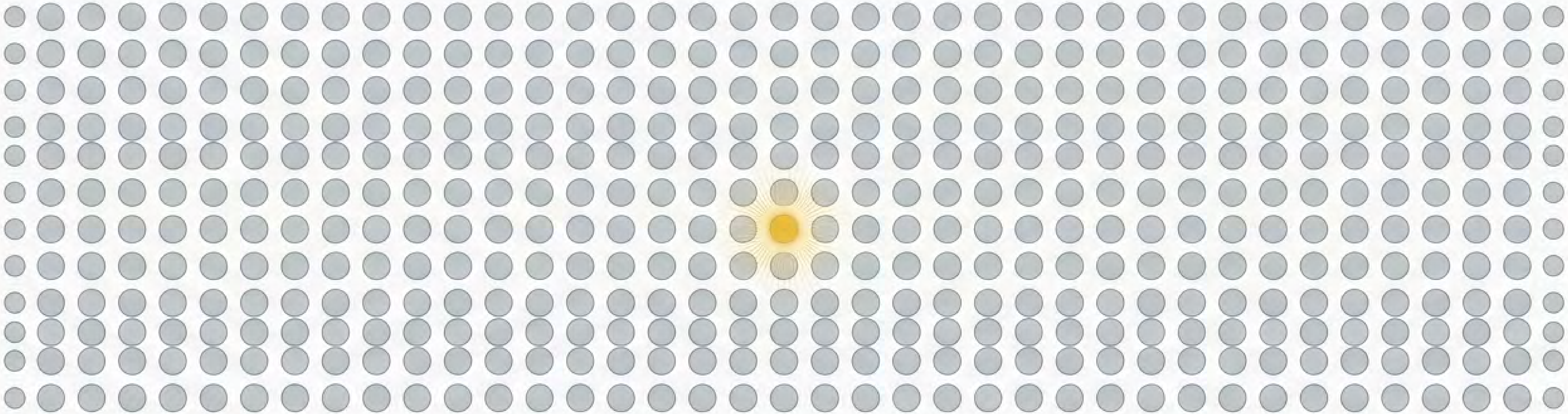
The Architecture of Action

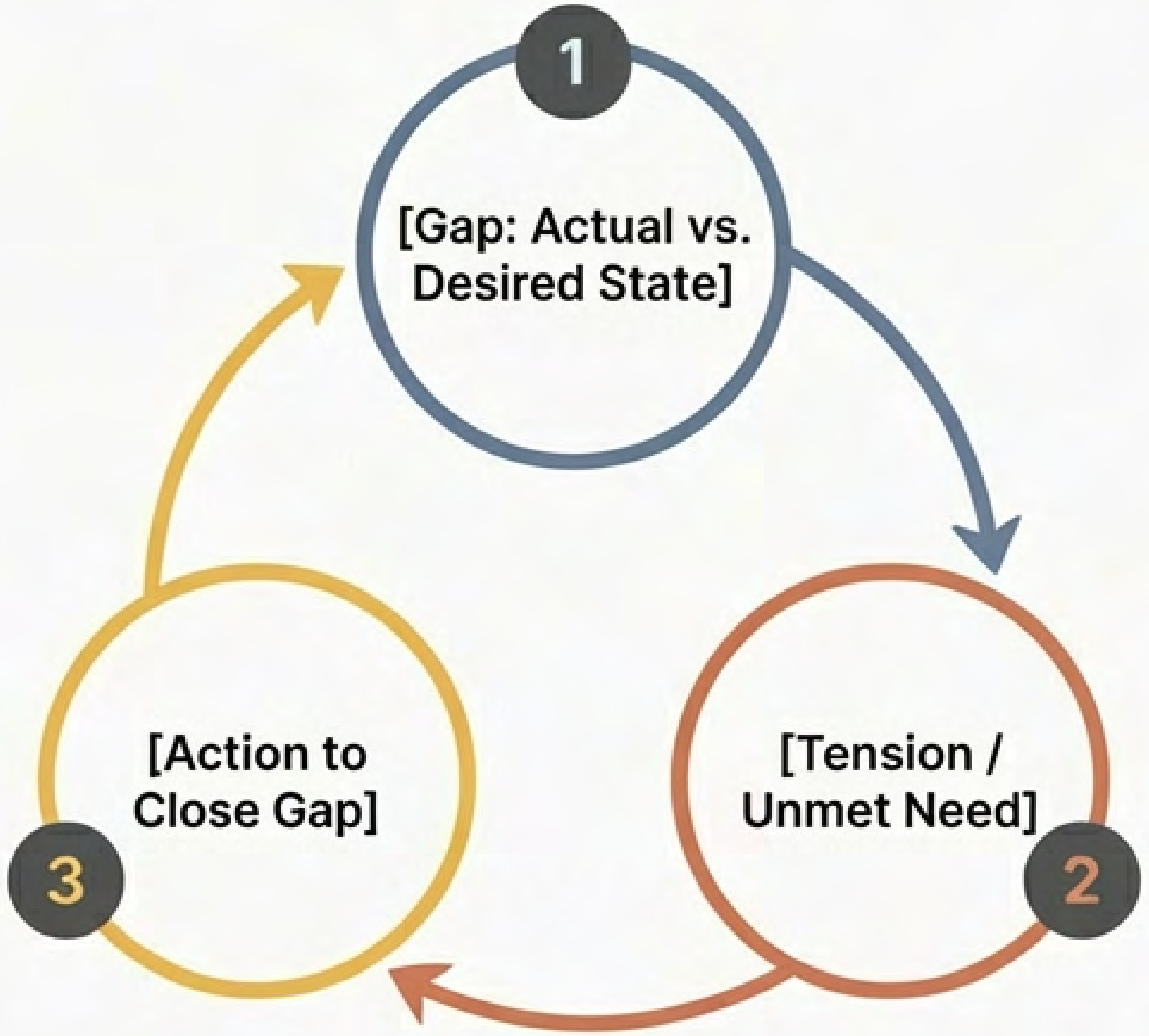
Understanding Needs, States, and Triggers to Drive Customer Behavior



The most valuable customer needs are often silent.

