

WHITEPAPER

CUSTOMER MESSAGING

How to communicate your
value added to your customers

Customer Messaging For Sales & Marketing Executives

Customer messaging is the ongoing conversation you have with your customers. It's the how and what you communicate.

Marketing is more than a department; it's every way you communicate with your customers. It includes: brochures, ads, web sites, trade show booths, journal articles, how your folks answer phones, how your drivers drive (especially if your name and logo are on the company vehicle), the look of your proposals, your packaging, the look of your invoices, point-of-sale pieces, etc.

Marketing is a bridge to the customer. Marketing sets strategy; sales executes this strategy at the field level. Salespeople execute tactically what marketers design strategically.

Introduction

Customer messaging is the marketing side of sales. It is your *planned communications campaign*. Controlling these conversations for customer interface is vital to your marketing and sales efforts. A breakdown in communications confuses and frustrates customers. The sales and marketing chasm is widely reported so we won't address that issue in this whitepaper. Specifically, we'll address the synergy of sales and marketing working together to communicate consistent value messages to customers. We will offer suggestions for creating the right tools to make it easier for the sales and service people to take your message of value to the customer. In fact, any customer interface employee must be educated in the understanding use of these tools.

Using the ideas in this whitepaper will result in message clarity, congruence and synergy. Our focus will be tactical (i.e. field-level), customer-centric message campaigns. The energy driving a campaign is ongoing and multiple exposures. The outcome of these planned and managed conversations is to surround customers with compelling messages of value.

Once you're clear on the messages you want customers to hear and have educated employees on them, you can take these messages to the market. How you broadcast these messages is limited only by the edge of your imagination. Here are some examples of how companies surround customers with their messages of value: printed messages on invoices, recorded phone messages, web-based communications, trade journal ads, customer Bill of Rights, awards brochures, and shipping documentation.

Value Audit

Your Market Position

Every company owns a position in the market. It's a slice of the industry psyche you have carved out as your own. It's the business equivalent of what you worried about as a youth—your reputation. It is:

- Your image and the impression you have made on the market
- The industry buzz about your company
- Your standing and status
- How you're labeled by the industry including suppliers, customers and competitors
- What people say about you, especially when you're not there

These questions will help you understand what space and place you have created for yourself in your industry and market. In as few words as possible and with as much candor as your professional ego can stand, answer the following:

1. What do you hear from customers about your company, products and people?

2. What do you hear from your suppliers about your company, products and people?

CUSTOMER MESSAGING

3. What do you hear from competitors (peers) about your company, products and people?

4. What do you hear from your employees about your company, products and people?

5. From all the above, what is your company's reputation in the market?

6. What do you want it to be?

CUSTOMER MESSAGING

7. What theme do you want to permeate all of your marketing messages (i.e. your core marketing message)?

Positioning Statement

After answering all of these questions, how would you complete this sentence:

We are known as the _____ company.

How can we do a better job of informing employees of this image we want to project?

How can we do a better job of informing customers of this image we want to project?

Your Difference

What is different about your customer experience than the rest of the market? This is called the unique selling proposition (USP). Sometimes, the USP is referred to as the "Big Idea." It is the outstanding difference that makes you stand out in your market. It is the one thing you can lay claim to that no one else in the market or industry can say. This difference must be unique, compelling, and defensible by you. Keep this difference short and specific. There must be consonance between your sales and marketing messages and the customer experience. Answering these questions will help you to determine your USP:

CUSTOMER MESSAGING

We were the first to

We are the only ones that

Customers tell us we're unique because

How can we communicate this to our customers?

Your Value Added

How do you bring value to your customers?

To begin this exercise, it's useful to make a list of all the value added you offer your customer. This includes the quantitative (what you do for customers) and qualitative value (who you are). This menu of value added reads like a talking-points flyer for your employees. This is the value added you want your salespeople talking about in the marketplace. It's also a way to audit your performance once you secure the business.

