

Selling Benefits In An Online World

Experts salesmen have always known that it's about selling the benefits, not the product. While it may seem counter intuitive online, the same strategy is still the most important strategy to generate sales for many of the same reasons. Selling benefits appeals to people more than selling features of a product. They directly show what a person will gain by closing the deal. They leave a small opening for imaginative sales pitches, and they clear all objections that are uttered.

Traditional Way To Sell Benefits Offline

There are differences in how those benefits are reiterated online. For one, in a traditional setting, a salesperson is offline, engaged directly with a customer, who can interact with him/her one-on-one. This allows the salesperson to hear the objections that most customers have to buying the product. As any good marketer knows, the minute an objection is raised, the sale is almost finalized. That's because people generally want to be convinced to buy a product; they just have some small issue or objection that they haven't been able to resolve themselves. When a salesperson hears an objection, he/she typically will have a ready response as to why that objection is not the way it is perceived, and frames it differently to produce a statement of benefit for the prospective customer. This allows the customer to rationalize or harmonize his/her feelings so that the final sale is accomplished.

How can you do the same thing online, though, when the customer is anonymous; you don't see him/her and he/she doesn't see you? How do you know what his/her objections will be and what benefits to list when you can't even engage a website visitor to talk to him/her directly? The key is to brainstorm every possible objection that a customer might have and list the benefits of your product on a sales page that includes ALL of them.

The online sales page is the equivalent of your sales introduction to the customer, and it better clearly list the benefits for them to read. If human nature is taken into account, though, you know that no one wants to read a long list of benefits. In fact, they may not even bother to read past the first two sentences of your sales page before deciding that they don't want to read further. What do you do? There are ways to write these sales pages so that the attention is grabbed and gently led down the page in a way that elicits an emotional response that keeps them reading and eager to buy. The next few pages will give you some idea on how to do just that.

The Difference Between Features And Benefits

Features Are Comprised Of:

- The actual components that make up the product.
- Descriptive paragraphs about the qualities of the product.
- Explanations of a product's performance.
- Pricing for a product.

Obviously, your customer is going to want to know the features of a product, but that isn't what is going to ultimately sell him/her on it. To get him/her to buy the product, you have to list the benefits, not the features.

Benefits Are Comprised Of:

- An explanation of how the product improves the customer's life.

All benefits will answer the simple question that a customer has in mind: What's in it for me? Any statement that answers that question can be considered a benefit to the customer. From this quick explanation, you can see that telling someone who wants to buy eyeglasses that are for nearsightedness and that darken when exposed to sunlight is a feature of the glasses. However, if you tell a customer that he/she will be able to read to his/her grandchildren now and don't have to buy a spare set of sunglasses too, these are both benefits.

In the end, they say about the same thing, but the benefits will highlight some emotional appeal that is part of the reason that the customer went shopping in the first place. He/She didn't go to get a specific prescription for his/her eyes. That he/she leaves up to the optometrist to decide. He/She didn't even go there for the sunglasses; it was just an additional benefit that could appeal to him/her. Very rarely does a person go in with only a specific budget in mind; that budget is flexible when enough benefits make it reasonable to pay a higher price.

Stick to elucidating the benefits of a product or service, and you will sell more, increase your average sales price sold, and have more satisfied customers. Understanding your customer's needs is the basis of all good business, and finding the right benefits that can trigger a sale is just matching a need to a benefit.

How Demographics Will Help You

If we were to brainstorm benefits for any one product or service, the list could be endless. The problem with this approach is that a benefit is only seen as beneficial if the customer has that need to meet. If you are brainstorming benefits for a new toothpaste, and you come up with the possibility of using it to patch nail holes in the wall, you'll probably elicit peals of laughter, not a sale. Is it a benefit of white toothpaste? There are some people who do use it like a compound, but not that many people would solely go out to buy your toothpaste based on that. The demographics that have a need to fill a hole with toothpaste is pretty small. Obviously, it's not a benefit that you would choose to list online. How do you decide to pick one benefit over another to list on your sales page then? In one word: Demographics.

What Benefits To Highlight

Every website has a specific demographic that it is trying to attract. Your core audience may be comprised of people within a specific income level, educational level, or heritage. You should know as much as you can about the demographics of the people you've attracted so that you can market to them better. If you don't know who is visiting your site, set up some surveys to help you define the demographic better and to reward people for participating with a sales coupon or discount.

The demographics will tell you the amount of money your customers have and what their most pressing concerns might be. It will also give you ideas of what products and services are most important to people who visit your site. If you don't have any idea about income levels, you can always set up three different product lines: cheap, mid-priced, and expensive product lines. You can see which are selling best and to whom and then set up your customer lists this way.

