

A SIMPLE GUIDE TO




**COMPELLING
MESSAGING**

FOR THE COMPLEX SALE



**INFLEXION-POINT
STRATEGY PARTNERS**



**THIS SHORT BOOK IS DEDICATED TO EVERY CEO
OR SALES LEADER WHO HAS EVER LISTENED TO
THEIR ORGANISATION'S MARKETING MESSAGES
AND SALES CONVERSATIONS AND WONDERED...**

“WHAT DO WE HAVE TO DO TO STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD?”

IP THE MODERN MESSAGING CHALLENGE



Today's B2B buyers are overwhelmed by information, to the point where they often find it hard to distinguish between different solutions and vendors.

Unfortunately, this explosion in content creation has been accompanied by a dilution in quality, to the point that much of it is little more than a **deluge of drivel**.

Much of what is fancifully labelled as "thought leadership" is actually little more than the shoddy rehashing of already widely-shared ideas, or poorly disguised product promotion.

In the absence of compelling messaging and clear differentiation, B2B customers make simple, predictable choices: they either go with the cheapest or safest option, or they do nothing at all.

That's why **STANDING OUT FROM THE CROWD** has never been more important for every vendor who is competing for complex high value buying decisions...

IP DIFFERENT BEFORE BETTER

The problem is compounded by the over-use of trite words and phrases like “unique”, “best-of-breed”, “best-in-class”, “innovative”, “state-of-the-art” and “leading” that have become so common that they are to all intent and purpose meaningless.

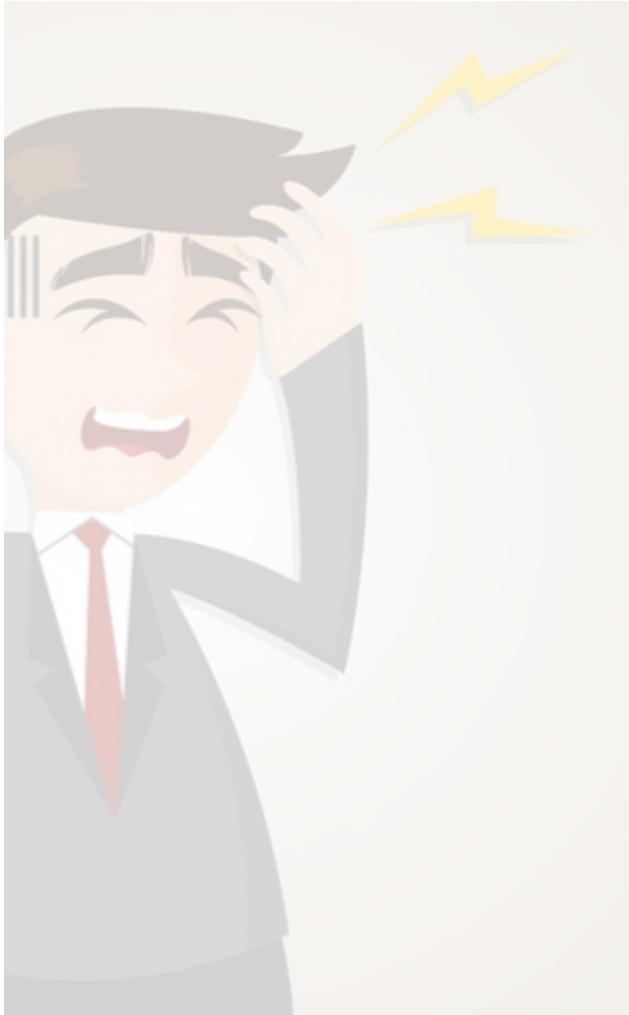
Consciously or unconsciously, your prospects tune out these “better” messages. What they are listening for are **different** messages: ideas that stop them in their tracks, challenge their perceptions and make them want to learn more.

That’s why your messages need to **show how** you are different **before** they go on to **prove why** you are better than any other option available to the prospect.

And it’s why your messages need to start with the prospect’s problem or opportunity before they evolve to position your product or solution. Get the focus or the sequence wrong, and you will lose your audience before they have even started to get interested.



IP PAIN BEFORE GAIN



A common messaging mistake involves leading with the features or benefits of your solution before you've even established why your prospect might need to change.

Most of the time, for most of your target audience, the status quo is usually a relatively comfortable place - and even if somewhat challenging, it at least has the benefit of familiarity.