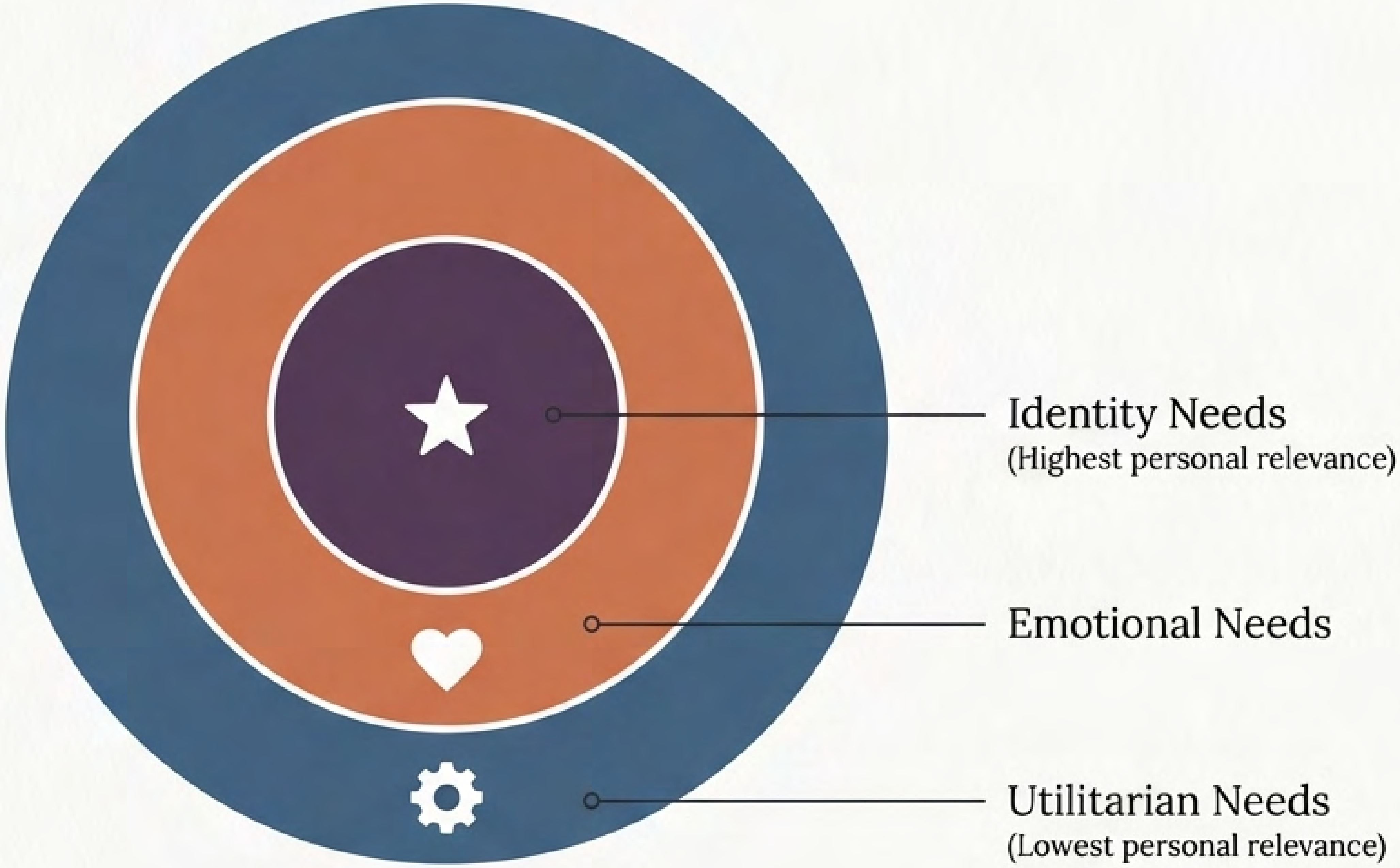
Most decisions are driven by unmet needs, but the majority of these needs lie dormant until awakened by an impulse. The fundamental challenge isn't just fulfilling existing demand; it's activating the latent need that precedes it.

Every action begins with an unmet need.



An unmet need is the realization of a gap between a person's current state and their desired state. This gap creates a state of tension. Behavior is the process of reducing that tension by closing the gap.

All needs are not created equal.



From a marketing perspective, needs can be organized into a hierarchy of personal relevance. These three categories operate in concert to drive behavior.

The Three Dimensions of Human Need

Utilitarian Needs

The need for functional performance and resource preservation (time, money, effort). This includes physiological needs like hunger and safety.

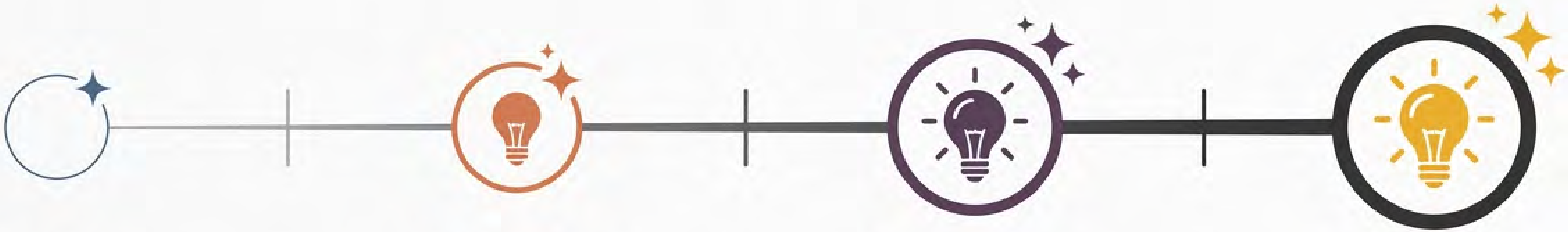
Emotional Needs

The desire to experience pleasure (joy, peace of mind) and avoid pain. These needs are concerned with entering or maintaining a positive emotional state.