If your demographic is young single professionals and you are selling office supplies, you would want to include the latest electronic gadgets that they might use, from phones to laptops. The benefits you might highlight are trendy and technologically advanced solutions. If you are looking at a demographic of parents with young children, their top concerns will be child-rearing, safety, and convenience.

Understanding your demographic is going to help you pick out the top benefits that you will use to hook your reader into reading the rest of your sales letter. You will only have a few seconds to grab the reader's attention, so you have to know what the top benefits might be for that demographic to have a strong sales letter.

Promoting The Top Benefits

After careful consideration, you might decide that your demographic is single parents and that their top concerns are convenience and money. The products that you are selling might be anything from disposable diapers to an online babysitting service, but the top benefits should clearly be triggering the basic psychological needs of this group. In order to do that, you are going to take the top-most benefit and phrase it as the heading of your sales page. This is your "hook" to catch their attention and to get them to read more of your sales letter.

The Eye-Catching Headline

If the product is a monthly-disposable diaper club, you might want to include convenience as the top benefit. In that case, your hook might show an image of a mother trying to balance a load of diapers up a flight of stairs while she holds her baby crying in the other arm. The look of distress on both their faces might accentuate the benefit of joining a monthly diaper club. Your hook might ask, "Trying to juggle career, house, and potty training at the same time? The Fantastic Diaper Club frees up your hands and mind for the things that really count."

The font on your headline benefit should be larger than any other font on the page. It should be placed at the very top of your Web page, in the first four inches of the page for maximum exposure. Some Internet marketers even use a bright red font to set it off from all of the other text.

The Expansive Subheading

Directly underneath the main headline should be a supporting subheading, with the second largest benefit being listed. In this case, it might be cost, and you can say something like, "For the price of two Starbucks Cafe Lattes, you can change your baby's diaper three times a day and still have a spare for special occasions." In other words, they'll never run out when they most need them.

By supporting the main heading with an expansive subheading, it anchors the benefit in the mind of the consumer and teases them to read a little more. Have we said anything about the program, the type of diaper, or how it all is going to be done? Absolutely not. That would be selling features and not benefits, and we still haven't found out what the objections to the product might be. In fact, even the Web visitor might not even know what objections he/she will have until he/she reads further. That's why the next step after engaging the reader through a personal story or entertaining quip

is to list all of the benefits that can overcome any objection that comes to mind as he/she is reading.

List As Many Benefits As Possible

Having no idea what objection is going through the mind of the visitor, the safest route is to list as many benefits as possible to overcome ALL objections, no matter who is visiting. However, there is an art and strategy to how you list these benefits so as to keep the reader involved and interested enough to continue reading to the end.

Realize that the majority of people who visit a site are skim readers. They skim the text looking for visual signals that cue them into when to read and when to skip reading. Things like major headings and subheadings may actually be read before they even read the inline paragraphs. If a heading is interesting, the eyes might skip to bolded, bulleted, or italicized text to see what the major points are being discussed. If that's interesting, then they might finally be persuaded to read the normal font and find out the details of each bullet. Thus, the format of your benefits list is just as important, if not more so, than the content of your list.

Bulleted Lists Are Best

For a list of benefits, you want to start with the strongest benefits at the top and then work your way down to the weakest ones. This way, if the reader reads something at the top that convinces them to buy now, they won't even see the ones at the end. They're simply not needed. However, if they have objections that aren't addressed as they continue to read down the list, they'll eventually (and, hopefully) spot a weaker benefit that might have been a larger concern for this customer that overcomes that objection, leading to them also being sold! It just takes a little more time.

List your benefits in a bulleted list that clearly separates them from the rest of the text on the page. You can add subheadings to each bulleted item to concisely explain what the benefit is in a few words and then expound on that in detail after a hyphen. This is one of the best ways to create a list that is not only influential, but is also easy for modern skim readers to pick apart and to read for their particular interests and concerns.

Add enough white space to make the reading of the list easy on the eyes. If that means adding a space between each bulleted item, that's fine. Your audience will appreciate you for it, and there's no need to worry about page length on a Web page. There is a scroll bar for just that reason. Go down and list as many possible benefits as you think are relevant to your demographic.

Near the end, ask them for the sale and put a button or link for where they can buy.

When To Sell Benefits

In our previous example, you would sell benefits the most on a sales page. That doesn't mean, however, that there aren't other times when you want to sell your benefits. Any time you are marketing online is a good time to sell benefits, whether you have your own website or not. It can be done in the copy of your sales page, in email marketing, in a comment you place on a blog, or even in article marketing. Selling benefits makes it that much easier to read your copy, have it be more enjoyable, and raises the chance that someone will buy from you.

