

Moving Beyond Product Features And Benefits In Brand Messaging

F forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2020/07/27/moving-beyond-product-features-and-benefits-in-brand-messaging

July 27, 2020

© 2020 Forbes Media LLC. All Rights Reserved

Dave Wendland Forbes Councils Member

Forbes Agency Council

COUNCIL POST | Paid Program

Leadership

Vice President, Strategic Relations at Hamacher Resource Group, Inc., passionate about optimizing results across the retail supply chain.



getty

We've all heard late-night advertisements touting amazing product features: "It slices! It dices! But wait — there's more!" For those of us old enough to remember these immortal words of Ronald M. Popeil, who started pitching products on infomercials in the late 1950s,

I imagine we would agree that the same technique may not be quite as popular today given the rise of consumerism.

Across today's competitive battlefield — especially amid the Covid-19 pandemic, when speed and convenience have become necessities for shoppers — a litany of features alone isn't likely to convince consumers to purchase a particular item. However, describing what a brand stands for and what attributes align with consumer expectations can tip the scales. Brands and the agencies that represent them have expanded messaging to go far beyond features and benefits.

I fondly remember my early career days working in the computer industry as part of a sales team. We would spend countless hours comparing the features and benefits of our offerings to the competition and then touting our advantages to anyone who would listen. Of course, we were successful a number of times, but looking back with an honest dose of reality, it may have been partly happenstance. Selling was different during those times since most system vendors felt that buyers needed and expected lots of detailed information and facts. We actually thought it strange that Apple's introduction of the first Macintosh computer was based largely on emotion — the company seemed to be well ahead of the curve, and its "1984" commercial was classically disruptive.

So how are shoppers evaluating their sea of choices today and determining which products they to bring into their homes? I believe there are two key factors: the brand's promise and its attributes.

PROMOTED

UNICEF USA BrandVoice | Paid Program

Thinking Through How To Safely Reopen Schools

Grads of Life BrandVoice | Paid Program

Why Investing In Jobs For Young People Can Boost Economic Recovery

Civic Nation BrandVoice | Paid Program

Show Up For Young Absentee Voters

Brands must consistently and articulately communicate their story and what they stand for. As suggested by brand maven and author Denise Lee Yohn in her book *What Great Brands Do*, "With great brands ... the culture and the values don't play supporting roles in business operations — culture and values *are* the brand, and they're used to inform business decisions and employee actions."

Identifying the true nature of a brand's promise is essential in creating and promoting its

“essence.” It’s these emotional characteristics that many consumers evaluate when considering one brand versus another. A brand’s essence is intangible, unique and unwavering. It may conjure up feelings of self-worth, confidence, serenity or other aspirational emotions. Such emotional marketing helps brands stand apart and compete, and it demonstrates their values and commitment.

While the brand-building process is conceptually simple, understanding consumer emotions requires careful and intentional research. As our art director often states when working on package design, collateral or market messaging, the brand must be able to tell a story. Be willing to dig deeper with clients to move beyond the obvious features and benefits of a product and understand the true essence of its appeal.

The second key factor in a brand’s success is its attributes. First, it is important to note that attributes are not features. Instead, attributes identify the unique traits of the brand (its physical form, character and personality) in the market and in the minds of the customers. Features are most often descriptors — they define what the product is.

More and more shoppers are searching to discover and support brands whose core attributes align with their values, personal aspirations and needs.

Here are five critically important elements to consider when developing a brand strategy in today's market:

1. Audience knowledge: Who will be the key (narrow) target?
2. Brand identity: What is its personality? What is its persona?
3. Key differentiators: How does this brand stand apart in the market?
4. Market messaging: Is the main theme consistent and relatable?
5. Media choices: Where will the message resonate most? Don't forget about social media.

Working with clients to move beyond the surface-level features and benefits and truly defining a differentiating brand promise with attributes that set the product apart are goals worth pursuing. After all, the message matters.

Forbes Agency Council is an invitation-only community for executives in successful public relations, media strategy, creative and advertising agencies. *Do I qualify?*
