




Five Questions you must ask before creating any more collateral

By Bob Apollo

Do your sales tools have the desired effect?

According to research conducted by the good folks at the CEB, Corporate Visions and others, **most of them probably don't**. They have concluded that the vast majority of sales tools and collateral have **next-to-no-impact** on the buying decision process. Some of the studies put the figure at **85%** or higher...



In other words, much of the time, effort and money you've been ploughing into creating all those data sheets, corporate presentations and marketing collateral has been a complete waste of time. They are either not used by your sales people, or not appreciated by your prospects.

It's time to stop the madness. I'd like to suggest **Five questions you ought to ask** before you create a single new piece of sales collateral.

Start With the End in Mind

The root cause of the problem isn't difficult to identify: too few pieces of marketing collateral or sales tools are designed with a clear end in mind. They have typically been produced because tradition demands that every time a new product is launched, a raft of material has to accompany it.

It's time to break that vicious circle, and to start producing material that is designed from the ground up to address a real need in your prospect's buying decision process. It's time to simplify your collateral library, and to create

deliverables your sales people will want to use - because they work.

Five Questions You Must Ask

I'd like to propose five simple questions that I believe are relevant to both creating new collateral, and to rationalising your existing material.

1: How is this going to be used?

The first question that needs to be addressed before you invest any effort in creating a new piece of collateral concerns the environment.

What stage in the buying process is this designed to facilitate?

Who are the players involved?

What do they care about?

How will the piece be used - face to face, sent as an email, discussed over the phone?

2: What are we trying to achieve?

What goal is this piece of collateral intended to achieve? What's the call to action? What are the desired outcomes? What do you want the recipient to do as a result? How will you assess whether this objective has been achieved?

3: What messages are required?

What key messages are you trying to convey?

What assumptions should you make about recipient's existing knowledge or attitude?

How can your messages be best delivered?

What proof points do you need to provide?

How can you provoke the reader into wanting to learn more?

4: How should the message be delivered?

What's the most effective vehicle for delivering the information?

What format is most likely to maximise comprehension and cause the recipient to take the desired action?

Do you need to offer alternative formats to satisfy all the targeted stakeholders?

5: How are we communicating this message today?

If this piece of collateral is dealing with an important element of the buying decision process, it's likely that your top-performing sales people will have already developed a workaround. They may have created their own material.

What can you learn from their experience?

Less is More

Given that most of their existing collateral is wasted, most organisations would benefit from a "Less is More" approach to sales tool and collateral development. Focus your attention on creating a handful of truly useful, well-targeted pieces. Your sales people will thank you for it, and your prospects will respond by being that much more willing to move forward with you to the next stage of their buying decision process.

And if that isn't the objective of everything you do or create, what is? By focusing on the desired outcomes, you'll end up doing fewer things, more effectively. So what's your experience - as either a creator or a consumer of collateral? Whether you are a marketer or a sales person, please share your experiences with the LinkedIn community.

Oh - and one last thing: it's hard to create great collateral if you haven't identified who your ideal customers are. I think you might enjoy our latest guide on the subject - you can [download a copy here](#).

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About the Author

Bob Apollo is the founder and Chief Strategist of Inflexion-Point Strategy Partners Ltd, a pioneering B2B sales and marketing performance improvement consultancy, based in Reading, UK. Inflexion-Point is one of the UK's leading B2B Sales and Marketing Performance Improvement specialists. Their research-led, evidence-based approach enables clients to increase pipeline values, shorten average sales cycles and improve average sales win rates.

Bob now works with growth-minded organisations of all sizes to help them build scalable businesses. He has written hundreds of articles on the subject of sales and marketing performance, spoken at dozens of industry conferences and events, and blogs regularly for a range of thought-leading sites including Entrepreneur Country, My Venture Pad, The Customer Collective and CustomerThink.

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