Email Marketing

Unlike a sales page, in email marketing, you won't be able to list every last benefit. Therefore, you want to pick one large benefit to put in the heading of the email and to directly support it when they open the email to read it. Email marketing tends to be short and to the point, but also should pack an emotional wallop that gets the person to click the link that takes him/her to the sales page. There, he/she can find out about all of the other benefits that you have listed.

Commenting

If you comment on other people's blog posts, on social networking sites, and on articles so as to place a link back to some offer, you want to make sure that you contribute to the conversation first. Just a link to your offer and little relevant conversation will get you placed in the spam folder, pronto. Add your two cents worth and then, if it is relevant, add a benefit to why you use a particular product, why it's worth buying, and link it back to that page or a personal blog where that ad is prominent.

Article Marketing

If you are writing free articles for directories to get more exposure, you know that they give you a resource box where you can typically place two links. Depending on the terms of agreement between the article archive and you, you might be able to place a link to a sales page or not. If not, you can usually use an intermediary page to link to, like a personal blog or an article on another one of your sites.

The biggest mistakes made with these resource boxes is that people are very unimaginative about how they place their links. They don't sell the benefits, but instead say something like, "For more information, click the link." Instead, sell a benefit to get them to click through more, and you will see a big difference in your click-through rate.

Benefits That Hook The Reader

Technology may change, but people don't. They are still human beings living in a world of warm bodies, a slightly inconvenient and embarrassing condition. Add to that the added pressures of career, child-rearing, and personal ambition, and you have a host of demands that people clamor to meet. It's these needs, whether material or psychological, that will hook the reader when he/she reads a benefit that solves some demand or problem for him/her.

Universal Needs

It's sad to say, but true, that most people have the same ambitions and needs as everyone else. If you want to find a large benefit for your product, take a look at some of the most common needs that people try to meet:

Convenience – People hate spending too much time or effort on anything these days. Whether that's due to laziness or an awareness of technology, it's unimportant. Convenience and ease of doing is one need that will remain topmost in people's minds, whether they are students or parents.

Profitability – People want to make money, and they want to make it fast. If your product can help them create a livelihood, an online income, or sets them up to profit off of other people's work and money, you will have a large audience of people clamoring for your product.

Beauty/Attraction – The beauty industry is huge, and people's sense of personal vanity knows no end. That's why plastic surgery is so popular. If one of the benefits of your product is that it heightens your customer's personal beauty or attractiveness to the opposite sex, it's a great lead-in for a benefit that hooks him/her on a subconscious level with great influence.

Status – If your demographic is already rich enough to hire people to make their lives convenient and beautiful, their deepest psychological need is going to be status. They want something to set themselves apart from their peers, whether it's the Mercedes they own or that product you're promoting that will prove to everyone that they're better than the average person.

Exclusivity – Along with status, people want something that no one else has, something exclusive. This hook is great for creating an urgency in the part of the buyer to buy something before it disappears.

As you can see, any need, whether material or psychological, can be used to frame a benefit to give that extra psychological trigger that makes a person respond to your ads. Finding out as much as you can about your demographics' innate needs is a wonderful way to target effective benefits.

Benefits That Create A Sense Of Urgency

By now, you're probably getting the idea that a benefit is not just a stale "explanation of how the product improves the customer's life." A well-written benefit is a psychological trigger that compels a person to some marketing action due to the nature of who he/she is and what group he/she belongs to. It is used to manipulate the sales encounter so that action is taken to buy a product by overcoming all possible sales objections and enticing the buyer to take action NOW. The best benefits now only have an emotionally-charged trigger, but make it clear that it is urgent to act on the impulse to buy; otherwise, the customer might lose valuable time or money through inaction.

Ask For The Sale Now

It's hard to believe at times, but most Web visitors and customers are pretty content to browse your site and never buy, particularly if they aren't asked for the sale. If they have to figure out how to buy something on your site or whether it's for sale or not, odds are that they won't take the effort to do it. One of the best strategies to creating sales is to simply ask for the sale online. While you're doing that, you want to create a sense of urgency in the copy that makes it clear that there is a risk to sitting on the sidelines and doing nothing.

No One Likes To Lose

Depending on the benefit you've highlighted, you can use these benefits to create a sense of urgency. Status items, for instance, work well by making it clear that if a buyer refuses to take you up on your offer, they stand to lose the chance to ever get in on this exclusive offer. This creates a risk in the mind of the buyer that they may, in fact, lose out on something that they're definitely going to wish that they bought later. As we all know, no one likes to be a loser, and so this is a great way to trigger a sense of urgency and to compel action on the part of the buyer with a benefit associated with that trigger.

