

# BRIDGING THE GAP

Learn to sell what your customers are trying to buy

By Stephen Wunker & David Farber

**It was more than 50 years ago that Peter Drucker wrote, “Nobody pays for a product. What is paid for is satisfaction.”**

**Yet, in the years since, companies across industries have continued to market their “products,” only to be surprised by the inconsistency with which they can predict what customers actually will buy and be happy with.**

If companies are to succeed at selling their offerings, they’re going to need to stop thinking about what they’re trying to sell, and start thinking about what customers are trying to buy.

## **Don’t sell products, services or features – sell a way to get the job done**

Companies are great at touting the benefits of what they sell, so that’s where they tend to focus their marketing efforts. They talk about how they have great designers, cheaper package-based pricing options and experience working with leading brands.

Those things are nice, but they end up sounding awfully similar to what everyone else is saying about themselves. More importantly, those messages don’t stick in the customer’s mind, because they don’t resonate with the “jobs” they’re trying to get done.

Jobs are the tasks that customers are trying to get done in their lives. Everyone has jobs they struggle to get done. This is true whether they’re mothers looking to feed their children something nutritious or business owners looking to bring in new customers. When people decide to make purchases, they don’t buy the product that has the most features. They “hire” a solution that’s best able to get those jobs done.

Unfortunately, very few businesses actually spend time thinking about how they can help customers get jobs done. In a recent study, Nielsen found that only 9 percent of concepts that are tested with consumers each year actually describe how people are struggling to get a job done. Yet concepts that clearly expressed how they could get a job done for the customer performed 58 percent better.

Customers aren’t looking for a new logo or a nicer sign. They aren’t looking to hire a designer. They’re trying to get important jobs done. Consider Marquis, a Boston-based design firm. When you visit their home page, there isn’t a single mention of the products they sell. Instead, they list the circumstances their customers might be in and how they can help get some common jobs done.

For example, they identify that customers might be struggling to gain recognition beyond their existing customers, so Marquis offers to help the business “spread the word.” Or they talk about how everyone in a company might have a different description of what the business does, so they offer to help them “speak as one.”

In 2015, Marquis was named a “BostInno 50 on Fire” finalist – an award reserved for those disrupting their industries and making an impact in Boston.

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### Identify clear types of buyers, and sell to them

While satisfying customer jobs is key, not all customers have the same jobs. The design industry cannot be cleanly divided into logo buyers and sign buyers, for example. Nor can it necessarily be divided into small businesses and large businesses.

Often, it's the circumstances around the job that cause customers to prioritize a particular job or to change how they evaluate how well an offering can satisfy a job.

For example, maybe the company recently moved into a new space and it needs a brand that not only communicates clearly to its customers, but also inspires an innovative culture internally.

There's no such thing as a one-size-fits-all offering. Companies that try to go that route typically don't satisfy anyone particularly well. But by understanding which jobs customers tend to find important and the different sets of circumstances that frequently surround those jobs, companies can identify discrete customer types.

From there, it's just a matter of designing the right offerings for those groups you choose to target.

### Give customers a reason to break their routines

Finally, it's worth noting that even when you design the right solution for the right customer, it's not a certainty that they'll choose you. Inertia is a powerful force, and customers are often reluctant to fire the products they're already used to.

The more things that stand in the way – including complexity in the decision-making process, high costs of failure and costs

associated with leaving their current solutions – the less likely customers will be to give you a shot, even if they think you might be a good fit.

In order to maximize your chances, the key is to give customers the chance to see that they won't regret making the switch. Make it easy to learn about your offering and to give you a try without a lot of risk. Do whatever you can to ease the burden of changing vendors. Switching to you shouldn't seem like a project.

### Start bridging the gap

The more companies double down on trying to explain why their offerings are better, the less the final message tends to resonate with the customer. Instead of trying to boast about features and benefits, companies need to convince customers that they can help them satisfy jobs that they're struggling to get done.

While customers may not want to buy products, they certainly do want to buy solutions to their struggles.

But because not all customers are the same, it's important to sell the right solutions to the right customers and to make the buying process as easy as possible. Companies that can pull that off will give themselves a clear edge in the market – one that is hard to match. ■

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