

Marketing Communication Skills: Writing That Sells

The term *marketing communications*, sometimes abbreviated as *marcom*, describes messages used to communicate with a market. Marketing communications focus on the products or services of a business or organization rather than on the company or organization itself, and are used to create demand or position a company's product or service.

The task of generating marketing communications often is the responsibility of the business owner, sales manager or development professional. Once written, marcom can be used to create a variety of sales collateral material – flyers and brochures, direct mail marketing packages, newsletters, press releases – and can also be used on company web pages.

Think of marketing communications as salesmanship in print. And just as you carefully prepare and plan for a sales call, prepare and plan for salesmanship in print.

Who are your potential buyers?

Regardless of your specific type of business or industry, your potential buyers will fit into one of five categories:

- those who are dissatisfied with their current provider and are ready to switch now;
- those who are open to switching but haven't yet made the decision to do so;
- those who haven't yet thought about switching, but could be persuaded;
- those who satisfied with their current provider and therefore are not now interested; and
- those who, for whatever reason, will never be interested.

Your task when writing marketing communications is to find a way to communicate effectively with potential buyers in the first four categories. In addition, the specific individuals within each buyer category can react differently to the sales message based on their need for lesser or greater amounts of information prior to making the decision to buy.



To guide your writing, remember the acronym AIDA – Attention, Interest, Desire, Action. This model, developed perhaps as early as 1898, describes the steps of a selling cycle:

- attract the attention of the buyer
- create interest in your product or service by demonstrating features, advantages and benefits
- convince buyers that they want the product or service because it will satisfy their needs
- tell buyers the next step to take to either purchase or lead to purchase.

Attracting attention

The single most compelling way to attract the buyer's attention is to use a headline. In his 1985 book *Ogilvy on Advertising*, advertising legend David Ogilvy states, "On average, five times as many people read the headlines as read the body copy. It follows that unless your headline sells your product, you have wasted 90 per cent of your money."

Headlines that work best are those that promise a benefit or are newsworthy. They will answer the unspoken question of the reader: "What's in it for me? Why should I spend any more time on this?"

Compelling headlines incorporate powerful, action oriented words that appeal to the reader's emotion. Examples include

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announcing, secrets, quick, proven, easy, at last and sale. Most headlines will fit into one of several categories: *guarantee* (states a benefit, then guarantees it); *discount* (describes savings then provides a reason to act); *benefit* (describes a benefit in which the reader is interested); and *how to* (a variation on the benefit headline; describes *faster, better, cheaper, easier.*)

Creating interest

Attracting the interest of a buyer is based on appealing to emotion – to wants, not needs. We all need a vehicle to get to work, but we want different kinds of vehicles. Therefore marketing communications need to address the buyer's wants.

Note that this is counterintuitive to the idea that a business is selling a product or service. There is a natural tendency for marketing communications to focus on the business offering the product or service – who the business is, what it does, its corporate philosophy and history, its mission statement and corporate objectives.

However, in the initial stages of marketing communication, the buyer is not interested in the company. Instead, the buyer continues to ask, “What’s in it for me? How will I benefit from doing business with this company versus its competitors (including my current vendor)?” If you can devise a meaningful answer to this question, you will have developed *empathy* with your buyer.

Convincing the buyer

Only after attracting the buyer's attention and gaining his interest will you be ready to move on to convincing the buyer that your product or service is the right one to meet their needs and satisfy their wants. Present facts, statistics and other objective information that the buyer will notice and remember. Or provide case studies, success stories, testimonials and consequence stories (*i.e.*, what happened to those who failed to use your product or service).

Part of the process of convincing the buyer is to move the buyer from needing your product or service to wanting it. This requires showing the buyer how using your product or service will be of benefit. The features of your product demonstrate how it meets the buyer's needs, but it is how the features translate to benefits that show how it satisfies his wants.

To help translate features into benefits, make a list of features. Read the feature, then answer the question, “What this means to you is . . .” to develop the benefit. Keep in mind that benefits must be real and of importance to the

buyer. This is another step in developing empathy with the buyer.

Finally, write as if you were having a *face-to-face* discussion with the buyer. Use *you* and *your* and rewrite sentences to change the emphasis from your company to the buyer. For example, the sentence “We provide world-class customer service” is focused on the selling company. To focus on the buyer, change the sentence to “You deserve world-class customer service.” The first sentence is a claim that the buyer may or may not believe; the second is a statement with which the buyer is very likely to agree.

Taking action

No matter how carefully you have written your marketing communications to attract attention, create interest and promote desire, if you don't motivate your buyer to take immediate action, your marketing communication has not fulfilled its purpose.

To motivate buyers to act now, you must provide *a sense of urgency* in the copy. Typically this is done with a limit – either time or availability. *The first 50 respondents will receive . . .* is an example of availability; *offer expires on December 31* is an example of time. The shorter the time period or the smaller the quantity, the greater the sense of urgency that is created.

When coupled with a special offer, a sense of urgency should provoke a good response from your buyers. Some examples of special offers are a discount or credit toward purchase or something for free. Depending on who the target audience is, the special offer could be called *introductory* (targeting new customers) or *appreciation* (targeting current or past customers). Just be certain that the offer has true value for the buyer, or else it won't act as a motivator.

Generating trust and confidence

Strip away all the techniques for motivating prospects to respond and buy, and you will find a basis of trust and confidence between the buyer and seller. Both consumer and business buyers are now sophisticated and able to detect falsehood, hype, hyperbole and overstatement. Keep your marketing communications simple, factual and powerful and you will take the first step in convincing prospects to buy from you.



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