A *simply*DIRECT Market Brief

Using Prospect Surveys to Enable Insight Selling

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The commoditization challenge

> **Only 14% of B2B buyers see a valuable difference between the business value of different brands.**

This finding from last fall's CEB/Google study ("From Promotion to Emotion"[i]), pointedly illustrates that in today's crowded market, products and services are increasingly perceived as commodities. Today's informed—and thus empowered—buyers have changed traditional processes by largely waiting to engage any sales conversation until they are equipped with a clear understanding of their problem, the range of solutions meeting their needs, and a firm sense of what they should pay. What's left to discuss but price?

HBR's article, "The End of Solution Sales,"[ii] underscores this development, quoting one high-tech CSO:

> **"Our customers are coming to the table armed to the teeth with a deep understanding of their problem and a well-scoped RFP for a solution. It's turning many of our sales conversations into (simply) fulfillment conversations."**

The challenge is clear: How can B2B marketers disrupt conventional buyer thinking and reframe their value proposition(s) in ways that effectively engage prospects with a unique, valued, and thus differentiated perspective?

The following brief covers these aspects:

- The reframing of value props with commercial insights
- The role emotion and personal value play in engaging prospects
- Discovering motivating influences in business decisions
- How prospect surveys can be used to develop commercial insights

Insight Selling & Driving Buyer Behavior

Traditionally, B2B brand messages and content have focused on features and benefits. Insight selling, however, seeks to redefine your prospect's purchase criteria in favor of your offering by providing compelling new insights and previously unconsidered perspectives. Insight selling also highlights the connection between your differentiators and your prospect's key concerns. CEB, a leading, global member-based advisory company defines the commercial insight approach as one which "elevates customer conversations and reframes their needs and the way they assign value to your points of differentiation."

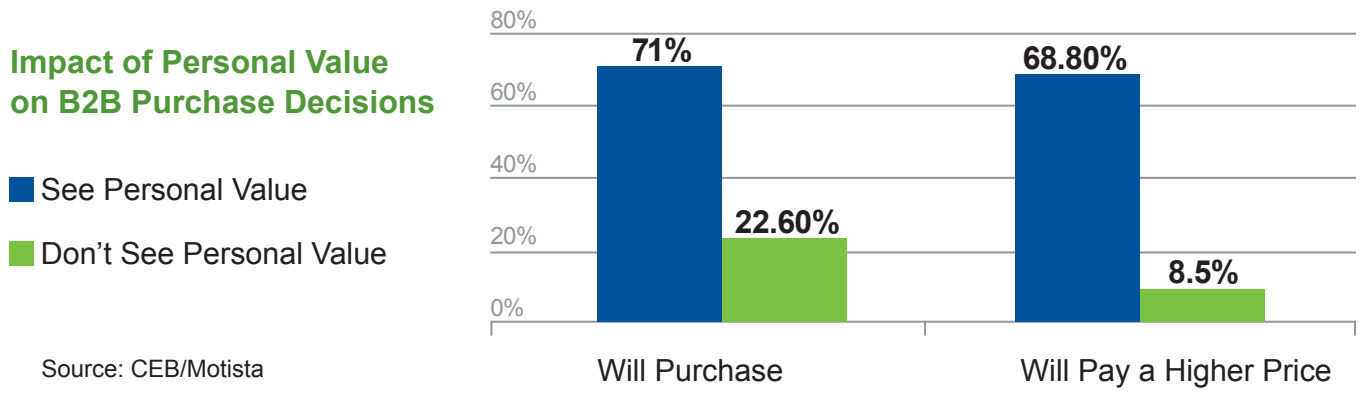
One of the key aspects of insight selling is that it leverages what is known about driving behavioral change and how mental models affect our actions. CEB's approach integrates the breaking down and replacing of "existing mental models with the new mental model that directly supports the desired behavior."

