

Principle 23

Features & Benefits

*Do you really understand
the difference*

The issue of handling features and benefits in marketing messages is critical to successful selling. This is an area where perhaps many sellers, even experienced sellers, are most likely to make a fatal blunder. Part of the problem usually involves confusing features with benefits. A feature and a benefit can be one and the same thing, but most often, they are not. It's a mistake for a seller to assume that some wonderful aspect or feature of his or her product will do the selling... Often it will not.

A feature is a physical aspect of a product

Before we say more, let's clarify the difference between a feature and a benefit. A feature is most often some physical aspect of a product -- its colour, the size of its engine, how much power it has, the quality of the material it's made of, and so on. Most often, a feature is "a thing."

A benefit is what the customers gets from the product

A benefit, on the other hand, is something more subtle. A benefit is what the product can do for the prospect -- how it can make his or her life better, how it can save time, how it can enhance prestige, how it can make life fun and easy, and more. So a benefit is not a thing -- it's a an aspect of the customer's life that is made better.

Benefits come from features, which is why this confuses some people. For example, let's say a car has a 230 horsepower engine. That's a feature. But what does this do for the person who buys the car? A powerful engine helps the driver accelerate with ease on the motorway and easily merge with traffic. It gives the driver the power he or she needs to pull a heavy trailer. It gives a feeling of pleasure to have all that mechanical power at the command of one's fingertips. All of these are benefits -- something the customer feels, gets or is satisfied by.



A benefit can be perceived or real

And this is what you should sell - the benefits. Benefits are what people really care about. They want to know how their lives will be made better by the product more than what the product is made of, or what its design specs are. When you spend too much time talking about your product's features, you run the risk of "me oriented" selling rather than focusing on customer needs. You can't assume that a prospect will naturally see how they benefit just because you describe your product physically.

It's much smarter to keep the focus on the customer - on his or her needs, desires, longings, problems, demands - and then paint a picture that clearly and vibrantly shows the customer how they can get all of the above if they buy your product. It's known as 'selling the sizzle and not the steak.

When you only list details about features, you don't do that, even though it may seem like you are. Look at the following example:

"Our premium chair is upholstered with the finest mountain ram's leather which is hand-selected and hand-stitched to an all cherry wood frame. The chair reclines to a 56 degree position, yet preserves a compact position that takes up less space than a normal chair twice its size ..."

It sounds pretty good, but it's all features. Ram's leather is great, and cherry wood is nice - but how does the customer benefit? You can't assume the customer will know, so you have to spell it out for him or her by describing benefits, as in:

Our ergonomic chair is designed with your comfort in mind - the 56 degree reclining position gives strong support to your lower back, meaning you never experience back pain and are able to rest for hours on end without the need to fidget, adjust or change seats. Our fine mountain ram's leather upholstery feels like heaven against your skin - you experience relaxation with a sense of luxury, and your guests will be impressed by the rich look and sense of style afforded your living room ..."

Here we see how the customer clearly benefits - physical comfort, no back aches from sitting too long, gaining a feeling of pride or prestige from guests who admire your excellent choice of home furnishings.

Never list, use or describe a feature without also telling potential buyers just how that feature will affect them in their real lives, how it will improve their lives, how it will enhance personal comfort, deliver a feeling of pride, satisfaction, gain, and so on.

A great way to discover what your product benefits are is to make a "You get" list. Write down "You get" 10 times on a sheet of paper, and then name specific benefits to follow each "You get." If you write, "You get a 230 horsepower engine..." you have listed a feature. That's not enough. Complete the process by also saying, "You get a powerful 230 HP engine that never

leaves you stuck or sluggish at a roundabout and thrills you when you take tight curves on a carefree drive in the country ...”

Just remember - a feature is most often some physical aspect of your products, but the benefit is all about the customer and what the customer gets, experiences and is satisfied by. The latter - benefits - is what really sells.