
Capturing Your Share Of The Market Through Value-Based Selling

by BILL BROOKS

Selling and marketing are two very different things, although they are closely related. Selling is about you when you are in front of a prospect. Marketing, on the other hand, is those strategies to position you to be there in the most receptive and positive light. Yet, creative salespeople have discovered they can learn a great deal from at least two types of marketing specialists: those in marketing research and those in advertising.

Marketing research primarily concerns itself with finding out *what* people want, while advertising seeks to interpret how products and services will *give* people what they want. Both functions are highly sophisticated in today's complex business world, yet the principles behind them are quite simple.

Needs-Satisfaction Selling

Marketing strategists use polls, interviews and a host of other tools to determine the needs of the people they hope to reach with their products or services. Then the advertising specialists develop ad campaigns to convince potential customers their products or

services will meet those needs. It is a highly effective combination.

Yet, salespeople have a distinct advantage over these two types of marketing specialists: market research people must rely on generalities, and advertising people must address masses of people with their campaigns. Salespeople, on the other hand, can talk in depth with individual prospects. That's one of the biggest reasons salespeople will never be replaced by computers.

What that really means is that salespeople cannot only explore with people what their needs are, but can also determine how each of them perceives those needs — and the perceived need is almost always a more powerful motivation for buying than the actual need is.

Let me illustrate the difference. International Business Ma-

chines, Inc. (IBM) was struggling to survive in the highly competitive office machines market half a century ago. It seemed people had all the business machines they needed and were not interested in buying more from a relatively unknown firm.

The top salespeople in the company took a value-based approach to selling and began to ask their potential customers what they perceived their needs to be. "We need better ways of processing information," came the quick reply.

Revamping the Approach

So the company revamped its whole selling approach. The name of the company was changed to IBM. They called their products "data processing systems and management information systems"

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instead of office machines, and started providing professional assistance in setting up those systems.

Thus, by addressing their customers' perceived needs instead of trying only to sell their products, they soon began to dominate the same market they had almost failed in before.

What that means to you as a salesperson is simply this: Once you discover what your prospect perceives his or her most pressing need is, you can build your whole presentation around that need. It keeps you from wasting precious time on trying to educate customers on needs they may never believe they have, and it puts you in touch with their strongest motivations for buying. It's the difference between trying to create a need and helping the prospect find a much-desired solution.

This brings me to this key principle: It is always easier to sell to a prospect's perceived need

than it is to create a need in the prospect's mind!

Failure to understand and use that simple principle causes most salespeople to work much harder than necessary, to miss a lot of sales they could make, and to fail when they could succeed at selling.

Value-based salespeople always concern themselves first and foremost with how the prospect perceives his or her needs. It is an old truth that perception is reality. To the successful salesperson, this simply means that sales is really the science of face-to-face perception. It is addressing specific needs — presenting your product or service to each prospect individually and personally. It is not standard presentations, canned or memorized "pitches," or a series of flip charts and slide shows. Instead, it is a carefully-crafted presentation customized to address each prospect's unique situation. □