Prospects can become intrigued by new ideas, but any change involves risk and there is always the temptation to simply stick with the status quo rather than go through all the upheaval.

That's why you need to get your prospect to believe that the costs and risks associated with their current situation are significantly higher than the costs and risks of change.

And that's why you need help your prospect to acknowledge and amplify their current problems and their potential missed opportunities **before** you promote the merits of your solution.

IP THE CRITICAL ELEMENTS

We've found that a simple framework that can help to ensure that your messages capture the essence of your offer. Here are the elements you need to make sure you've addressed. If any of these components is missing or unclear, your message will be measurably less compelling:

For [TARGET AUDIENCE]

Who need to [CRITICAL PAIN OR OPPORTUNITY]

But are struggling to [WHAT'S HOLDING THEM BACK?]

Your solution is a [CATEGORY]

That [COMPELLING REASON TO CHANGE]

Unlike [ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS]

[YOUR KEY DIFFERENTIATOR(s)]

We'll look at each of these elements in turn on the following pages. Those of you who have read "Crossing the Chasm" by Geoffrey Moore may recognise the inspiration behind the framework. As you consider each element and how they complement each other, we encourage you to consider whether your current messaging framework adequately addresses each of these essential points...

IP CLARIFYING YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE



It's impossible to craft a compelling message without first identifying **with** your audience. In complex B2B sales, this has two critical dimensions: the type of organisation, and the type of role.

When thinking about what your ideal target organisation looks like, it's essential that you look beyond the traditional demographics of size, sector and location: you need to consider the common structural and behavioural characteristics of your most profitable customers, as well as identifying the specific circumstances and trigger events that cause them to recognise the need for change.

At the same time, you need to clearly identify the key roles within these target organisations that are most likely to recognise the problem or opportunity, to champion the change agenda with their colleagues, and who have the power, influence and authority to lead the change process.

IP TARGETING CRITICAL PAINS AND OPPORTUNITIES

You need to be very clear about the issues your solution is designed to address better than any other option available to the target audience you have identified. This could either be in the form of a painful problem or an unrealised opportunity.

The chosen issue needs to have the sort of impact that - once it has been acknowledged - will force your prospect to conclude that they simply have to take action.

This is vital: your prospects will have many interesting issues that might stimulate them to do some initial investigation. They will have fewer issues that are important enough to make them conduct a detailed evaluation of potential solutions.

But at any given point in time, there will only ever be a handful of truly business critical issues that once identified will inevitably result in a decision to take action. [That's where you need to focus.](#)



IP IDENTIFYING THEIR CONSTRAINTS



Your prospects may already have been aware of the issue you have chosen to target, even if they are not yet fully aware of the implications for their business.

In some cases, they will have already tried to address the issue, but without a great deal of success. So in crafting your message, you need to anticipate what may have been holding them back.

Perhaps they tried to implement an internal fix - moving headcount around or attempting to write some custom software to solve the problem.

Perhaps they lacked the management experience or expertise to solve the problem internally. Or perhaps they were simply unaware that affordable solutions existed.

If you can identify these constraints, your message will resonate far more powerfully than if you leap straight from problem to solution.