The goal of insight selling is to break down common, narrowly-focused buyer perspectives by providing credible, relevant, and compelling connections between your differentiators and your prospects' top priorities and goals. Consequently, your differentiated offering is reframed not as a "nice to have," but rather as a necessary and unique solution to your prospects' most urgent needs.

Packing a Personal, Emotional Punch

People buy on emotion and use facts to back up their decisions. Counter to conventional marketing wisdom, the B2B buying process is a highly emotional and personal one. While branding and the communication of business value are indeed vital to engaging prospects, as traditional B2B messaging best practices maintains, these components alone aren't sufficient to create differentiation in the marketplace. Rather, the key differ-entiating component most marketers are currently missing is an emotional one—the explicit communication of the personal value and benefit for the buyer who makes a decision in favor of your offering.

Traditionally, creating emotional connections with customers has always been the focus of B2C marketers, whereas B2B marketers have catered to the rational and value-driven needs of level-headed buying committees focused on business benefits and outcomes. Despite conventional wisdom, B2B buyers often place everything on the line, most notably their credibility and even sometimes their job. Consequently, B2B buying is, in actuality, highly personal and fraught with emotions—and much more so than B2C buying due to the level of personal risk involved. Explicitly addressing this volatile, emotional component by featuring the personal benefits your solution provides, renders your offering significantly more attractive. In fact, a recent CEB/Google study found that "personal value has twice the impact of business value across a broad range of commercial outcomes."



Source: CEB/Motista

As suggested by the study's authors, appealing to personal values utilizes messaging which addresses aspects such as:

- Professional benefits (being a better leader, simplifying my life, getting promoted)
- Social benefits (fitting in with colleagues, admiration from others)
- Emotional benefits (confidence, excitement, happiness)
- Self-image (doing good for society, feeling of accomplishment)

In today's noisy, digital business context, where mind share is tiny and attention spans tinier, pointed messaging which resonates personally and authentically with your target audience is vital to landing your value prop on their already-full radar. As the study concludes, to engage today's B2B buyers you need to communicate both rational and emotional differentiation.

As an example, last year prior to the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, Kronos found that most dining establishments didn't have the tools to address employer requirements in the law. As a result, they educated CEOs and HR VPs in the dining industry and proposed a solution to this potentially expensive problem. Here the emotion aroused was the fear of failure from an unknown, but real problem. Naturally, the solution was a comprehensive Kronos offering. This approach put Kronos in a very strong position in one of their target markets, the dining services industry. More on this later…

Revealing the Personal Drivers of Business Decisions

Gathering psychographic information to gain a deep understanding of your prospect's leadership attitudes and social values, as well as their personal fears, motivations, and expectations with regards to their career, can pay significant dividends.

Where demographics provide information on who buys your product or service, psychographics gets the heart of why they buy. And the "why" is critical—it's the element that grabs the heart, soul, and imagination. In physiological terms, it's the element that speaks directly to the brain's limbic system, our more primitive "feeling and reacting" brain, which drives emotions, motivations, and behavior. It follows, then, that any marketing message, B2B or otherwise, that seeks to drive a behavior, must necessarily appeal to this more fundamental brain system.

In spite of our best efforts to make purely rational business decisions, an emotional component—whether acknowledged or not—will always hold some measure of sway.

The challenge then becomes to understand precisely which values and emotions are driving prospects on a personal level and how to tap into these with your commercial insight.

Advertising executive Eugene Schwartz advised tapping into one overwhelming desire in his book, *Breakthrough Advertising*, where he stated, "Copy cannot create desire for a product. It can only take the hopes, dreams, fears and desires that already exist…and focus those already existing desires onto a particular product." Restated from an insight selling perspective, you must focus those already existing desires through a lens which recasts your value proposition and differentiators in a new and compelling light.

Leveraging Prospect Surveys For Insight

In developing your commercial insight, surveys are a great tool for 'going directly to the source' to enable you to garner insights from individual prospects, as well as to gain the collective pulse of your target audience. In addition, surveys are an effective tool for testing new ideas. In particular, prospect surveys are an exceedingly efficient tool, permitting you to reach, engage, and qualify your prospects, all while providing you valuable insight into a highly targeted market.

