

Marketing experts will tell you the importance of differentiating your company, its products or services from the competition. But differentiation only works when it demonstrates a material difference—one that will make the prospect sign on the dotted line.

# Material Difference.

WHAT YOU GET WHEN YOU MERGE SALES WITH MARKETING.



By Andy Gole.

Former university professor Andy Gole is a sales consultant who now puts his revolutionary ideas into play in the marketplace. His breakthrough selling programs have re-shaped dozens of organizations effecting increases in sales of more than 25%. Contact [andy@bombadillc.com](mailto:andy@bombadillc.com) for more information.

It is marketing's job to identify the critical needs of the target audience and to put together a campaign that communicates the company's ability to meet those needs. Unless you have the necessary funds to conduct market research, no one is better equipped than your sales reps to identify "critical needs," or what we prefer to call material difference—a difference strong enough to command action. To make this work, the marketer needs to work closely with sales and sales people need to think a little bit more like marketers.

## Material Difference.

Most companies attempt to differentiate themselves. They look for the advantages they have over the competition. For example, RX Printing has just installed a new thermal CtP system. All of RX's competitors are still using film or older visible-light systems. In a sales campaign targeting corporate print buyers, RX promotes the differentiating factor—thermal CtP. But what if this market doesn't care about the technology? What if this audience is more interested in fast turnaround? In that case the differentiating factor won't attract any new sales. Rather than focusing on what makes your company different from the competition, you need to find a material difference—

a difference strong enough to motivate a change in behavior.

An example is the difference between a mobile phone and a land line. The advantages of mobility provide a compelling reason to switch. The material difference needs to be measured and quantified. The ability to make calls from any location increases productivity by 60%, for example. Now you have made the material difference obvious. I call this a breakthrough move. If you now add urgency—everyday you go without mobile phones, your productivity stagnates while your competitor's increases 60%—you'll motivate an immediate change in behavior.

## Refining Material Difference.

Commitment to material difference necessitates non-stop innovation and interaction between sales and marketing. First, marketing frames a material-difference statement, then sales tests it, and then the two use the feedback to refine the material-difference statement.

The prospect also aids in the search for material difference. When salespeople offer a partial idea for a material difference, then let the customer complete the idea, they learn how to refine the material difference.

Let's suppose that RX's new thermal platesetter was an :Azura chemical-free system. RX knows that prospect E-Star buys only the highest quality printing and specifies recycled stock exclusively. So RX says it is the only printer in the area with technology that can improve print quality on recycled paper. During the discussion RX learns that E-Star uses its eco-friendly policy to win new business. Not only can RX improve the quality of the printing, but with a chem.-free system, it can give E-Star another means for promoting its policy and winning new business. This is the material difference that will make this prospect switch printers.

Providing proof of the material difference is also key. When salespeople assert benefits without proving them, they arouse scepticism. Here is where the marketing effort can really benefit sales. "Proving" materials create credibility up front and avoid the perception that sales is making self-serving statements. Proving materials might include case studies, white papers and published articles which present your statement as fact.

The search and refinement of material difference, proving, breakthrough moves and urgency are defining characteristics of an entrepreneurial, growth-oriented firm. ■

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