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Three Tips to Make Your Marketing Better

CI's portfolio companies are some of the most amazing I've ever worked with. Fascinating technology applied in brainy ways to effect groundbreaking innovation: Color me impressed! Despite being incredible—and vastly different—each company I consult with typically benefits from similar marketing advice. Here are my top three tips.

Assume a position. From social media to direct mail to advertising to SEO and beyond, there are almost as many marketing tactics as there are products. Want a simple guide for all of your efforts? Write a positioning statement. This short but powerful piece of prose defines your target market and outlines how you want your brand to be perceived, particularly in comparison with other options. Refer to this document, which is for internal use only, whenever you need to focus your marketing efforts. Every marketing tactic you use should support your positioning statement.

Here's a template to get you started:

For [target market], the [brand] is [competitive frame] because [differentiator or proof point].

Zipcar's positioning statement is hailed by marketing gurus as a good example. Let's take a look:

To urban-dwelling, educated techno-savvy consumers [target], when you use Zipcar car-sharing service [brand] instead of owning a car [competitive frame], you save money while reducing your carbon footprint [points of difference].

Can you see how every time Zipcar makes a marketing decision it can refer to the positioning statement as a guide? For example, if Zipcar is trying to figure out whether to contact customers via Twitter or direct mail, they'll know that their target market—urban, educated, techno-savvy customers—is probably more easily reachable and more receptive via Twitter.

Don't make potential customers and investors work too hard. You may have the most sophisticated technology backed by the most brilliant scientists and used by the most prominent Fortune 100 companies/Yale-trained surgeons/astronauts. But, if you can't explain it quickly and simply to your audience, potential investors—even me—you're making your professional life a lot harder. People are busy. They're not going to spend a lot of time deciphering highbrow prose. Keep your company and product descriptions clear and simple. Bonus points if you can write them without buzzwords.

Consider: This groundbreaking, state-of-the-art product uses breakthrough technology to offer advanced solutions for cerebrovascular accidents.

Huh?

Better: Our catheter-based retrieval device allows you to remove clots more quickly and safely than ever before, vastly improving outcomes for your stroke patients.

Focus on the customer. I see so many company and product descriptions that are well written and accurate, but simply miss the mark from a marketing perspective. Your customers don't care what you do—they care what you do for them. This means you should use "you" a lot more than "we" or "us."

Think you're focused on your customers? Find out for sure at www.customerfocuscalculator.com . Simply enter your URL and the free "we we" calculator will let you know. I tested one of our former portfolio companies (I won't say which one), and here's what came back:

"It appears that your web page has **3 words focused on your visitor**, while it has **12 words focused on your business**. That means your site is focused on your customer **20%** of the time, while focused on your business **80%** of the time. It appears that this web page speaks about

your own business more than **4 times** as much as it speaks to your customer. **It's likely that this is having a negative impact on your conversion results.**"

To fix it, simply rewrite your sentences so they focus on the customer. Instead of "Our platform is the best educational platform in the world," you could say, "You need a better educational platform. Your search is over..."

Finally, focus on benefits, not features. Even better? Focus on the benefits of the benefits—the emotion behind what your product or service delivers.

Consider three examples:

1. Our chef's knife features a carbon steel blade, polypropylene handle, laser-controlled edges and full bolsters. (Marketing the features.)
2. Our chef's knife has a carbon blade which ensures that you'll make sharp, precise cuts every time you cook, while the polypropylene handle offers you no-slip comfort. Full bolsters keep the knife evenly balanced for easier handling while you chop and slice. (Marketing the benefits—much better.)

3. You'll feel like Emeril when you use our professional-grade chef's knife. Chopping, dicing, slicing—you're in control and will make beautiful, even cuts every time. Bask in the glory of your guests' admiration as you present a gorgeously carved steak and perfectly prepared crudités while they sip wine and ooh and aah over your culinary skill. (Marketing emotion—better still.)

As Harvard Business School professor Theodore Levitt said, "People don't want to buy a quarter-inch drill, they want a quarter-inch hole." Explain how you'll deliver it to them.

Got your own marketing tips to share? Join us on Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn.

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