Here are some tips for constructing this list:

1. Seek input from different disciplines in your company.
2. Write down as many as you can think of. Go for quantity. You can always revise and edit.
3. Study the customer's Critical Buying Path™. This is the sequence of steps customers go through from the moment a need exists up to and including buying and using the product you are proposing they buy. At each step along this path, you have a potential for delivering value. Study your value added through this process prism.
4. The information gleaned from this exercise can serve as the basis for the VIP List. This stands for Value In Purchasing. This tool supports salespeople in the field.

PROCESS ANALYSIS OF VALUE ADDED

	Product Value	Salesperson Value
Planning		
Acquisition		
Usage		

Customer Experience

The Customer Bill Of Rights

The experience you plan to deliver to your customers is an important part of your messaging campaign. It's the promise you make, your covenant with customers. Promises influence expectations. Customer expectations play a major role in customer satisfaction.

All employees must be clear on these promises since they help create customer expectations. How your employees deliver on these expectations affect customer satisfaction. Having a clear standard for serving customers and communicating its importance internally is the first step in this process. You can create this with a Customer Bill of Rights. The Customer Bill of Rights answers this question:

What six things do our customers have a right to expect when doing business with our company?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

List some ideas for using this Bill of Rights:

Value Proposition

The value proposition is the down-line *outcome* of your customer experience. It's the long-range *impact* of your value-added solution on the customer. It is a clear statement of the tangible *results* customers experience as a consequence of partnering with you.

Three-out-of-four sales and marketing executives believe that getting this value proposition right and communicating it clearly to customers is the number-one goal for customer messaging. Do you know the full impact of your value added on the customer?

These are some examples of value propositions:

- Helping customers “play bigger” than they are
- Helping customers better serve and satisfy their customers
- Helping customers achieve economic gain (greater profitability)
- Giving customers access to global markets
- Helping customers differentiate themselves in their markets
- Helping customers excel at what they do
- Offering one-stop sourcing
- Adding value to the quality of the customer’s product

The first step in constructing your value proposition is to identify the different segments you serve. **You cannot be all things to all people.** Those suppliers that try end up being nothing special to anyone.

Companies segment customers using different parameters depending on their purposes: demographics, psychographics, geographic and even SIC classification. For our purposes in customer messaging, **we define a segment as a group of customers with similar needs**—either complex or simple. Customers with simple needs expect little more than price and availability from suppliers. Customers with complex needs demand greater value added from their suppliers. Before discussing the outcome of your solution, be clear on the segment.

Once you’ve clarified your value proposition, prepare a formal document for your salespeople to use in their customer messaging campaign (sales letters, proposals, presentations, elevator speeches, etc.).

Step One: Segment customers by common needs.

Segment	Needs

Step Two: List your down-line value for this customer (outcome of your solution).

Customer Segment	Our Value Proposition

Launching Your Customer Messaging Campaign

The first criteria is that these messages must be customer-centric. They must focus on value that is driven from the customer’s side of the supply-and-demand equation. If it’s not customer centric, it’s not relevant to our discussion.

The fundamental questions you must ask are:

- Who are the customers?
- What is our message for them?
- How will we communicate this to them?

CUSTOMER MESSAGING

We've discussed customers earlier in segmentation. You know who your customers are. You studied your message in previous sections. Now, you must turn your attention to the opportunities for surrounding your customers with these messages. ***Every customer touch point is an opportunity to message your value added.***

Telephone calls, emails, sales presentations, web sites, text messages, company brochures, magazine ads, written correspondence, proposals are a few examples. Every time you interface with a customer—a touch point—you have the opportunity to message your value.

About the Author



Tom Reilly is co-author of *Value-Added Selling*, 4th edition (McGraw-Hill 2018). Additionally, he has written twelve other books including the hot-selling *Crush Price Objections*. His award-winning column appears in *Industrial Distribution Magazine*. Tom has a Master's degree in psychology and is a faculty member at the University of Industrial Distribution. He began his career as a salesman for a Fortune 500 chemical company and then opened his own distribution company in Houston, Texas. He sold that in 1981 to pursue a full-time speaking and sales training career. You may contact him through his website www.TomReillyTraining.com.