



Winning The Complex Sale

Creating your Marketing Message for the complex sale where the customer does not understand the value of the solution you provide

If you examine the marketing materials produced by most solution sellers, you will find two common threads. They tend to be focussed on the solutions they offer, and they usually communicate in the wrong tense – a tense that describes a brighter future in which the customer is enjoying the many benefits of the solution.

There are two prerequisites of Marketing in a complex business environment.

The first is that all marketing communication be centered on the customers reality, their situation, their problems, and the physical symptoms that bring those problems to reality. You can amuse, intrigue, and interest customers with solution focussed messages, but because this communication is future oriented and therefore speculative, it is usually not compelling. Customers have grown apathetic and immune to these promise focussed messages. Symptom focused and problem focused messages on the other hand, are entirely based in the customers reality and have considerably more power to trigger serious discussion and subsequent action.

The second prerequisite is that addressing customers in the negative present tense is the most effective path to constructive engagement

There are four tenses in which marketing messages can be communicated:

Postive Present

Here, the customers current situation is described in positive terms. These messages are built around the customers desire to sustain the current situation. This tense is really only useful when communicating with an existing customer who has already achieved value using your solutions. Reinforcing the benefits of their current situation strengthens their resistance to change and fortifies your competitive position. Use this tense in your 'thank your for your business' letter to a satisfied customer.

Positive Future

Solution Sellers usually rely on the positive future tense. These messages are built around the customers need to create a better future. But no matter how attractive that future looks, unless the message reaches a customer who has already decided to change and buy, it drops into the 'so what' category.

Negative Future

Here, we are speaking of dangers that the customer does not yet face, but someday might. These gloom and doom messages are built on the need to avoid something that has not yet happened. Unless the future being described is unavoidable in the mind of the customer (think death and taxes), negative future messages are not very effective at compelling change, and the decision to buy.

Negative Present

When the marketing message is communicated in the negative present tense, it speaks about the customers current problems and their tangible symptoms. Customers typically see these messages as no-nonsense, to the point and highly credible.

Sales Partners International Ltd

paul@salespartners.co.nz • Private Bag 31069, Lower Hutt, New Zealand • Tel: +64 4 586 4733 • Fax: +64 4 586 4429

Relating the physical symptoms is important as it provides a basis for the potential connection between the customers reality and your solution. The indicators of a problem are the evidence that motivates individual customers to investigate a problem and, if appropriate, attempt to solve it.

Because decisions to buy complex solutions are fundamentally decisions to undertake change, marketing messages that speak in the negative present tense are the most effective messages. The negative present tense taps directly into physical symptoms that the customer is experiencing at this moment. That being the case, the customer becomes engaged to determine if that symptom has undesirable consequences. The customers decision to eliminate these consequences is the most effective incentive for change.

A good rule of thumb in creating meaningful messages is always to remember that an indicator represents reality, while a benefit represents a speculative future. The better defined the indicators, the less speculative the benefit.

To create your marketing message, answer the following seven questions:

1. What are your sources of value?
2. What are your customers uses of value – first define the problems that your customers experience or will experience in the absence of your sources of value
3. What are the physical symptoms that occur in your customers organisation that confirm their potential uses of value and validate your sources of value?
4. Where in the customers organisation are the symptoms experienced?
5. What are the consequences the customer experiences, and what is the financial impact of those consequences?
6. Who within the customers organisation cares about the consequences and their financial impact?
7. In the light of the above answers, what value assumption will constructively engage the customer?

The answer to question 7, will form the basis of your marketing message.

Extract from The Prime Solution, by Jeff Thull.