

Branding -- the emotional shortcut to winning the rational sales argument

By Allan Gorman

For the most part, business customers aren't impulse shoppers, they're extremely rational.

Enormous sums of money are sometimes involved, and their corporate future can often depend on making the right choices, so people who buy business products and services will usually follow a very deliberate and careful path to a purchase decision. They'll gather data, peruse literature and websites, consult with associates, ask for proposals and weigh alternatives to make sure that the choice they'll make is correct.

Sometimes, there can even be multiple parties involved, keeping each other in balance to make sure that the product or service to be selected will be the very best available to solve the problem at hand.

So if customers are going to research choices anyway, does a strong brand really matter?

More than ever!

While it's true that in today's information-rich marketplace there are endless resources to find facts on just about anything one might want, what business buyer really has the time to scour the web and follow every possible lead to look at every possible supplier there is?

In most cases, it's easier to start with a list of candidates that they already know about, and then work from there. And this is where good branding comes in.

You want to make sure your name gets on that list!

Recognizing you as a preferred brand simplifies the buyer's task of assembling his list of viable candidates.

But there are more benefits from branding than just making the buyer's candidate list.

To be sure, just getting on the list isn't the only benefit to be derived from building a strong brand.

As the purchasing process progresses, being a strong brand also gives you a competitive advantage on the emotional side of the buying decision. And make no mistake -- just because business purchases are carefully considered, doesn't mean that they're devoid of emotion.

Preference and loyalty plays an important role --just as it does when you buy something for yourself -- such as a new car, a vacation, or even a pint of ice cream.

When there's a lot at stake, a brand can be a blessing.

There's another emotional element that we should consider.

People who are charged with making major purchases have a lot at stake.

The wrong decision can negatively impact their company -- in some cases, it can even cost the buyer his or her job!

A strong brand addresses this fear factor.

Usually a strong leader has a reputation for quality -- that's what makes, and helps keep it a leader.

And when there's no apparent practical difference between a top brand and one that's lesser known, the more popular brand will almost always have a competitive leg up. The decision to go with the market leader will almost always be perceived as the safer choice.

It's also cool to buy the best

Even in tough economic times, companies that stand for leadership -- or those that aspire to it -- will look to surround themselves with premium products and services. The quality they buy represents the quality they sell. And leading companies, don't compromise, as they've come to realize that saving a few bucks on an inferior product just isn't cost-effective in the long run.

Find a way to position yourself as the best, communicate it well and walk a high road. Deliver beyond expectations and become perceived as the market leader.

Become the recognized, emotionally compelling "brand", so that you'll make the list more often... and win more of the rational arguments, too.

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