If the Want is Strong, the How will Come

By Mark C. Perna

Using benefits to market your school can create emotional attachment.

enefits sell. And yet, most marketing campaigns focus on features. Creating powerful benefit statements that project a clear picture of your programs, services and value in the community are the foundation of the communication needed to become enrollment rich. Benefits are identifiable and connect with your audience. What do they mean personally? What does someone gain by attending your school? How do they feel about that? Benefits may exist but are often lost in rambling descriptions of feature-laden marketing messages that describe but rarely persuade.

In last month's Techniques article, "Doing Right Things Right," I introduced WIFM, which is everyone's favorite radio station. It stands for, "What's in it for me?" We all subconsciously ask this question when presented with a marketing message. Anything you create or any message you deliver will have prospects asking themselves, "What's in it for me?" The benefits of your school or program must deliver the answer to this question. In fact, to persuade, they must create emotional attachment and a desire to learn more, because if the want to is strong enough, the how to will come (enrollment).

People buy products and services, including education, based on emotion not logic. When logic and emotion come into conflict, emotion always wins. Benefits are a way to touch prospects and students by appealing to their emotions and delivering what they want or need. Do you suppose prospects sit down and compare the merits of programs against competitors in a fair and logical manner?

The truth is, people make emotional decisions and then create a logical line of reasoning to justify their decisions.

We call it rationalization.

Have you ever wanted something badly enough that after several days or weeks of plotting and rationalizing you were suddenly clever enough to find the money or the means to acquire what it is you wanted? That is the principle behind if the "want to" is strong enough, the "how to" will come. You must create the want or desire through clear and concise benefit statements that build value and work in concert with the emotional attachment action steps of the enrollment funnel. The bottom line is: if someone wants to, they will find a way. Your job is to facilitate that process.

Here is an explanation to better help you understand the difference between a feature and a benefit. A feature is what a school provides, such as state-of-the-art technology or a great atmosphere. A benefit is what the feature delivers in terms of value to each prospect, such as cutting-edge skills leading to higher wages, or an engaging classroom with peers who share similar goals, ambitions and talents. Which sounds more emotional and desirable, the features or the benefits?

An Example of Connection

We recently worked with a statewide initiative to market college tech prep to high school students, parents and primary influencers. The features of college tech prep are vast, but there needs to be a connection of value in the form of benefits. Here is a feature and the corresponding benefit copy points we created directed toward the number-one influencer of students, their parents.

Feature: Earn college credit.

- Benefit 1: Save money. College credits earned in high school are FREE!
- Benefit 2: Why wait until sophomore

year of college to explore career options? Students investigate, experience and thrive in high school, allowing them to benefit from a productive and successful college experience.

I point out this example because it is easy to make the mistake that "earn college credit" is a benefit when it is in fact a feature. Benefits are the value the feature delivers, which in this case include saving money, saving time and making the most of the high school experience.

It is critical that you work through each feature and develop the benefit in terms of the audience you need to reach, such as students, parents, counselors and peers.

To begin the benefit creation process, you must know the value your school delivers to students. You have to know each feature before you can create a benefit or value.

Steps to Take

Here are five steps to consider in the discovery of benefit statements.

Step One: Start at the beginning. Pretend your school or program is brand new and imagine your prospective student has never seen it before. Take each feature and assess the value (benefit) of that feature. Ask yourself, what's in it for the prospect? List the obvious benefits first, and then start looking for more.

Step Two: Investigate. Ask students about your school and the value you deliver. How would they describe it? Would they change it? What are the true benefits they experience? The answers may surprise you. Investigate what students tell you and determine if their

A feature is what a school provides. A benefit is what the feature delivers.

applications are valid. Their comments may inspire further hidden benefits that add to your overall value to students as well as the community.

Step Three: Evaluate. Does your school or program deliver enough value to each student? The more benefits your school demonstrates, the less significant price or the barriers to entry become. The payoff to increased benefits and emotional attachment is the chance, one day, to require higher enrollment qualifications, allowing you to become more selective.

Step Four: Test. Try out each benefit statement with current and prospective students. Ask them to evaluate and suggest improvements. Develop a library of powerful benefit statements that will deliver your value in all aspects of your enrollment funnel.

Step Five: Implement. Adjust your marketing and promotion to reflect each benefit statement. Drip them with consistence persistence using my smart marketing strategy of "The Rain Effect" (discussed in one of my earlier *Techniques* articles), and let the marketing rain fall.

Benefit statements are specific to each school and depend on the strengths of the organization as to which are the best. By following the steps above, you may unlock hidden treasure that you can communicate with your community. Brainstorm, survey and meet with your team regularly to find those secret gems that represent the value necessary to speed your journey on the road to being enrollment rich. **1**

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