

Kickstart Marketing

Extract from Chapter 3: Focus on your product

Recently, a new client told me about the process she and her husband had gone through to choose a business consultant. Although experienced business people, this was a new venture so they had decided to get some professional advice. Two of the consultants they interviewed had asked them, 'What makes your business different?' 'What is your unique selling proposition?' My client said if she'd known the answers she probably wouldn't have needed a consultant in the first place! The questions made her feel stupid and she felt she should have had a ready-made answer. But most of us really don't know what makes us special or different as we are too busy coping with the day-to-day stresses and strains of running a business.

So, the final area to go under your critical gaze is your product or service. What is the difference between a product and a service? A product is a tangible item you can touch and see like a lawnmower or a software program. A service is generally intangible, something you purchase but can't physically see, such as radio advertising or a car repair.

Create a cocktail party description

A good place to start is with a 'cocktail party' description of your business and product or service, a couple of sentences that succinctly describe what you do and catch the interest of a listener. I call it a cocktail party description because it has to be interesting enough to compete with lots of chatter, trays of food and attractive people of the opposite sex! No matter how complex your business or service is, if you can't enthuse someone in a couple of sentences then selling is going to be difficult. The description needs to include facts such as 'I am a small business accountant', but it should also include some passion or interesting information such as 'I specialise in high growth businesses like the IT sector, and I've developed systems that help them cope with rapid growth'. You'll need to experiment with a few lines of your own, then test them on friends and family.

What are you really selling?

Before you can actually match your product to your customers' needs and wants you also have to understand what you are really selling, something that is usually identified by looking at the reasons clients buy your services. Often it's surprising and a little frightening to discover that your customers are buying something you didn't realise you had up for sale!

Let me pose this question: when you go into a hardware shop to buy a drill, what are they selling you? The answer is a hole. Think about it: if you didn't need a hole, would you need a drill? The shop is simply selling you different types of holes—a fast hole if you buy a power drill, a slow hole with a hand drill, a hole in masonry, timber or brick. In the same vein, if you hire a children's video on a wet and windy Sunday afternoon, what are you purchasing? Entertainment, the actors who star in the picture, the good name of Disney? More than likely

you are purchasing an hour and a half of peace and quiet. Often when we are asked what are we selling we are tempted to say service, quality or expertise, but we need to think harder about the real reason people buy from us.

As a marketing consultant it would be easy to say I'm selling my years of experience, my knowledge and my unique concept for a marketing plan, but the fact of life is that my clients don't give a damn about those things. When they buy my services they are looking for increased revenue and profit, more clients and ideas that will save them time and money. If you are having trouble working out what it is you are really selling, ask yourself what the major motivation is for your clients to buy your product or service. If you understand what it is you are really selling, you will find that you can relate directly to your customer in your advertising and sales activities.

Features versus benefits

Once you know what you are selling, try to deconstruct your product or service to identify all its features. A feature is typically an attribute of the product or service. If I was selling a refrigerator some of the features you could expect to see would be size in cubic litres, energy rating, frost free capability, adjustable shelves, butter conditioner and freezer capacity. If I was selling a training service some of the features could include a one day course in conflict resolution, on-site team development training, accredited courses, offices in capital cities, on-site visits, free needs analysis and tailored courses.

Take the time to try to write down as many features as possible of your product or service. Don't be satisfied with broad features like quality service or friendly staff; instead, detail all the aspects that mean quality service. Features can be very specific, such as the only factory qualified repair mechanic in the city, or more generic such as made in Australia.

The good news is that features are pretty easy to recognise once you get started. In fact, if you open the Yellow Pages or local paper you will see that most advertising lists the features of a product or business. The bad news is that customers don't buy features, they buy WIIFMs (what's in it for me), otherwise known as benefits.

Too many businesses market by telling their potential customers about their features and then leave it up to the customer to work out what's in it for them. Your marketing should talk about the benefits, about why the client should buy your service as opposed to your competitor's.

To turn a feature into a benefit you need to add the words 'so you' to the end of the feature.

For example, this fridge:

- Is 150 cubic litres so you can fit three cartons of beer, two dozen bottles of wine and a tray of smoked salmon in it.
- Is a number four energy rating so you will save on electricity.
- Is frost free so you never have to waste time standing around with kettles full of hot water scraping ice out of the freezer.
- Has adjustable shelves so you can fit extra large bottles or cartons in it.
- Has a butter conditioner so you can have spreadable butter whenever you want.
- Has a large freezer capacity so you can cut down on your weekly shopping time and take advantage of specials at the supermarket or butcher.

If I was selling a training service some of the features and benefits could include:

- Conflict resolution training so you will have a happier team that works well together.
- Team development training so you can improve the productivity of your department.
- Accredited courses so you know that participants will be trained to meet industry standards.
- Offices in major capital cities so you can train staff at the closest centre and save on travel and accommodation.
- On-site visits so you do not have to waste your valuable time travelling to appointments.
- Free needs analysis so you have an opportunity to identify any important skills gaps and tailor the course material to address those issues.
- Tailored courses so you can introduce issues that are specific to your business and don't waste time covering information that is not relevant.

You can often find more than one benefit for a feature, which is a bonus. Just think how different your advertising will look once you start to use benefits in your telemarketing, advertising, flyers, brochures and sales proposals.

Identify your USP

Ask yourself if your product or business has a USP, which is a fancy advertising acronym that stands for unique selling proposition. In plain English, it means the one thing that makes you different or unique, but it can also be described as your competitive advantage.

Unfortunately, quality and friendly service don't count, however, if you are the only qualified taxidermist in your city, use only organic fruit or are the only consultant to offer a free needs analysis then this could be your USP

A strong USP is often identified when you are detailing your features, so keep an open mind. Sometimes a USP can be developed once you understand where you sit in the marketplace in relation to your competitors: a free delivery service, a package of products or a frequent flyer program for regular customers. Once you have identified a genuine USP you should promote it wherever possible, featuring it on all advertisements and marketing material.

Don't panic if you don't have a USP You don't need one to market or run a successful business.

You have now completed half of the review process. The good news is that all of the areas looked at are under your control, as you can develop strategies to change or modify anything that may cause problems with your marketing. You can train staff in new skills, you can hire staff to take on new tasks, you can purchase new equipment, you can modify your product or develop new services, you can introduce new customer service initiatives. The next phase of the review looks at the unknown, areas that you cannot control: your competitors and potential clients.