

Creating Sales and Marketing Messages

By Carol Ann Weiss

Want to gain some insight into sales and marketing messages from your customer's point of view? Just walk the trade show floor in your industry and use a quick three-question test to analyze what you hear:

1. **What are they selling?** (*Do you know after their elevator pitch?*)
2. **Why would you want to buy it?** (*Could you repeat it?*)
3. **What questions were you asked before they launched into their pitch?** (*They did ask you questions, didn't they?*)

With solutions becoming more complex and comprehensive, coming up with a clear, compelling message becomes increasingly difficult. As we work with organizations, we tend to see that the more sophisticated the solution, the more sophisticated the buyer has to be to understand what the solution does – or why they care. There seems to be a reluctance to make a solution sound “too simple” for fear that it may lose some of its value. The truth of the matter is that quite the opposite is the case.

For Example, where do people go with hot new ideas that require funding? Venture capitalists. Professionals involved in the venture business (who are subject to numerous pitches daily) tell us all too often that at the end of a presentation- ***they are still not sure what a product does.*** The presenters were so infatuated with their own product, that they went heavy on the pixie dust and non-existent on the meat!

What are some key things to remember when creating messages? Let's revisit our three questions.

What are you selling?

The easy part is coming up with the comprehensive, technical explanation. The tough part is distilling that into something anyone can understand. We work with clients to help them “peel back the layers of the onion” to get to what is at the core. Think about how you would explain your solution to someone who knows nothing about your business. First think about the core of what your solution does and then consider the key reasons that it is necessary and beneficial. Analogies and practical examples help consumers understand more easily.

Why would they want to buy it?

The first part of this process tends to focus on what your solution can do for them that they cannot do today. But, if your thought process stops there, you can educate them, but you can't persuade them that they need it. There are always dozens of new features, functions and capabilities that someone could use, but what do they really need? It is imperative to understand WHO you are selling to and what would make them want to spend money on your solution versus an alternative. Think about your top 3 buyers and why they need what you are selling.

What questions do you ask?

Quickly getting to the point that THIS audience cares about is what will get their attention. ***Take the time to ask, to understand, and to validate*** before launching into a laundry list of things that MIGHT intrigue them. By asking few questions first, you can focus on the two or three things that will get and keep their attention

We believe a key way to think about effective messaging is to compare it to a relay race. Marketing is your anchor – the runner that begins the race. They must have the right content to get you ahead early. If they overload with information, they will overrun the next person in the relay (sales). If they don't provide enough of the right information, then sales is trying to catch up in leg 2. Aligning content and momentum is key to getting a clear message to the field in a manner in which they can internalize.

The next step of the race is getting the customer to “take the baton”. The content and momentum that a sales professional uses to get the customer ready is critical in the outcome of the race. Too much information without enough value will make the customer reluctant to engage. Too little, too late means the customer has joined the race with another provider and/or solution. Timing, content and momentum are all critical to the alignment needed to win.

Key Points:

1. Message content should not only consider the primary consumer, but the secondary consumer (i.e. marketing to sales and sales to customer OR sales to customer and customer to internal constituents).
2. Details are good, but simplicity is better. Carve out the core message and have the details in your hip pocket to back up your points.
3. No two organizations, roles or individuals are the same – pick and choose what will resonate in each situation.
4. Listen. Hear what you have to say from the customer's perspective and take the time to make it easier for them to understand why they need it and why you are the best alternative to provide it.

Alan Greenspan once said, “I guess I should warn you, if I turn out to be particularly clear, you've probably misunderstood what I've said”. While he may have a point relative to the complexities of his communications, it certainly doesn't have to be the case when you are communicating with your clients, prospects and internal team.