

Want to Sell More?

Try these Simple Yet Effective Value Offerings

By Joseph DiMisa

Are you struggling to sell your services? Try a new approach. In most professional services roles, the first step to developing business is creating awareness and building a relationship. The cold call, product offer, or tight handshake doesn't work. You need to get your prospect's attention first. Often this starts by offering "something of value."

What does "something of value" mean? It means creating a vehicle that attracts prospects to you, your service, or your offering. It gives information and guidance in a way that piques interest, stimulates demand, and creates a need. It engages and persuades clients to window shop while you learn their needs and issues. In the best case, it spurs a client to seek you out for more information; in the worst case, it reminds a client that you're around.

Complimentary Informational Material

Positive or influential information that better positions you, your firm, and your service or offering is one of the easiest to create. It allows you to promote your offer without being intrusive. There are three important points to consider:

1. **Information About You:** Provide a bio, not a resume. People like to work with people they know and like. Your bio can be the first step in getting prospects to know you, like you, and trust you. A bio presents personal and professional information about you and your experiences that differentiates you from others. A bio can be creative in approach and format, as well as more personal, highlighting your experience as it relates to your audience. Include your bio in all prospect information packets.
2. **Firm Information:** If you create your own marketing material, focus on areas important to your client. Customization is not about glossy, but rather facts salient to your prospects. Customize to show you are a reputable, secure business, poised to meet the clients' specific needs.
3. **Service or Offering Information:** Showcase your service or offering through a demonstration and/or your materials. In a demonstration, you are not the main attraction. Your role is facilitator. The client is buying the service, so position the demo according to their needs, and let the service or offering match up with the buyer and their expectations.

Points to remember:

- Keep a file of materials that have worked best, with notes about different ways you've customized.

- Always customize or plan your demo to match the client’s specific needs. Whether in the setup or through the configuration of your demonstration, take the extra time to show how your service or offering would specifically serve the client’s situation.
- Always be well prepared, well-rehearsed, and somewhat scripted. Solid prep work will allow you to answer questions, remain focused, and meet your objectives.
- Let your client “drive.” No method is more effective at improving your chances of winning the business than letting your client try out your service or offering.

Client Testimonials

Use the goodwill of happy clients to your advantage. . Invite a prospect to call a client and get the story straight from them. Direct conversation enables the prospect to ask questions without reservation. If clients can’t call or attend a sales meeting, their presence can still be felt through testimonials. Ask them to share their experience about how well you, your firm, or service meets their needs. For greatest impact, match up clients in similar businesses or those with similar needs and issues. At a minimum, always touch on client examples—provide detail about the way a client uses your service or offering, including client quotes.

Competitor and Industry Information (Trends and Issues)

Differentiate yourself by being conversant about your prospect’s competitors’ new offerings, or pricing, as well as industry trends. Providing facts about their industry and other trends and issues makes you a figure of trust and authority—enabling you to position your service or offering with greater influence.

Being knowledgeable does *not* mean sharing confidential information or breaking client confidence; it means understanding where the market or industry is heading and how your prospect’s chief rivals are meeting these market demands. ***Do not share secrets; share only publicly available data, or client data that those clients would disclose publicly.***

Self-Assessment Tools

Self-assessment tools are a good way to get participation and feedback from a prospect without making them feel threatened or like they are being “sold to.” Self-assessments allow you to get critical information about concerns, which may help position your service or offering against your prospects’ issues.

The typical tool is a simple questionnaire that enables a firm to rate itself against best practices, industry norms, or even its own mission statement or corporate objectives. More advanced tools provide a grading scale that a prospect can use to determine an overall score and rate itself against others.

- Don’t make self-assessments too long or too complicated; your prospects may not finish the test.
- Always structure the quiz in a way that is not critical or judgmental.

- Include questions that show quiz takers their good qualities. They have done many things right, so point that out.
- Provide some simple suggestions on how to get better.
- Always include your contact information.

Some deficiency may be exposed during the assessment. Use that revelation to close the gap with your service or offering or service.

Content Surveys and Best Practices

Content surveys present nonthreatening, value-add material that will generate interest because of the business or competitive intelligence they can provide. A typical survey identifies key areas of interest and establishes a baseline reflecting other companies' or world-class practices. The best surveys are well thought out and include topics or practices that stimulate discussion.

For clients or other survey participants, a survey provides free information that adds value to their business. Participation requires a limited time commitment in exchange for competitive data that are hard to find or don't exist elsewhere. To create greater demand for the survey, give participants an opportunity to structure or add important questions or requirements to the survey.

As the creator of the survey, you broaden your industry knowledge and arm yourself with key industry facts, making new contacts in the process. Determine survey topics by:

- Asking the participants
- Using topics that are not addressed elsewhere else, yet are important
- Using topics that relate to you, your firm, or your service or offering or offer
- Developing topics that stimulate discussion or may even be divisive to a certain extent

A survey gives you a great non-selling reason to meet and/or call a prospect, as well as license to continue the conversation multiple times. Points of contact: 1) invite the prospect to participate; 2) meet or call to conduct the survey; 3) call again to follow up with additional questions; 4) visit, to share results; and 5) make a final contact and get the sale.

A wise fisherman—who also was an astute businessman—once advised, “It’s better to pull the anchor 15 times a day than sit and let the fish come to you.” Same for sales: be generous with your SOV—scatter it wisely and always, always, follow up.

For more information, please call Joseph F. DiMisa at 770-403-8006

Joseph DiMisa is a senior vice president and leader of Sibson Consulting's sales force effectiveness practice. This article was adapted from Joe's book, The Fisherman's Guide to Selling: Reel in the Sale—Hook, Line, and Sinker (Adams Media 2007). Joe can be reached at 770.403.8006 or jdimisa@sibson.com.

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