

Want More Customers? Be Overt!

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By Jim Logan

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The essence of being overt is to be clear and assure your prospective customer understands exactly what you want them to understand about the benefits, difference, and reasons to believe in the outstanding value of your offering.

In my business I see a lot of customer communication materials. Unfortunately, I see too many customer presentations whereby you finally understand what the company does and what benefits they deliver to their customers somewhere around slide 7 of a way-too-many-slides presentation.

No long ago I was leading a sales and marketing meeting, discussing with a management team the launch of a new product line. We were reviewing the new product's positioning, competitive environment, pricing methodology, and sales collateral. While reviewing the customer presentations I noted there were continuous questions:

"What does that mean?"

"What do we mean by that?"

"What are the keys things I should say about this slide?"

"What is the point we want to make on this slide?"

As these questions were asked several times it become obvious..."Why don't you just say on the slide what it is you mean and what it is you want the customer to know about the benefits they'll realize as a result of employing your solution?" The question was simple enough and left the meeting participants looking around the room at each other.

It's amazing the positive impact you can have on your sales efforts by simply communicating with your prospective customers clearly and directly about the value you offer. To greatly impact your revenue there are really only a few things you have to do...

Don't Make Your Customer Translate Your Offering into Something They Value – A huge mistake in marketing and sales is to unwittingly make your customer translate everything you say into something

Want More Customers? Be Overt!

they value.

Regardless of your market, customers of all types have similar buying processes. Customers evaluate you offering by first asking themselves two questions – "Why do I need this product/service? What do we get (benefit) out of using it?" No matter what you say, write or present; this is the first and only thing going through the mind of a buyer.

A great number of vendors (technology companies tend to be the greatest offenders) make the mistake of communicating with prospective customers from "love" they have for their product or service. Their typical communication is driven from the speeds–feeds–features–functionality of their offering. Their big mistake is not realizing customers never buy speeds–feeds–features–functionality; they only buy the benefits they can realize from employing your speeds–feeds–features–functionality. If you communicate

from your speeds–feeds–features–functionality you force your customer to translate them into meaningful benefits they value. Remember, customers only buy benefits. It only makes sense then that you should lead your communications with the benefits they want, expect, and will enjoy.

"But aren't speeds–feeds–features–functionality necessary?"

Yes. Speeds–feeds–features–functionality, especially in technology markets, are necessary and often critical to closing a sale. The difference is you want your speeds–feeds–features–functionality to be evaluated as proof of your ability to deliver benefits, not as evidence in investigation of the benefits you offer. Put another way, once your prospective customer resonates on the benefits and value you offer, the speeds–feeds–features–functionality of your product or service is then evaluated solely in its capacity to deliver the benefits your customer wishes to purchase.

Communicating clearly and directly is the key to assuring your customer knows the benefits and value you offer, something that important to the success of your business must be overt.

Great Example of Bad Communication – I came across what I believe to be a great example of poor customer communication. Following is exact text taken from an anonymous company's marketing materials, describing who they are and what they do. Note how it is unclear what they do for their customers (benefit) as well as unclear why a prospective customer would seek their services. Avoid making this mistake:

"Company X is a results oriented training and consulting firm promoting sustainable economic growth globally by developing entrepreneurship programs focusing on capacity–building techniques, skills and knowledge. Company X provides needs assessment to determine capacity–building strategies, training design and implementation in small and medium enterprise development, services focused on empowering women through entrepreneurship, and technical assistance and business advisory services."

For Company X, their prospective customers have to interpret and translate the statement above into something meaningful for them (benefits). Remember, all customers in a buying process take what you offer them in communications and reason what's in it for them. Your customers want to know what

Want More Customers? Be Overt!

benefit they will realize as a result of using your product or service. You can't take the chance of leaving it up to your customer to figure it out on their own. You need to be overt in telling your customers who you are, what you do, and what's in it for them. Remember to sell from their process of buying. Lead with your benefits and offer your features and functionality are proof of your ability to deliver.

