



Don't Sell a Thing! Sell a Vision

If you are like most people, writing to sell is a challenge. It may be easy for you to price objects and bargain smartly at yard sales. But it's another story to sell yourself, your plan, your program, or your budget in writing. Draft after draft, the plain truth can seem ho hum (that is, dull), but attempts at hype feel false. How can you communicate value?

This article describes the powerful role of vision in selling.

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When I bought a new minivan recently, I wasn't buying the antilock brakes, the cruise control, or the 12 cup holders. Instead, I was buying worry-free driving, comfortable car camping, a satisfying role as a hauler of kids, and a smart, successful image.

I didn't buy a car with features. I didn't buy benefits. I bought a vision.

If the salesperson had talked up the heavy duty battery or the towing capacity, I might have muttered "So what?" If he had focused on the 5-speed transmission, I'd have thought "Who cares?" But instead—sizing up my husband, our 10-year-old, and me—he opened the rear hatch, flipped the third row of seats backward, and said, "Here's where you relax during the soccer game." To another person, he might have said, "Here's where you sit at the tailgate party" or "Here's where the grandkids sack out."

It's all about the vision.

Too often, when we are writing to sell, we focus on features:

In a resume, Roger describes himself as a "highly experienced" safety coordinator.

Selling a training program, Katrina writes, "The workshop follows a standard format; however it can be customized easily."

These writers have described features. They hope their readers will recognize the value or benefit of those features. But readers might easily respond, or think, "So what?"

To get beyond "So what?" when selling, try this method:

Forget features. Focus on your reader's vision.

You know the features of your idea, method, product, or program. Forget them. Instead, answer these questions: What does your reader want to add or maintain in his or her life? What is the desired vision? Is it more productivity? Efficiency? Profits? Skill? Energy? Creativity? Integrity? Leisure?

Roger described himself as "highly experienced" on his resume. That's because he believes the hiring company must want an experienced safety coordinator. But is the employer's vision of a person with experience? No. It's of what the experience can lead to: fewer incidents and injuries, fewer claims, public recognition of an excellent safety record, and increased business. Consequently, Roger needs to paint his



accomplishments—his experience—in clear, vivid pictures that match the employer’s vision.

Katrina, who described the customization feature of her training program, has not connected with her customers’ vision. Customers don’t envision a customized program. They envision its results. Those results may involve getting the job done quickly and efficiently, avoiding litigation, closing sales faster, hiring qualified candidates, or a variety of other outcomes. When selling her program, Katrina needs to tie any discussion of customization to the company’s vision of results.

Suggestion: When selling a vision, promise only as much as your product, service, or idea can deliver. That way, you will meet or exceed expectations, and the customer will be pleased long after the initial sale.

Remember these three points when selling a vision:

1. Go beyond benefits.

Sales experts will advise you to describe benefits—not features. But even benefits fall short. When you describe benefits, your readers must translate those benefits into their vision. Instead, paint a picture, describe a vision, show your reader what the future looks like. And tie that vision to your product, service, proposal, or idea.

Examples:

Beyond describing himself as “highly experienced,” Roger can write, “Working with the engineering department, I invented a chain hoist lift for raising shrink-wrap film into position, which reduced on-the-job strain injuries by 70 percent.” For people with a vision of a safe workplace, that’s an impressive accomplishment.

Describing her training program, Katrina can write, “When employees complete this fully customizable program, they will be able to

reduce sales closing time for your products and services.” The customization message is tied to a vision of closing sales.

2. Try beginning with a negative reality.

Beginning with a picture of a negative reality can be very persuasive. That’s because readers who are feeling that pinch will respond immediately.

Example:

Our home page (www.syntaxtraining.com) opens with these two questions: “Do your managers and employees struggle with business writing? Do documents take too long to write—sometimes with questionable results?”

When the reader answers yes, he or she is immediately engaged and eager to read on—to get to the positive vision.

3. Identify the vision—your reader’s and your own.

If you are not aware of your reader’s vision, you are not ready to sell. Prepare yourself by observation, listening, and research. These will help you determine what your reader envisions in the future. If you move forward without a sense of your reader’s hopes and dreams, you may get the silent treatment or the discouraging “So what?”

If you are uncomfortable selling a vision, think about your own. Imagine the good things effective selling or persuasion will bring into your life. When your own vision inspires you, you will get closer to the vision of others.

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