

Marketing Your Technical Product/Service ... to my Mother

Introduction

Companies promoting a technical product or service frequently base their offerings on technical features and benefits, while technology may not be the main customer decision criteria. Potential customers will be looking for business benefits which have not been addressed.

Having a technology-based product or service makes the marketing activity even more challenging because:

- Few people understand complex technologies.
- The benefits of one technology over another are not clear.
- Since people cannot easily differentiate between technologies, all technology is seen as *equal*.

A big danger is having your technology seen as a commodity. Then the only differentiator you have for competing is price, which is a race to the bottom.

B2B is Different from B2C

Many technology-based businesses sell into the business-to-business (B2B) market, which is different from the business-to-consumer (B2C) market.

The marketplace is more complex. The products and services furnished are more complex, and the audience is more sophisticated, especially in their own areas of expertise.

Order values are larger. While the B2C world processes many small orders, a B2B order can be a thousand times larger, but they occur less frequently.

Sales cycle is longer. B2C orders are often made on impulse. A B2B order may have a six-month sales cycle, or even longer, requiring multiple steps and contacts.

Processes and procedures. Formal proposal requests, review committees and delegated contract signings are common parts of what is frequently a complex process.

Your Potential Customers

You must understand your customers. **Three Key Questions** to ask about your potential customers are:

- Who needs to be **persuaded**?
- What **actions** must they take?
- How can you **encourage** them to do this?

Customer Types

You will typically encounter two types of customers when selling technical products and services. Firms will often have both of these as part of their customer decision process.

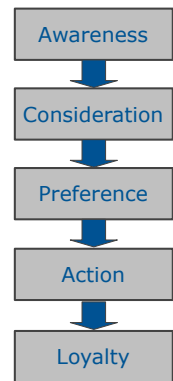
Influencers are people who have an impact on the final buying decision. They are attracted to:

- Specific information, often technical
- Solutions to problems they encounter
- Calls-to-action telling them what to do next

Decision makers have the power to authorize the buying decision. They are often not technically oriented, and they are at higher levels in the organization. They are looking for reasons to validate the buying decision, to make sure it is the right choice for their organization.

Customer Decision Process

The customer Decision Process is the set of steps a typical customer takes in order to make a purchase. This is a process which they follow, so you should **guide them** through it. In the past sellers would qualify potential buyers, then approach them with sales proposals. Now buyers conduct their own search for sellers, visiting websites and pre-qualifying sellers at an early stage based on the material they find on company websites. You may never know you have even been considered as a supplier and then disqualified!

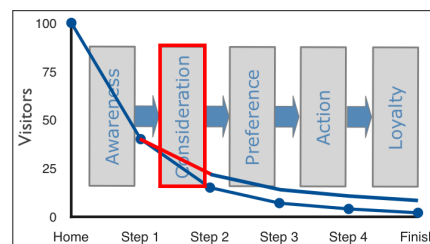


ACME Widgets Qualified Buyer List	Quantifixs sa/nv Qualified Vendor List Websites to Check
<input type="checkbox"/> Smith Manufacturing	<input type="checkbox"/> Big Widgets Inc.
<input type="checkbox"/> Jones Industries	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ACME Widgets
<input type="checkbox"/> Xavier Foods	<input type="checkbox"/> Hong Chow Widget
<input type="checkbox"/> Josef & Marks ASBL	<input type="checkbox"/> East India Widget Exports
<input type="checkbox"/> Quantifixs sa/nv	

Effective Persuasion

Your challenge is to effectively persuade potential customers to start the Customer Decision Process with you, not a competitor. Many people who start the Customer Decision Process never complete it, so your website must be designed to help visitors finish the process.

Making changes to your website and marketing message can help move potential customers along the Customer Decision Process to reach your desired goal. Even a small improvement can have big results.

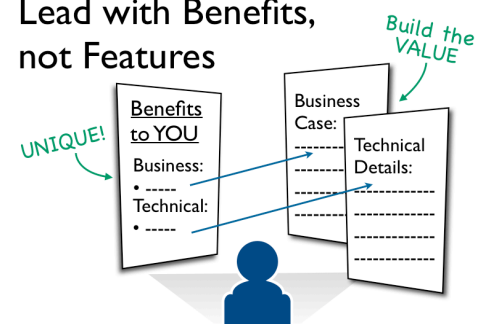


Properly Position and Differentiate

You must show why your product/service is **unique**, is different from all the others. You must also show why it is **valuable** to your customers in terms that they, not you, will understand. You can do this by leading with benefits, then features:

- **Benefits**, both business and technical, show why your offering is unique.
- **Features** show why it is valuable to your visitors.

Lead with Benefits, not Features



Influencers will look for information, solutions and actions. They will be attracted by:

- White papers, reports, e-books
- Case studies, especially for their business sector
- Demonstrations and free trials
- Webinars, conferences, podcasts

Decision makers will be looking to validate their decisions. They may visit your website, but will not go very deep into it. They will look at outside trade groups, associations, search engines, etc. to see what others are saying about you. They may even telephone.

Design for Your Audience

All your marketing material, including your website, must be designed to help your potential customers make decisions.

High-value content will:

- Educate potential customers
- Include information to help them make a decision
- Include clear instructions for the next action to take (sign up, call, download, etc.)

Charles E. Crouch

Helping people who are lost on the Internet

Online Business Consultant

Lecturer in e-Business, Boston University International Graduate Programs

Phone: +61 (0) 447 413 070

Email: charles.crouch@mac.com

[linkedin.com/in/charlesecrouch](https://www.linkedin.com/in/charlesecrouch)

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