

Speak Your Customers' Language

When working with customers, do you use your language or their language?

No, the question isn't about whether you use English or German or Spanish. The question actually is whether you talk about your product or service in terms of features instead of what the customer wants from the product or service.

A simple question - "Why do people buy 1/4-inch drill bits?" - can help small-business owners understand the importance of using the right "language."

If you ask a group of people that question, you will get a variety of answers, but several people will answer correctly: "Because the buyer wants to make a 1/4-inch hole."

The issue isn't that the drill bit keeps its cutting edge longer than others or it is made from a certain grade of steel. The buyer just wants a hole.

Marketing language is talking about the benefits of a product as opposed to the features.

Many of the benefits customers desire are personal, such as comfort, safety, ease of use and affordability. These characteristics answer the question, "What do I get from this purchase?"

So do you focus solely on the benefits in your marketing?

The answer is "probably not." If products or services provide the same benefits, then features become a way to identify yourself in the marketplace. But even then, the product with the most features or most-desired features will portray itself as something elite or in a category by itself, again a benefit for those looking for self-expression.

To fully speak the language of your customers, you need to understand your customers and what motivates or drives them. Market demographics are part of the answer. This means that your customers will be divided into segments, each focused on a different desired set of benefits.

Talking about a product's features is easy because this is a language we understand. Talking about the benefits the customer wants is a language we may not know. Yet it is the one that best gets our message across.

So what language will you use?

For help in learning that language, visit NDSU's small-business support website at www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness and sign up for the monthly newsletter. Check out our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/NDSUextsmallbiz> or follow us on Twitter at @gmuske. You also can contact your local Extension Service office.

Other resources include <http://powerofbusiness.net> and www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship. The Small Business Administration and its related organizations, such as the Small Business Development Centers and SCORE, also can be valuable resources.

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NDSU Agriculture Communication

Source: Glenn Muske, (701) 328-9718, glenn.muske@ndsu.edu

Editor: Ellen Crawford, (701) 231-5391, ellen.crawford@ndsu.edu