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Marketing Strategy for Emerging Technologies

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In a nascent market, risk-averse buyers often equate to longer and more costly sales cycles. In this four-part series, we'll examine proven and repeatable techniques that marketing and sales organizations can use to streamline the process of education, evangelism and ultimately conversion to a sale. Part 1 begins at the heart of sales and marketing: messaging.

Overcoming Analysis Paralysis

It's amazing how often the simple principle of execution excellence is abandoned. In my experience over the course of five software companies, countless product launches, innumerable lead generation campaigns and dozens of "value props", each company - ranging in both size and product offering - would inevitably get caught in analysis paralysis while deliberating company and/or product messaging. The exercise had many names: messaging, positioning, value-based selling, however, all the dithering really came down to one amazingly difficult concept: our struggle to articulate what our software did and why our customers bought it.

For those of you who can relate, here are two simple and effective tactics that can help. They may not equate to a "get out of jail free card" the next time your CEO wants to revisit your messaging, but they are relatively easy to administer and can positively impact your sales cycles.

Exercise 1: Believe the Buyer

Assign someone in product marketing to conduct interviews with your clients. Don't confuse this with a customer satisfaction survey or information that can be captured in an online form. The right owner is important: it must be someone with sufficient product knowledge, who can intelligently dialogue with your end-users. Ideally, the owner should be someone sufficiently senior within your organization, with a title that won't get ignored. This exercise is especially effective for organizations - or product lines - with a limited install base. The interviews aim answer two questions: Why did they buy and what value is it providing to their business today? The answers will often surprise you, helping to crystallize your value proposition.



Most recently, for example, during yet another exhaustive message review, we were trying to prioritize our top three value statements. Six very smart, seasoned executives all agreed that "cost savings" was the number one reason our clients purchased our software. Imagine our surprise then, when the results of our in-depth client interviews yielded an unexpected revelation. Most CIOs felt that they had already trimmed the fat out of their organization and that while they did expect additional cost savings (or even cost avoidance and containment), their motivating factor was, in fact, something entirely different: creating a more agile IT infrastructure that would allow them to better serve the dynamic needs of the business.

Be warned, it's not like this gem jumped off the pages of our client interviews but after reading dozens of transcripts, the trend was clear. They ultimately purchased our technology because they couldn't meet the current demands of the business, they couldn't remain competitive and time-to-market on new product introductions took far too long, cost reductions almost seemed an afterthought. Needless to say, we revised our top three messages to reflect what our buyers had told us.

When in doubt, listen to your clients. They're the best proving ground for testing your messages.

Exercise 2: Different Versus Better

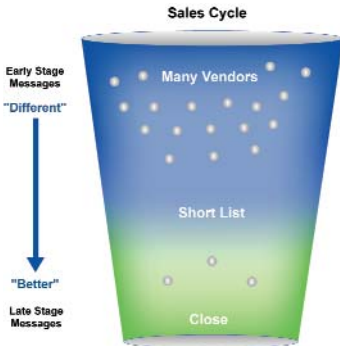
When you think of the software sales cycle, no matter what the product, there are some universal steps in the process. Prospective buyers assemble a list of potential vendors, conduct research (in the form of analyst inquiries, RFIs, reference checks, etc.), get to a short-list of products to evaluate, demo, and so on. For our purposes, this isn't about documenting the ultimate sales cycle step-by-step, but to understand that as the buying process progresses from beginning to end, so your selling messages must adjust.

One of the most common limitations of marketing messages is that they remain static. This is not to say that they don't change, but they don't often change within the context of a single evaluation. Unfortunately, the types of messages that resonate early in a sales cycle differ greatly from those that resonate late in an evaluation. Here's why:

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Early on, prospects are mired in white papers and Web sites of who-knows-how-many vendors, all of whom sound eerily alike. They're all "leading providers" whose product descriptions sound remarkably similar. The project manager is facing a daunting chore: how to identify the short-list of vendors who actually get called in to



As the buying process progresses from beginning to end, selling messages should adjust. Early stage messaging should focus on differentiation, while late stage messaging should highlight competitive strengths—how your product is better than the competition.

give presentations and demos?

With that simple truth in mind, early-stage messages should focus on differentiation. This is an exercise best suited to your system engineers or Pre-Sales team. They'll have enough detailed knowledge to help you identify your unique attributes. Remember, too, that this question can be answered by characteristics like market focus which are not inherent product attributes, but may separate you from other vendors. (E.g., you focus on mid-size enterprises while the competition's client roster is Fortune 100. Or that your install base is primarily CPG, while the other vendors focus

on life sciences).

This is only half of the equation. It's not enough to be different; you must also be able to demonstrate - and defend - that your products are better. In all my discussions with pre-sales organizations, this question was far easier to answer. This list of core strengths will be laden with product functionality: whiz-bang features that sales can proudly trumpet to slay the competition.

Once you've documented your differentiators and your key strengths, you can arm your sales force with messages that are tailored to each stage of the sales cycle, increasing their chances of getting short-listed and ultimately win the business.

A Simple Starting Point

You may be wildly confident (or even mildly content) with your current messaging. Or you may recognize these tips as a simple starting point. The two exercises mentioned here aren't rocket science - or even revolutionary. But they are proven, simple techniques that can help you clarify your value proposition and arm your field organization with clear, concise and consistent messages that resonate with your prospective buyers.

As Chief Marketing Officer at DataSynapse, Kelly Vizzini works to leverage the company's existing successes and domain expertise to build a brand identity that positions DataSynapse as the de facto standard in the U.S. and European markets for distributed computing solutions. Contact DataSynapse at www.datasynapse.com.

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