

Market Differentiation - What Do Customers Want?

By Wendy Reed

As I looked at our focus for this month's newsletter, Competitive Positioning, my thoughts immediately went to a current personal project of mine – building a new house. In the feature article, you will see references to the “simplicity factor” of competitive positioning, and I believe that a great checkpoint of how well we do this in our professional lives is looking at how we perceive this in our personal lives.

When I stopped to think about this daunting task of building a home (the first such endeavor for me), I began to reflect on my experiences with craftsmen that I chose or chose not to use. Taking the perspective of the buyer doesn't mean you have to know all of the ins and outs of their business, it just means you have to put yourself into “buyer” mode in order to be empathetic with their needs.

What are the key things that create competitive advantage and ultimately a good customer relationship? These are some basics that I have found:

- ❑ Listen – Do you understand what is important to potential buyers? Have you really listened to their needs and challenges?
- ❑ Respect – Have you thought about how new, and sometimes overwhelming, the aspect of a new service or technology can be to them? Will they still respect you and maintain a relationship with you after the sale?
- ❑ Be curious – Are you genuinely interested in what the buyer needs and where they are or are not comfortable? Have you asked the right questions?
- ❑ Understand schedules and milestones – Do you know what happens if they do nothing or if they miss a defined date? What steps have to be completed when, and who will be responsible for those?

Remember, the “steps” that a buyer goes through to make a decision are significantly different than the ways that a seller measures progress. In a nutshell, the trick is to think about ways that you can meet the needs of the buying process while still advancing your sales efforts.

Read on for additional insight, but just remember - the next time you are preparing for a sales call, stop, think and test how your message will be perceived. Don't try to make them play by your rules – at the end of the day, they won't anyway. (I can personally attest to that)