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### FABulous Selling

Benjamin Franklin was the original American advertising sales person. Like many of the people in our industry today, Ben started his business on a shoestring and used his entrepreneurial skills to make it grow and prosper one reader and one advertiser at a time. As a good salesman, Franklin was tuned into what his readers and advertisers wanted. He had an intuitive understanding of the psychology of sales. In his popular Poor Richard's Almanac he offered the following advice: "If you would persuade, you must appeal to interest rather than to intellect." He knew that what customers want to know is, "What's in it for me?" He understood the power of self-interest; that people buy for their own selfish reasons. A successful sales person must demonstrate how their product satisfies these needs.

#### **What we sell**

As advertising sales people our job is to help our customers grow their businesses. We do not sell paper and ink; customers can get a much better deal on these commodities at Staples or Office Depot. What we really sell are customers. We are in the eyeball business. At its core, our business is all about helping people who have something to sell, connect with the people who want or need to buy that "something." Our papers and websites are simply the packaging that our real product comes in. If I go to Best Buy and buy a new flat screen T.V., it comes in a big cardboard box carefully padded with oddly shaped blocks of white Styrofoam. I don't really want the box, but I want the T.V. to arrive safely in my living room. Our product is the "box" that delivers what the advertiser really wants—customers, to their business. It is our job to help our advertisers understand this. No one wants to buy advertising; everyone wants to buy paying customers.

#### **Why people buy**

As Franklin wrote, people make buying decisions based on their own "interest." They don't buy a sandwich because they want to help out the restaurant; they buy a sandwich because they are hungry. Most buying motives are not quite that simple. People don't choose to buy a BMW simply because they need transportation, a Hyundai can move them from point A to point B just as effectively. The BMW also fills a need for comfort and gives them an ego boost as well. Most decisions are made emotionally and justified with facts. "Feeling" that they are making the right decisions is more important to them than "Thinking" they are doing the right thing.

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This means you need to position your product in a way that allows the customer to imagine how they will be rewarded for buying an ad from you. If you can get them to visualize what your program will do for them, you tap directly into the emotions that drive decision-making.

### **New improved FAB**

Most sales people have been taught to talk about features and benefits by telling the customer about their product and what it can do. FAB selling takes this one step further. FAB is an acronym for Features-Advantages-Benefits. FAB is essentially a process of customizing your offering to the customer's situation and needs. FAB selling requires the sales person to use good probing skills to uncover a customer's problems and needs before attempting to recommend a solution.

### **Defining FAB**

- **Feature**—A physical characteristic or attribute of the product or service.
- **Advantage**—How the feature can help the customer.
- **Benefit**—How the feature and corresponding advantage solves a customer's problem or addresses a customer's specific need.

Features describe the product; Advantages help the customer understand the product; Benefits make the customer see how the product can help them. Benefits make the customer want to buy from us.

Let's say I was a car salesperson and I told a customer that the vehicle they were considering had a "turbo". The "turbo" is a feature. Unless the customer is a real car nut they are likely to think, "So what!" The feature is meaningless to them.

Since I am a clever car salesperson, I decide to hit them with an advantage of the turbo. "A turbo significantly improves the acceleration of this vehicle." Many customers will think, "I'm no drag racer, why do I need that kind of pickup?"

Now it's time to seal the deal with a benefit: "What this means to you is that when you are pulling on to the freeway with your kids in the backseat, you'll have the power to merge in before a truck kills you." The customer thinks back to a few close calls on the on ramp and taps into the emotional stress of a vehicular near death experience and decides, "I need that turbo."

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I have seen this happen when I am out with our sales people. A rep will say, “Our product is direct mailed.” When the customer doesn’t respond, they may add, “This means it reaches every home in the area.” Sometimes this will “click” with the prospect, but often it does not. The most successful reps drive home the feature and advantage with a benefit. “Ms. Customer, we are direct mailed so your ad will reach every home in the area meaning more people will see and respond to your ad, making you more money.” “Making money” is ultimately what the customer wants to accomplish. By tying your feature to this need, you heighten the prospect’s perception of the value of your product.

Never assume a customer “gets it”, you have to tell them why they should buy. Customers have a lot on their mind. Don’t make them have to figure out why they should buy an ad.

### **One FAB doesn’t fit all**

Advertisers are as unique as fingerprints. No two prospects have the same needs. Again, this is why you must ask good questions to reveal the customer’s needs and situation. One customer may want to blanket the entire market with their message, while another may be more interested in a targeted ad to a limited area. Some people may be interested in a coupon vehicle, while others never discount. As the old saying goes, “You’ll never know, unless you ask!”

### **Being FABulously well prepared**

You have a lot to think about during a sales call. When you are with a customer, ideally you should be thinking about their business and their needs. Since this doesn’t leave a lot of time to think about FAB, it makes good sense to plan in advance. Take the time to list all of the features of every product you sell along with the accompanying advantages and benefits. Many features will offer multiple advantages and benefits. Here is an example for a racked product:

Feature – Demand distribution (Racked)

Advantage 1 – People only pick up the paper when they want to read it

Benefit 1 – So every one that picks up a paper will read it and see your ad, no wasted circulation generates a better response and makes more money

Advantage 2 – Readers know where to find the paper when they have a buying need and will seek it out

Benefit 2 – It is available to potential customers when they are ready to buy, so

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you will reach customers when they are in the market and motivated to spend money with you!

Take the time to write out the features, advantages and benefits for all your products in advance. Do this and you will be prepared to respond when you discover a customer need. This exercise also helps you to think in terms of FAB. Writing out the advantages and benefits associated with each feature will help you to “connect the dots” for your customers on every call.

### **Conclusion**

As sales professionals, we get what we want by helping other people get what they want. As we have seen, customers aren't interested in the features of our publications, and advantages alone will not motivate them to advertise. Features and advantages are only effective when the customers see them in the light of a desirable benefit. Resolve to never offer a prospect a feature or an advantage without including a meaningful; customer specific, benefit and you will be FABulously successful.

*This article was written by Jim Busch of the Pittsburgh Pennysaver.*

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