

Make believe

Episode two of the presentation series

‘Talk is cheap’, the saying goes, and most audiences implicitly understand this. In sales presentations, the value proposition – which claims benefits for the customer – must be justified. It is essential to back up claims – “Reduce costs” – “How?” , “Ability to deliver” – “Why should we believe that?”, “Accurate results” – “Who says so?”

In the first of this series, I covered the techniques to craft a powerful and relevant sales proposition. This is the first and pivotal step towards creating a winning presentation. But while it’s one thing to claim value, it’s quite another for buyers to believe you. A common shortfall of many presentations is to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt, and with crystal clarity, the ability to deliver the promise.

And if buyers don’t believe that you can execute, then they won’t believe you. And they will only buy what they believe.

But there is a way to create compelling belief in your capabilities, and to justify why they should believe you – to really prove your value proposition, and for it to be valued. After writing umpteen B2B sales presentations we have found that there are four types of justification: testimonial, process, technical and logical.

Testimonial

Testimonials are the things that have been said or documented about your company or product. They may have been said by you or your company (first person testimonial), by your customers or partners (second person testimonial), and by people or organisations who have no commercial relationship with your company (third person testimonial).

Third person is the most powerful, as it is seen as independent and objective. Examples can be found in press coverage, award schemes and analyst assessments.

Second person can be gained from customer feedback. This naturally comes after a job well done. Testimonials can be solicited either directly or by sending out feedback forms or customer satisfaction surveys. Well crafted questions (such as, “What did we do well?”) can ensure a steady supply of testimonial. But generally the fastest way of getting what you need can be to ask a client directly for a quote.

First person comes from you or your company. Data makes very powerful first person testimonial – surveys, benchmarks



you have performed, cost of ownership forecasts, and so on.

Process

A process justification explains how a product or service will work to deliver value. If the value proposition claims that a product will enable faster manufacturing times, the process justification will explain how, perhaps by cutting down lengthy testing. For example: a value proposition claim for quality can often be supported by showing a flow chart of the QA process.

Technical

A technical justification relies on the existence of proprietary technology or intellectual property (IP) to deliver a benefit. For example: “We have a client who has developed a unique method for separating oil from water – this gives him competitive advantage in the oil clean up industry.”

Logical

A logical justification is where the proof comes from a reasoned argument. For example: “We have 75% of the FT100 as regular clients,” will add weight to an argument about being a “low risk supplier”. The trick is to find an indisputable data point and use it to show credibility for something else.

The search for proof

I am often surprised about this – we can find proof of value for our customers when they are convinced none exists. It usually does, but the people who know

about it are sometimes unaware of the need and therefore don’t volunteer it. For example, customer service personnel may have quotes from clients, R&D engineers may know of intellectual property, and HR may have internal statistics that are useful. But how often do salespeople take time to talk to these people? So, revisiting the types of justification:

Testimonial – This is almost certainly in your sales or delivery executive’s emails. A client will have emailed to say thank you or well done and we have a tendency to smile and press delete; at best we email it internally. We find that sending out requests for any positive stories usually provides more than enough material.

Process – QA departments often have this type of proof captured as part of ISO quality control systems.

Technical – R&D or delivery departments are a great source for this kind of argument. The issue often becomes translating it into English.

Logical – This is an intellectual pursuit and probably best left to the brightest in the organisation.

Building justification into your sales presentation will encourage belief in your ability to execute the promise of your value proposition. And it will help you win more business. **SF**

Next installment: If purchasers make their decision after you have left, how do you make sure they can remember the value proposition? Nicholas Oulton is MD of m62 communications, a specialist presentations firm. See www.m62.net