Identity Needs

The drive to define and express oneself, to belong to in-groups, and to achieve self-actualization. These needs reflect how individuals define themselves to others and to themselves.

What is your customer's current state of awareness?



Delight
Need is fully met; customer ignores alternatives

Indifference
Need is reasonably met; no compelling reason to change

Discomfort
Aware of an unmet need, but passive; not a priority

Problem
Prominent unmet need; actively seeking a solution

Needs vary in the degree to which they are active in an individual's mind. This spectrum of activation, or "need state," determines a customer's motivation to act. Active needs become goals.

A Trigger is the bridge from awareness to action.

A trigger is any factor—internal or external—that activates a dormant need. It reveals the gap between a customer's current and desired state, turning passive discomfort into an active problem to be solved.

Triggers work differently depending on the starting state.

For the Indifferent

The trigger's role is to highlight a gap they didn't know existed, reactivating a dormant need.

For the Uncomfortable

The trigger nudges them toward taking action by highlighting the benefits of addressing the need.

For the Problem-Aware

The trigger channels an already active need toward a specific solution or offering.

For the Delighted

The trigger must set a new, higher reference point that raises expectations, creating a *new* gap between their current and desired states.

The Three Categories of Triggers

The most effective triggers are designed to activate specific types of needs. The trigger toolkit can be organized into three primary categories that directly align with the need hierarchy.

Utilitarian Triggers

Emotional Triggers

Identity Triggers

Utilitarian Triggers: Activating needs of practicality and performance.

These triggers activate needs related to physical existence and the ability to accomplish specific tasks.

Functional Triggers

Focus on maximizing benefits. They highlight a performance gap or superior features to activate a dormant need. This is especially challenging when customers are already satisfied with current options and do not perceive an urgent problem to solve.

Monetary Triggers

Focus on minimizing costs. They shift customer attention from maximizing the benefits of an action to minimizing its financial cost, activating the need to save money and preserve resources.

Emotional Triggers: Activating needs of feeling and experience.

These triggers directly target people's emotional needs, driven by their desire to experience pleasure and avoid pain.

Positive Triggers

Evoke feelings of pleasure, enjoyment, love, nostalgia, or peace of mind. They position an offering as a source of positive affect.

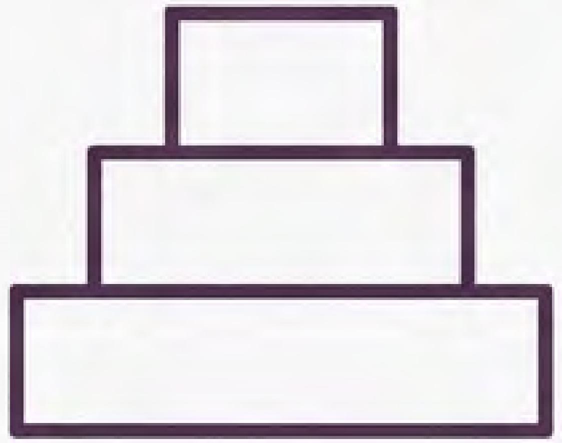
Negative Triggers

Evoke feelings of fear, anxiety, or the "fear of missing out" (FOMO). They focus attention on the negative consequences of a risk that a customer may not have previously considered, then present the offering as the solution to alleviate that risk.

Identity Triggers: Activating needs of self and society.

These triggers focus on an individual's need for self-realization, belonging, esteem, and respect. They have the highest personal relevance.

Status Triggers



Tap into the desire to demonstrate membership in a particular socioeconomic class or aspirational group. They are effective when consumption can be used to visibly signal wealth, power, or social standing.

Personality Triggers

Tap into the need to express unique personal values, beliefs, aspirations, and tastes. They focus on showcasing personal identity rather than group affiliation and can be a powerful driver when an offering aligns with a customer's core value system or self-image.

The strategic question is not *how* to trigger, but *which* need to trigger.

Companies often focus on the tactical execution of a trigger, overlooking the strategically more important question of which particular need to activate. The choice depends on the customer, the context, and the offering's core value. Different needs can evoke entirely different responses to the same offering.

The Architecture of Action: A Unified Framework