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## ENGAGE YOUR CUSTOMER – WRITE ABOUT BENEFITS

Think quick. In 10 seconds, can you list the 5 key benefits you offer your customers?

I bet you said “Yes”. But are you sure you listed benefits? If you’ll bear with me for another 10 seconds, I’d like to test out a theory on you.

Recap your answers – maybe even write them down. Now list the 5 main things your business does. In other words, what are your 5 core services? What are the 5 core features of your product?

If your first list looks anything like your second, chances are you’re mistaking features for benefits. As a result, it’s likely that your marketing materials aren’t engaging your customer. Customers don’t want to know what you can do. They want to know what you can do FOR THEM.

Don’t talk features – talk benefits.

Don’t be alarmed. You’re not alone. Most business owners and marketing managers are so close to their product or service that they have a lot of trouble distinguishing benefits from the features of their offering. Ask a web host “what are the benefits of your service?”, and you’ll likely hear something along the lines of, “we offer load-balanced server clusters.” But that’s not a benefit... that’s what they do. The benefit is superior uptime and performance.

In fact, so many people think features instead of benefits that it can work in your favour – to dramatic effect. If you can accurately identify your benefits, and convey those benefits to your market, you’ll be light-years ahead of most of your competition. You’ll be converting leads into sales while they’re still bogged down trying to promote features.

So if you’ve ever sat down to write a sales letter and wondered how you’re going to grab your reader’s attention, or you’ve ever gone ‘round in circles writing draft after draft of web copy without ever hitting the mark, now you know where you were going wrong.

The only question remaining is, how do you do it right? Advertising copywriters and website copywriters do it all the time – and most of the time, they do it with benefits. Benefits are the copywriter’s holy grail. But if you’re not a seasoned copywriter, how do you identify the benefits you offer your customers?

There are any number of ways to identify the benefits you offer. This article discusses just three:

- 1) Customer Research
- 2) Speak to Your Sales Team
- 3) Make it Easy for Your Customer to Get Buy-In

The method you choose depends on your time constraints, budget, and level of customer interaction.

### 1) Customer Research

The most obvious way to identify benefits is to ask your existing customers. They’re spending a lot of money on your offering, so you can be sure they know what benefit they’re getting from it. (In many cases, it can be handy to ask them what benefits they’d like to be getting from you too!) Unfortunately, like everyone else, your customers are busy people. In most cases, you won’t get useful feedback by simply sending an email enquiry. You have to make it easy for them to respond, and you have to make it worth their while. Think about questionnaires and surveys for quantitative data, and interviews and focus groups for qualitative data. These are the simplest techniques, but you still have to make sure you interpret the results appropriately. And always remember that they’re self-report methods. People will sometimes tell you what they think you want to hear. (That’s also why you have to word your questions very carefully – try not to ask leading questions.) Of course, there are plenty of other research techniques around. Do a bit of homework and find the methods which best suit your business requirements. But don’t get carried away by the possibilities. All the research data in the world is pointless if you’re not talking the language of your customer.

### 2) Speak to Your Sales Team

Sadly, not every business can afford to invest in market research. If your budget doesn’t stretch far enough, try talking to your sales people. They’re out in the field every day, talking to customers. And because their livelihood depends on their success in engaging customers, chances are they’ll be able to tell you what your customers want to know. (A word of warning, though... Be careful not to make lofty promises. Unlike your sales team, written collateral doesn’t generate a rapport with your customers. Customers won’t make as many allowances, so you can only stretch the truth so far in writing before your credibility suffers. What’s more, if you do push the boundaries, you’re more likely to be held to your word!)

### 3) Make it Easy for Your Customer to Get Buy-In

If you don’t have the budget for in-depth customer research, and you don’t have a sales team, a good tip is to imagine how your customer gets buy-in from their boss. Quite often, the decision maker is someone higher up the food chain than your direct audience. Your audience will probably be the key stakeholder – they’ll be the user of your product, or the recipient of your service. But when they find an offering they like, there’s a good chance they’ll have to sell it to someone further up the line. If you can make this sale easier, you’ll have a foot in the door. Don’t just appeal to the sensibilities of the direct audience. You also need to ask yourself what they need to know to convince the decision maker. If the decision maker is a CFO, think Return on Investment (ROI) and Total Cost of Ownership (TCO). If the decision maker is a CIO or MIS, think performance, technological sustainability, availability, manageability, and ease of integration. If the decision maker is a CEO, think liability, risk management, and ROI. And only use jargon to prove you know your stuff. Remember... jargon will probably have the ultimate decision maker scratching their head, not reaching for their cheque book.

There are many many more ways to identify benefits. This is just a very superficial snapshot of some techniques you might like to try. At the very least they’ll get you thinking benefits.

In the end, the message is simple. Forget all the fancy talk about complicated revolutionary marketing principles. Forget new-age hard-sell advertising quick-fixes. Forget looking to so-called “experts” for solutions. Just think benefits. And if you can accurately do that, the rest is just mechanics. Once you know what you want to write about, you just need to put pen to paper. And that’s a whole ‘nother story!

Happy writing!