Lasting Thought – The lasting principal here is extremely simple...if you mean something; say it as plainly as you possibly can. Never let a prospective customer guess about the benefits they should expect to enjoy as a result of doing business with your company. Review all of your marketing materials and assure there are no implied benefits. Read all of your materials as a prospective customer will, from their perspective of being engaged in a buying process. Make sure your communications clearly answer the most critical components of good sales communications – what's in it for me, why should I believe you.

Your perspective customers need to clearly understand what's in it for them. When you approach your customer communications from the perspective of your features and functionality, you need to assure you are doing so only as a means to prove your ability to deliver benefits to your customer, not as the

reason to purchase.

Lastly, remember...if something is worth saying, it should be said.

Jim Logan is founder of Accelerate Business Group, LLC, a revenue growth company. Accelerate Business Group partners with their customers to build revenue the only three ways possible – getting more new customers, increasing the value of your average sale, and getting more repeat business. Jim can be reached at <http://www.jslogan.com>.

STELLAR STREAMING VIDEO CAN DRIVE SALES

By Alyn Edwards

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Al Galbraith and Associates, a real estate marketer who turns dying industry towns into thriving recreational and retirement communities, commissioned a promotional video as an added feature for his company's website. The video has been down loaded 30,000 times by Internet users. In fact, Galbraith's Internet campaigns to sell homes from Tumbler Ridge, British Columbia to Plattsburgh, New York are so successful, the company has cut back its traditional advertising. Here's how streaming video promotes your organization online.

IT IS A GREAT USE OF INTERNET TECHNOLOGY. Greater numbers of web users have the capability of downloading video and find it a novelty.

Want More Customers? Be Overt!

Short videos of less than five minutes can be downloaded in a short time, depending on bandwidth.

YOU CAN TRANSPORT POTENTIAL CLIENTS TO YOUR PRODUCT. As a customer, you don't need to fly across the country to see real estate when you can get a 3-D perspective on the homes, the community and the geography as well as meeting residents and buyers from an online video.

VIDEO IS PERSUASIVE. Because video can incorporate the spoken word, music, maps, digital effects and moving images, the user experience is much more intense and when, well designed, very compelling. Testimonials have more punch when spoken by the happy customers.

THE COST OF DISTRIBUTION IS NEGLIGIBLE. In contrast, imagine the cost of producing and delivering 30,000 videotapes around the world.

STREAMING VIDEO POSITIONS YOU AS LEADING EDGE. Many customers see a company's innovation as evidence of its ability to be creative and effective. Taking the technological lead in your sector may give a lead in sales.

>From a public relations perspective, however, there are a few things to remember to ensure your video does what you want it to.

THE HEAVY SELL MUST BE KEPT TO A MINIMUM. Despite appearances, your streaming video is not a commercial. At least it shouldn't be a hard-selling pitch for business. The Internet is still an environment where overt commercialism is frowned upon. Take a journalistic approach and create a video in the style of a news or documentary

item that might play on the six o'clock news. Users want information and won't take kindly to downloading hype.

THE PRODUCTION QUALITY MUST BE HIGH. This not the time to bring out the family video cam and become a filmmaker. Hire video producers who know what they are doing. And a word about budget. You need not spend tens of thousands of dollars for the finished product especially if you take the journalistic approach mentioned above.

Through streaming video, Galbraith reaches customers he might not through traditional advertising and he touches them in ways a brochure could never do. His streaming videos do all the talking and, for the price of a single full-page ad in the local daily paper, he has produced a tool that can close the sale all by itself.

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If you want to see it in action, check out
<http://www.selectpropertygroup.com>.

Alyn Edwards is VP and news director at Verus Public Relations (<http://www.verus.com>). A 30-year veteran of print and broadcast newsrooms, he heads up the in-house production team. He has a special summer PR package to introduce organizations to the promotional power of the media and the Internet.



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