



How Valuable is Your Business?

*How Small to Medium Business Owners Can Capture
What's Already Great About Their Organization
and Translate It Into Sales Growth*

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Abstract

As small business owners its tempting to think we know all there is to know about our target market and what they want. But maintaining this perspective increases your risk of positioning your company incorrectly, and thereby missing the mark with prospects. By taking a systematic approach to researching your customers, competition and company you can make sure that whatever marketing dollars you spend give you the biggest bang for your buck.

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Most of us think we know what our customers want. Why would we have stayed in business this long if we didn't have a clue, right? And it's especially tempting to make this assumption when we're in charge of the client relationship in an agency setting. It's our job to know the customer better than anyone else. But I would argue that if you're only looking inward to determine customer needs, you're leaving revenue on the table.

Let me explain. As providers of a service, marketing and public relations in particular, we are extremely dependent on what I call the "perceived value" of our end product. In other words, there's no cost of goods that we can point to and say, "See, it costs this much to make our product." Instead, we rely on the fact that our customers just believe our product is worth what they pay for it. And it's our job as marketers to understand why they make that leap of faith, and that is where I think so many of us fall short.

Instead of relying on our own perceptions, we should be looking in three areas to understand that perceived value:

1. Customers - It seems obvious enough, but when was the last time you asked your customers what they liked about working with you? Also ask what needs improvement and then make sure to follow up on their responses. Nothing can damage your perceived value more than asking for feedback and then ignoring it! But polling current customers only gives you a window into a portion of the sales cycle. If possible, reach out to former clients and ask why they left. And ask your prospects if they're considering your services and if so, what would clinch the deal for them.
2. Competition - Look around you on a regular basis at what your competition or even firms you aspire to are doing. The purpose of this exercise is not to emulate them, but to get a perspective of the market from your customers' point of view. When they need a service like yours, what do they see as possible solutions? And don't forget that your competition includes your customers moving the resource in-house. When you close a new customer, ask them why they chose you over their other options. Their answers might surprise you.
3. Company - There is something exceptional about your organization, or you wouldn't be where you are today... but do your customers know what that is? If your customers' responses from #1 don't match what you thought set you apart, it's time to reassess. It's possible that you're not doing a good job marketing your exceptional qualities or that you're investing in services that will attract a client base you don't have yet. But the more likely

culprit is that your customers just don't care about what you thought they did. If you believe this is the case for your organization, it's time to shift your resources to what your customers do care about.

By evaluating these three areas, you can identify the perceived value that is unique for your organization. In marketing, we've called this concept many things - the single-minded value proposition, the mission statement and even the brand. All of these terms are often over and misused. But whatever you call it, it is valuable to your target market, different from your competitors and true to the culture and structure of your business. And while we take it for granted most days, it's what made your past successes happen. So by better understanding it, you can use it to build a blueprint for repeating those successes with your prospects. Doesn't that sound worth the investment to figure out what it is?