

Insights

A series of articles covering trends in the technology sector



5 recommendations for effective B2B product messaging

Product messaging to B2B audiences is challenging to get right. Marketers need to convey complex messages in simple but compelling terms. Here are five recommendations that will help you in the initial stages of message development, when decisions about message content, benefits and value propositions are made:

1. Understand your audience
2. Focus your message
3. Make it credible
4. Use ROI messages with care
5. Consider your brand's position and the market's maturity

1. Understand your audience. We'll start with a piece of simple advice that yields powerful results. Doing the homework up front to understand the target audience translates into messages that resonate and make the audience feel that your offering is relevant.

To determine how well your message connects with your audience, ask yourself the following questions. After viewing your message, does your audience take away an impression that you understand:

- The business-process challenges they face relative to your offering?
- How they conceptualize pains, i.e., lost revenue and risk avoidance?
- Where their solutions fall short vs. where their needs are met?
- What they see as direct or substitute alternatives?

We are not suggesting that one message must convey all of these themes – they are simply examples of ways to demonstrate an understanding of your audience. When people see a message that does not relate to their world, they make assumptions. For example, they assume the offering is designed for companies in other verticals or of a different size. They might make other assumptions too, but the pattern is the same: if they don't see their world and realities in the message, it will not resonate with them.

We would like to make one last point on understanding your audience's world. When B2B marketers find that their audience does not see the benefits of the offer, they often talk about educating the market; the idea is that if they could just get the audience to understand the benefits, sales will follow. While this may be true, it is also complex and expensive to educate an audience. Given the resources available to most B2B marketers, it makes more sense to make messaging reflect how the audience sees the world than to attempt to change its world view.

2. Focus your message. The most effective product messages focus on a single audience or type of decision maker. B2B decisions typically involve multiple decision makers, and although they work for the same organizations, these audiences experience different priorities and pains and become involved at different points in the decision process. Spreading one message across multiple audiences dilutes its effectiveness and the message resonates with no one. A message focused on a single audience or decision maker, on the other hand, enables you to speak to the themes that resonate most with that audience.

3. Make it credible. All B2B marketers know that credibility is essential to effective product messaging. Being credible is difficult, though: business buyers are dubious of claims regarding ease of use, cost savings and revenues gained. It's not that they don't value these attributes; they do and are willing to pay for them. However, in their experience they have found a gap between what the message claims and what the offer delivers.

The key to developing credible messages is communicating proof points around how your offering delivers the benefits. What does it do differently, what problems does it eliminate, how does it make a business more efficient, etc.? Proof points used in messaging needn't be highly detailed; they should provide a short, simple answer to the "how" question and invite the target audience to learn more.

Credibility is as important for fear tactics as it is for claims about benefits. Fear, uncertainty, and doubt have their place in B2B marketing. But when vendors talk about a problem as if it is a crisis and the audience sees the problem as merely an annoyance, there is a credibility gap.

Doing your homework at step one to make sure you understand your audience and focusing on your audience as recommended in step two provide a baseline of credibility to your message: the audience is more likely to give you the benefit of the doubt regarding your claim if it believes you know what you are talking about.

4. Use ROI messages with care. ROI messages can be powerful, but they can also be overused and ineffective. Here's why: although decision makers must justify their purchases to get budget, ROI doesn't necessarily drive the initial consideration of a product. Decision makers are typically more interested in performance improvement. In addition, many products and associated business processes are so far removed from the bottom line that they lack a practical connection in terms of cost justification.

If you do use an ROI claim in your messaging, provide concrete examples of how ROI is delivered, e.g., the product enables you to process X times more orders per hour or it reduces the cost of a specific task by Y percent.

And, in keeping with recommendations one and three above, make sure the ROI claim demonstrates that you understand the target audience and is credible.

5. Consider your brand's position and the market's maturity. A strong brand is a surrogate for proof points in an established product category. The brand itself conveys part of the message and category leaders can rely, at least to some extent, on their reputations. In a new product category, however, brand doesn't substitute for proof points. The mainstream market tends to be conservative regarding new products and processes. It sees new technologies as unproven and therefore is skeptical of claims of improvement. As a result, even strong brands need to provide proof points in new categories.

The underlying theme across all of these recommendations is to see the world from your market's perspective. If you can demonstrate this type of understanding you are more likely to gain credibility in the market's eyes and more likely to gain consideration. Use these ideas as a checklist to evaluate your current product-level messaging in terms of how well it resonates with your audience.

This exercise may raise some questions which you may be able to answer with existing internal knowledge. If questions remain, primary research can be a useful tool for developing a better understanding of your messaging and your audience. [For information on how Isurus may be able to provide assistance with market research initiatives, please contact us at 617-547-2400 or info@isurusmrc.com.](#)