Through the survey process mentioned above, Kronos was able to glean key insights. Dining executives were concerned with both complying with and absorbing the cost of pending regulations; and the industry, collectively, was ill-equipped to efficiently handle or properly comply with these upcoming changes.

> **"The results of this survey have solidified our concerns for the dining industry. Dining organizations are simply trying to fit a square peg into a round hole in their attempt to use POS for their workforce management needs."**
>
> Liz Moughan, Director, Retail and Hospitality Practice Group, Kronos[iii]

This insight enabled Kronos to develop both a comprehensive solution for this unique situation, as well as an accompanying story that played on the industry's frightful reality, while allaying industry executives' fear and concern:

> **"When it comes to ACA administration, spreadsheets, home-grown reports, and manual calculations will do little to simplify a highly complex process with potentially significant financial consequences. Instead, organizations like yours need integrated workforce management tools that provide complete automation and high-quality information for driving cost-effective labor decisions and minimizing ACA compliance risk. The good news is that Kronos already has them ready for you."** [iv]

Final Thoughts…

In order to rise above the fray and not risk being perceived as simply 'another vendor option,' today's information-rich digital context challenges us to bring a fresh, unique, and emotionally compelling perspective regarding our value to business buyers.

Science has long recognized that there exists a strong emotional component in decision making. Often termed "gut feelings" or "intuition," emotions shape most decisions to some degree, whether personal or business. Risk perception—a significant component in the B2B decision making process—is largely based on emotions.

We are all of us, fundamentally, driven by emotions, albeit to varying degrees. B2B buyers don't check their personalities, values, emotions, and biases at the door when they meet with the decision-making committee. Rather, these are influencing factors which can always be counted on to be present.

Viewed from this science-based perspective, marketing truly resides at the crossroads of art and science. The science informs strategy and tactics, but the art is in the crafting of credible, relevant, rational, and unique messaging to resonate on a personal and emotional level. The art is also in the framing of an offering, not as a "nice to have," but rather as a necessary and wholly differentiated solution to your prospects' most urgent needs.

About SimplyDIRECT

SimplyDIRECT through its subsidiary Gatepoint Research, designs, drafts and deploys opt-in, by invitation-only surveys to management-level executives within a client's target companies. Using web, phone and email-based data collection, its cutting-edge IT trends research and data analysis helps in the generation of custom reports and thought-leadership content. They have deployed over 500 surveys since 2000 and engage over 10,000 decision-makers each year.

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SimplyDIRECT has but one goal—Your Success!

Special Offer: 25 Free Hard-to-Discover Contacts

Provide us with your "hard to discover" titles, functions or roles and a list of up to ten key target accounts (and their locations). We'll email you 25 contact records free of charge (one time per company only)*.

SimplyDIRECT helps you identify, engage and qualify prospects with maximum precision through custom database building into your target accounts.

We specialize in account penetration by delivering accurate, high-level contact information for Director, Vice President and C-level decision makers as well as managers.

We focus on:

- Key account marketing: Our account-based approach focuses on the right contacts with the roles you need to target, in the accounts you'd like to win. We phone verify our contacts to ensure accuracy.
- Survey based demand generation: Identifying not only prospects but also details about their need for your product or service. Those with appropriate needs are invited to opt-in to be contacted by your sales force.

Find out how we can help. Take advantage of our offer of **25 free contact records** for the titles/roles you want to engage within up to ten target accounts of your choice.

[i] http://www.executiveboard.com/exbd-resources/content/b2b-emotion/index.html

[ii] http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic1292290.files/HBR-End-Of-Solution-Sales_3888.pdf

[iii] http://www.kronos.com/pr/kronos-survey-reveals-dining-industrys-urgent-workforce-management-priorities.aspx

[iv] http://www.kronos.com/affordablecareact.aspx