

Developing a Message Platform for Your Marketing Success

By Jose Palomino

In your crowded marketplace it's more important than ever to communicate a simple and compelling story about your product or service. This can be the most important marketing success factor you can shape and control. Carefully choose words to describe what you offer and to whom. These words should connect powerfully with your clients and prospects and support your advertising, marketing and sales efforts.

Dawn Hudson, Senior VP of Marketing for Pepsi put it this way, *"The average American receives more than 3,000 marketing messages a day."* Marketing messages have unavoidably crept into almost every second of everyone's day and are part of almost all your activities. Messaging is overwhelming us from every angle in the worlds of business and consumers alike.

To make your company's voice stand out in this overwhelming chorus of messages, you need a coherent and compelling "message platform." A message platform is made up of purposefully designed concepts, words and phrases that communicate your value proposition and coordinate it across different channels of communication.

The platform contains these elements:

- 1) **The Value Proposition:** the most basic description of your offering, explaining what it is, why it's important, its benefits and who it's for.

- 2) Sales "cases" or the conversations direct and channel sales efforts will inevitably engage in. These "cases" include:
 - **The Business Case:** the core business rationale for your offering;
 - **The Financial Case:** the financial justification for your offering;
 - **The Technical Case:** what a buyer has to be prepared to do or what resources they need to have in place, in order to benefit from your offering;
 - **The Competitive Case:** answering questions as to how your offering compares and contrasts with both direct competitors and alternatives;
 - **The Decision Process:** how you have designed the sales process so that prospects can examine and evaluate your offering.

Your message platform shouldn't change that often, but should be adjusted and tailored for different areas where customers will interact with you, including your website, print collateral, sales team and other media. Creating a message platform will help you communicate your offering consistently and reach your target market more effectively.

A Five Point Plan for Creating an Effective Message Platform

Creating a coherent value proposition and developing sales cases can take time, numerous drafts and some input from various stakeholders. Here's a five step plan to get started:

1. Start with the truth

The fact that you have something of value for your customer is the basis of your business. If a product isn't distinct in some meaningful way, little else will help. Start with the truth about your product when building a message to represent your product in the marketplace. If the truth is that your offering is not distinct – work on that first!

2. Discover your real value

Examine the interconnected parts of what you are selling. Namely, the products, services, support and anything else that a buyer will experience and associate with your offering. Clearly state what it is in your overall "value chain" that offers a distinct benefit to customers.

3. Think like your customers

Ask your customers what frustrates them. Not just in general, but about providers in your industry, and most importantly, about what frustrates them about your company and its offerings. It won't necessarily be pleasant, but it's the key to get to know the pain points that your solution and message might address.

4. Test, test, test

Advertising and promotion, as well as direct sales campaigns can be measured and tracked easily – whether using sophisticated tools or a yellow pad. Don't guess that a new tag line is working for you or if a lead-gen campaign is better than last year's. You don't have to become a statistician, but commit to examine what you do, ask questions and refine, refine, refine as you test, test, test.

5. Simplify for understanding

Reduce the number of features or benefits in your story. Don't reduce the actual features that make up your offering, but reduce the number of features you communicate. Reducing the number of features communicated forces you to evaluate which features really matter to prospects and enables you to deliver those points more clearly. The more complex the product, the less effective it is to deliver the proverbial "fire hose" of information to an already overwhelmed audience.

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