Time-Limited Offers

Another way to create a sense of urgency is to make the offer only available for a set number of hours or days. Just be sure that when the clock runs out that you pull the offer immediately to make your time-limited offers credible. The first time someone loses out on that offer, they will rush to be the first in line on any other time-limited offer you put up. Associate this with the benefit of convenience, and you will see people actually groaning at their own stupidity for not taking you up on an offer that would have made their lives easier when they had the chance.

Benefits That Come Alive

What if you could promote a benefit and have the person actually experience that benefit firsthand, prior to the sale? This can be a powerful motivator to continue opting to buy a product or service, but it can be hard to do online. Offline, beauty product companies have known for years that samples are the perfect way to create an experience of owning the benefit before an actual purchase is made. This compels a person to buy something that they may never have opted to buy without that experience.

Online, however, you can't send out an immediate beauty sample or place a diamond ring on someone's hand to try out. The equivalent of that is virtual applications that simulate the experience or benefits of those applications, which can be given away as free demos with limited features. Think about the products you are selling and decide whether there is some way to make that benefit come alive in the mind of your potential buyer. Remember, once they get a taste of owning that experience, your benefit will have more credibility and it will have a larger psychological pull to it too.

The Virtual Ring Builder Example

Online diamond wholesale companies like Abazias had a big hurdle to overcome when marketing the benefits of buying a diamond ring online. For one, there was no way to actually place the diamond ring on the finger of a potential buyer, like a regular retailer would do, to compel the final sale. That's when they began to look into ways to simulate that experience by creating online applications that not only helped the customer to visualize the final product, but also allowed them to have a direct hand in the creation and product design. That was even one step better than going into a retail store. By getting a small application built, they created a way to simulate their biggest benefit, the beauty of a custom-designed diamond ring, without actually placing it on anyone's fingers. Any software application that helps customers to have that look and feel is a great way to sell beauty items like clothing, hats, and hair dyes when you are in an online environment.

The Trial Membership

If you have a membership site, you can sell trial memberships to that community by enrolling people for a minimum fee or even for free. This gives people the experience of being a part of that community and lets them obtain some of the benefits for a short time. This can make people become lifelong buyers of your products and services and not just one-time shoppers. Take a look at how subscriptions can work for you online, just as they've worked with magazines and newspapers in the past. It's actually very easy to provide a membership demo online, and it costs you nothing.

Benefits As A Seduction

A good benefit statement seduces the buyer into taking action on your product and service by triggering deep psychological needs that make it imperative that he/she acts to resolve the problem. Many of the same problems that human beings have dealt with since the beginning of time are prime candidates for creating benefit statements that offer solutions or at least some sense of psychological reprieve from pressing problems.

As you're trying to build up your online business, you don't want the relationship to be finalized after one sale. It's much harder to find a new customer than it is to work with the ones that you already have. That's why it's important to listen deeply to what your customers are saying and to continuously provide products and services that offer the benefits that they need so that they will keep buying.

Listening Is A Good Seduction Skill

If you've ever bothered to read the life stories of some classic seducers, like Casanova, you will find that the one skill they used the most was the art of listening. It was this skill that allowed them to determine what was missing in their target's life that they could provide that would uniquely suit him/her and provide a sense of psychological relief that would lower his/her defenses enough to complete the seduction. You might think that it was their skill with more intimate actions that actually won the ladies over, but actually, it was their skill and dedication to really listening that helped them to create strategies in multiple ways to get them to a point where the intended victim would surrender himself/herself of his/her own accord.

Similarly, a good Internet marketer has to take the time and the effort to listen to the people who are coming to his/her sites. He/She can't reach out and force anyone to hit the "buy now" button, so he/she has to create ways to make it easy and desirable for the customer to make the decision on his/her own. One way is to offer exactly what the customer needs, even if

he/she isn't aware that he/she has that need until you mention it. There are few people who really understand themselves, but most have many emotional cues that trigger them into subconscious actions on a daily basis. It's your job to figure out what is the most effective way to target that need by listing just the right benefit that compels them to buy.

If you can't find that out through studying your demographics, don't be afraid to ask people. You can even find out what their most pressing concerns are in their business or a problem they've had difficulty solving for years. Offer an incentive to participate in the discussion, like giving credit to someone for their input, a discount on another purchase, or even cash. People want to talk about themselves, so give them the time and provide the forum where they can do that, and it will help you to pinpoint your demographics' needs better.