

Marketing Savvy: Setting Yourself Apart

A Sales Strategy for Differentiating Your Organization

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Think of your favorite bakery. Why do you buy from it? Maybe you can taste test or you're given a free cookie for every half dozen you buy. Or you're intrigued by the baker's proudly refusing to share the secret recipe for his mother's double espresso brownies. These motivate your weekly pilgrimage to the bakery and keep you recommending it to family and friends.

So, what makes your organization unique among its competitors? Your first inclination may be to note your products, experience, or number of locations. But it takes a lot more to be unique in today's marketplace. Technology, price, and comparable products are closing the gap, making all things equal in the eye of the consumer. If you want to appeal to consumers, you must clearly define and differentiate your organization.

Define and Differentiate Your Organization

1. Make a list of three or four things your organization does that are similar to your competitors.
2. Do what Tern Langhans, author of the book, *The 7 Marketing Mistakes Every Business Makes and How to Fix Them*, does in the seminars she conducts, Ask yourself, "If I can stand out in one way, what would it be?" In other words, what's the one big thing you could do to differentiate yourself? Langhans uses these sample questions to generate ideas:
 - What makes your customers want to do business with you?
 - Why do they like working with you?
 - What would they say makes you unique?
3. Take a look at your current sales process. How well do you understand the wants and needs of your customers or prospects? Are you using your sales for market intelligence so that you can better identify your unique selling point? If not, incorporate these steps into your process:
 - Review the current information about your customers and answer the questions above. See if you can identify purchasing patterns and the reason they continue to do business with you.

[find out]

Get Useful Customer Feedback

Use these questions to prompt customers when soliciting feedback:

1. "Help me understand your criteria for selecting a provider. Please list and prioritize them."
 2. "If all things were equal, what would sway your final decision in terms of an occupational health provider?"
 3. "Beyond location, services, and pricing, what's the number one thing that's important to you and your company?"
 4. "What would make you change providers?"
- Review your current prospect pool to determine why they are currently dissatisfied and what they are looking for in a new provider.
 - If you don't feel you have adequate market intelligence, perhaps it's time you surveyed

your customers. Ask them to provide feedback anonymously about you and your competitors.

Effective Questioning

Often, we find that a sales staff isn't using effective questions to gain market intelligence. Planning key questions for staff to use on sales calls can prove very helpful. Use the following suggestions as you craft your own set of questions.

Assess customers' current and historical situation.

What are they doing now and what have they done in the past? Who have they used, and why?

Assess customers' desired situation. What would they change, and why, and how? What would a new program or provider situation look and feel like?

Determine who are the decision-makers. Who makes the decisions, and when? Confirm this information every time you talk with customers as situations and politics change.

Match Your Solutions to Customer Needs

Once you've captured solid marketing intelligence and analyzed specific customer situations, determine customer need and how your organization can provide a valued solution that differentiates you from other providers. For example, all of your competitors can do physical exams. But maybe it's how you perform the physical exams, provide pertinent reports, and manage group health risks that make you not only different, but a better value.

The most important distinction is how your solution matches their need—from both a work and personal perspective. Their business need maybe finding a way to get employees back to work faster. Their personal need may be looking good to their boss. Build your solution with each perspective in mind.

Transform Features into Benefits

Don't focus on features. Focus on benefits. A feature is a characteristic of your product (the task or function) and a benefit is the value of the feature to the customer (what makes it personal).

At Corporate Health Group, we use a feature/benefit worksheet (below) to help our clients build this important skill. The object is to make a list of your features such as location, staff, hours, and service offerings—then transform those features into benefits your customers and prospects will want to buy.

FEATURE/BENEFIT WORKSHEET

Select a product/service that you need to sell:

Feature	Benefit	Competition?	Proof Source

How to use a Feature/Benefit worksheet:

1
List all your features for one product or service offering.

2
Identify the benefits of each feature. What will clients find valuable? Are there benefits that only appeal to certain groups of clients?

3
Identify your competition for the product or service you're analyzing. Note what does or could differentiate you as a better value.

4
Determine what proof you can offer to support your benefits. Examples include testimonials, outcomes, best practices, and outside rankings.

Sell the Benefits!

Now that you have shifted your staff's focus from features to benefits, sell the benefits to your customers. Develop sales scripts that clearly show you have listened to your customers. Train your staff to use these scripts. Your scripting may sound like the following.

- “Based on our earlier conversation, you indicated it was most important to have direct communication in post-injury treatment. We’ve measured our client satisfaction on that issue and have consistently received a score of 97% or higher. Our process couples patient check-out with the discharge call to you.”
- “You’ve indicated you’re seeking a proactive partner to address not just work health issues, but group and preventive health. We’ve been recognized the past three years by the Chamber for our integrated health program serving both large and small employers.”

Take these statements and add on your product offering. Keep the focus on the benefits that your customers value and support that value with your proof sources.

[put it all together]

7 Steps for Differentiating You, Your Program, and Your Organization

1. Test the products and features of what you and your competitor currently offer.
2. Identify what your current customers value or perceive as different in your offerings and organization.
3. Work to optimize market intelligence. Understand your customers' buying modes; then develop outcomes to help prove you are different.
4. Identify the BIG thing that makes you and your program truly different. Develop your marketing, messages, and sales approach around the BIG thing.
5. Develop the feature/benefit/proof source worksheet with your team. Consider your customers' varied buying personalities. Use words and proof sources that match their styles.
6. Train all staff on the messages and process. In occupational health, your entire team interacts with the customer, patient, and employer. Make sure everyone consistently hears your differentiating messages.
7. Ensure that your marketing materials reflect the benefit-oriented and differentiating messages. Avoid looking just like everyone else out there!

Remember, it takes ongoing dedicated attention to the customer's needs and a strong desire to raise the bar to succeed at differentiation. If done well, the pay-off can be threefold: you'll re-energize your team about their product; you'll get customers excited about the changes they helped implement; and you'll increase customer retention.



Tern Langhans speaks to business audiences and Works with clients who want to stand out and get better results from their marketing efforts. Contact her at 800.207.0015 or on the web at <http://www.blahhlahhlah.us>