



Points of Pain – their importance for more effective Marketing and Sales

Introduction

Marketers and sales people are, or should be, always trying to find out what their customers need, and how they can sell to them - the typical paradigm is "the more or better you understand their need, the better chance you have of being able to satisfy them and therefore sell to them". This is true in principle, but in practice it's more complicated than being able to simply identify and therefore address needs. What you really need to be able to find out is the **nature** of your customer's need, and in particular their pain points or 'points of pain'. This Application Note explains how.

Detail

The difference between the 'what' and the 'how'

As an obvious starting point we can say that customers have to have a need otherwise they don't buy. Most Marketing and Sales people naturally get this, but it's only half the story. A person may have a need to travel from London to Berlin on a certain day, and that tells you what they want, but knowing that is only the start and doesn't even begin to help you understand what that person's real need is or how you can address it. How do they want to travel? How much do they want to pay? Have they got something difficult and fragile to transport at the same time? Is time of the essence? And so on. So the point here is that understanding the 'what' is just the first stage, and 'how' the customer wants to be served is more important than the 'what'. Just to be clear, discovering the 'how' includes asking about "when?", "how much?", "which?" and "why?", not just "how?"

Unfortunately though, most of the time spent when meeting and thinking about customers is spent identifying the what, not the how. This is because discovering the 'what' is much easier and takes less time and effort than the 'how'. Discovering **how** a customer wants to be served requires time, effort, skill and results in a huge amount of information. It requires the marketing and sales force to ask deeper questions and this in turn supposes the ability to gain trust (to earn the right from the customer to ask more deeper, penetrating and typically more confidential questions).

Points of pain

So the first challenge for buyers and seller is to move from the what to the how. The second is to identify points of pain, or what is increasingly known as the POP. To illustrate this, let's return to the example of the flight from London to Berlin. Imagine that there are two competing airlines which offer flights at differing times during the day. One airline is a low cost airline and the other is a standard service offer and the low cost airline have a flight of half the price of the full service offer.



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In this case, on the face of it, both airlines can satisfy the 'what' (flight to Berlin), and assuming that leg space, food and inflight service are not major pain points for short-haul, price is the clear difference between the two and probably the major point of pain for the buyer. But if the reason for the flight is to get to a very important conference at a particular time, then there is real stress and pressure on the actual flight times, the reliability of service, the closeness of the airport to the venue and so on, and the customer will inevitably be focussing more anxiously on the pain of potential queues, late arrival, connections, location of airport., etc., and these are then the real points of pain of the customer.

As another example, let's look at Adobe's recent research (The New Creatives Report June 2014) into what creatives are looking for, and in response to the question "what keeps them up at night?", the top concern (33%) was "Pressure to deliver creative ideas and content faster than ever". Interestingly, their primary concern wasn't 'better software' or more features', but **speed**. Other concerns in the report emphasize the need to be able to create content 'wherever they are', or 'on-the-go', and these are, of course, concerns about the 'how' rather than the 'what' that we saw earlier.

Typical B2B POPs are:

- Less time to develop something (so your customer has faster time-to-market and lower costs)
- Faster time-to-market / speed (gets them to the market first and gives them first mover advantages)
- Lack of resources, capability or know-how to do the job themselves (not enough engineering, logistics, selling resources / capability), thus they need help from the supplier
- The activity, or parts of it, have to be done at some stage but are not part of your customer's core strategy or competence. (This leads to the activity being a 'pain' for them to do, hence a desire to outsource the activity [such as we see with in-house canteens, or UPS / FedEx taking over logistics activities])
- Less overall system cost or TCO (Total cost of Ownership)
- Competitive or strategic advantage - your customer gaining a significant edge over their competitors

'Points of pain' has meaning for both B2B and B2C, with some similarities, although in practice the pain points are often quite different. As a somewhat simplistic generality, B2C needs tend to be more emotionally-based and B2B needs tend to be more rationally-based, but this simplistic view obviously has its limitations – B2C buyers may often have rational needs and B2B purchases often include an emotional element. A typical bunch of flowers that a consumer buys each week at the supermarket may be +/-€10 for example, but if that consumer is travelling and has forgotten their partner's birthday or anniversary, they will pay anything to get something delivered at a distance and by express service, so speed, availability and service can also be pain points for B2C buyers as well as B2B.

How to find the POP

Finding the POP requires demands significant effort and dedication, and for certain things within the selling organisation to happen:

- **Time and effort:** Significant investment in time by sales and marketing to do the 'Deep Dive' necessary to really understand the customer, their current situation, and find the pain points
- **Change in attitude and approach:** for example Sales functions and people are often short-termist, driven by their short-term sales targets and objectives – whereas discovering the 'how' and the POP is going to require significant investment over time without any immediate or quick results. This requires a change by management in their tasking and incentivisation of the Sales force
- **Building and gaining trust:** changing the paradigm from just ever responding to cheaper and cheaper prices, but explaining to your customer that you want to offer something different and take the time to get to know their organisation – this requires trust as a pre-condition to being able to ask the tough questions
- **Different skills and capabilities:** from the Sales side for example, this requires a consultative selling approach with a more strategic approach to the business, rather than the often transactional selling
- **Information:** the more you know about a customer, the better able you will be able to really understand and then address their issues and concerns. This again implies that you have earned the trust necessary to dig deep and get information

In practical terms, it means finding out (much more) about your customer, but also your customer's customer.

Conclusions and Recommendations

You will by now appreciate that there are many links and similarities between understanding the points of pain with value-based marketing and selling. Understanding the POP of a customer enables Sales and Marketing to focus on pain and value and transition away from purely price-led discussions. This in turn enables you to put price last in the discussions. So this approach is key to building and implementing value delivery systems within the organisation. Finally, whilst a deep understanding of your customers, their situation and needs is always necessary, it can also be the moment for some blue sky and 'out-of-the-box' thinking - thinking, dreaming, imagining what your customers' POP is and how you can create completely new offers to address and wow them.

- Sources: 1. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>
 2. <http://www.adobe.com/content/dam/Adobe/en/solutions/digital-media/pdfs/adobe-new-creatives-report.pdf>

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