



## Doing the Homework Attracts Business

Behind every marketing brochure, email campaign, webinar, and sales call is the unsexy side of sales and marketing. Homework. Remember that? Going to school all day and then bringing home more books to do even more work before you went back to school the next day? Many of us graduated with a major sense of relief that we'd never have to do that again! Unfortunately, for those of us who market and sell for a living, homework is a fact of life.

As you read this, look around you. What do you see? Tables, chairs, a glass, a television set, a pizza, the shoes on your feet, your cell phone. Every one of those things required someone marketing and selling them to someone else. Up close and personal – every one of the manufacturers and distributors of these products and services had to figure out how to market and sell to YOU. All of those things are in your home because you needed and/or wanted them. To get them to you, each of these sellers had to figure you out. They had to do the homework involved in identifying you as a good target for their products. How do you think? Why do you need these products or services? How do you prefer to buy them? When do you typically buy them? What information do you need to have to make a decision? What price do you want to pay? How informed are you about your alternative options? Very little of this information can be figured out on the fly. It requires gathering and analyzing a lot of information. The biggest challenge is to boil it down into a message that will resonate with your prospect.

Once the questions are answered, and a message is hammered out – the homework is done. Right? Not necessarily. How the homework is used has everything to do with success or failure. If we assume that you have figured out what value you bring to potential customers – how and to whom are you communicating it? To what degree is your organization's value proposition communicated to your customers? Does every customer get the same message? Do your sales people communicate it consistently? Since we believe that selling happens both pre and post the actual sale (in the marketing and customer service realms) – an even more important aspect is how the value

message is communicated internally. To what degree is your value proposition communicated and understood by your employees? In order to actually deliver the value that your brand is promising prospects and customers – your employees must clearly understand what it is, why it is of value – and how their actions directly relate to its delivery.

Hmm, the homework is piling up here, isn't it? Do all of your people understand what business your customers are in? Do they know both the tactical and strategic challenges that your customers are facing? Can they tell you what the customer's goals are? It's like the difference between selling some tires OR selling the ability to get somewhere reliably. Are you trying to get prospects to connect to the WHAT of your company or the HOW and WHY? The last 2 items are more important to your prospect than your "WHAT."

Here's a quick diagnostic to assess how aligned you and your co-workers are with your customers. Have each person jot down what they think your company's value proposition is. Why do customers do business with you? Then look at everyone's answers. Do you all have the same answer? How many different answers were there? Looking at the range of answers as well as where in your organization each type of answer resides can tell you a lot about what other kinds of homework you need to do!

A poorly tuned value proposition is indicative of misalignment between the strategic plans and the tactics of your company. Just fixing the value proposition isn't enough. Figuring out where all the disconnects are and aligning them into a consistent communication and delivery system is key to gaining marketing share. Consider a Marketing and Sales Assessment. Focusing on and comparing your company's sales perspective and your customers' perspective can be extremely enlightening. Even if you think you know the answers – don't assume your homework is done. The only way to be sure your homework is right is to actually DO IT! I was a student teacher very early on in my career – and I had a student come in one day with no homework. He was a good student and usually very committed. I asked him why he hadn't done his homework that day. "Oh," he said, "I already knew all that stuff. I didn't need to do it again." We had a quiz later that week which he failed. His assumption that he knew the material didn't hold up. So – how much of what you know about your customers and prospects is recently studied information? Do you know it all already? Are you sure?

-- Lisa D. Dennis

© Knowledge Associates, 2005 / All Rights Reserved