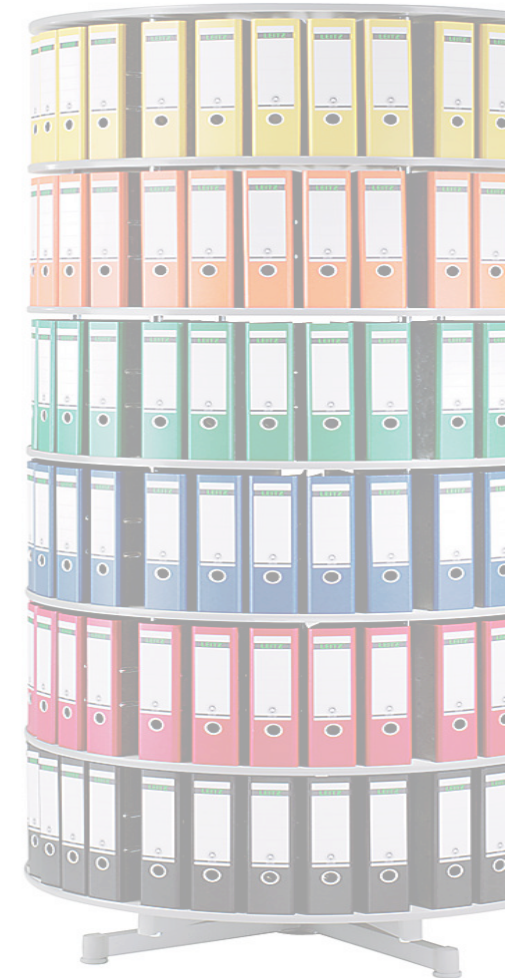
IP FINDING A CATEGORY FOR YOUR SOLUTION

When decision makers are searching for solutions or evaluating their options, they need to be able to describe what they believe they are looking for.

Decision makers find it hard to relate to concepts that don't fit into recognisable, familiar categories. That's why trying to invent a brand new category - at least in the early days of the development of a new class of solution - is such a lengthy and risky process.

Even if the solution you are offering is offering a breakthrough approach, your prospect will always have other options for solving the problem. There no such thing as "no competition".

That's why relating what you do to an already familiar and relevant category is so powerful - if necessary using a "like but different" approach.



IP THE COMPELLING REASON TO CHANGE



Even if their current situation is uncomfortable, your prospects also know from bitter experience that any sort of change can be both costly and risky. Change involves a leap into the unknown.

That's why so many apparently promising opportunities so often end up with the prospect, after an often-lengthy and detailed evaluation, concluding they will be better off sticking with the status quo.

Simply put, the pain and risk of change was seen as higher than the pain and risk of living with their current situation.

And the reason? The sales interaction failed to create enough contrast between where they are today and where they need to be in the future. If the contrast isn't strong enough, the status quo prevails.

That's why your messaging - and your sales conversation - needs to lead your prospect to believe that their least risky, least costly option is to bite the bullet and make the change - **with your support.**

IP POSITIONING AGAINST ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

If you ever hear the phrase “we have no competition” from a vendor, then they probably don’t have more than a handful of customers, either.

If the problem is worth solving, your customers will **always** have alternative options for solving it. Those solutions may not look much like your offering, but they appear to be credible alternatives.

Some potential solutions may fall into the same or similar category as yours - but others may look radically different - and may include simply throwing more headcount at the problem.

You cannot and must not ignore these options. In fact, acknowledging the most common options actually strengthens your message - because it provides contrast.

That’s why understanding what alternatives your prospect is likely to consider is such an important element of crafting compelling messaging.



IP YOUR KEY DIFFERENTIATORS



Now, at last, you've set the scene for establishing what truly sets you apart in a memorable manner that your prospects will recognise and remember and (just as important) share with their colleagues.

Resist the temptation to throw every capability into the equation at this point. Every element you add to the list of differentiators only confuses the prospect and makes your difference less memorable.

Your audience is conditioned (and their brains are wired) to relate to simple themes, not lengthy lists. They filter out messages that sound complex or over familiar, and tune in to simple messages that provoke, intrigue and make them want to know more.

That's why you need to distil what sets you apart into a memorably short and resonant theme, backed up by a handful of specific capabilities that are directly related to your value proposition and which (this is critical) it would be hard for your competition to credibly claim.

IP PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

Here's how a fully developed framework might look (it happens to be the underlying messaging framework we use to support our own business):

For the CEOs and sales leaders of B2B-focused tech-based businesses

Who need to satisfy their investors' revenue growth expectations

But are struggling to bridge the gap between their top sales performers and the rest

Inflexion-Point offers a fresh perspective on sales performance improvement

That drives lasting revenue growth and improves sales forecast accuracy

Unlike traditional sales training programmes that have at best a limited short-term impact

Our integrated approach addresses every element that influences long-term sales performance

You don't need to give them a detailed description of what you do to start with: you simply need to make them want to learn more, and to ask you the question "how do you do that?"

By the way, we don't generally and you probably won't ever actually use the precise full form of words in any externally published materials: but the core underlying theme must be consistently reflected in all of your marketing messages and sales conversations.

IP PUTTING THESE PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE



Hopefully, this short guide will have given you some food for thought about the relevance and completeness of your current strategic messaging framework - assuming you already have one.

Or it may have helped you recognise that the reason that you're not yet standing out from the crowd in the way that you want is because some of the elements are missing from your marketing messages and sales conversations.

We believe you need to start by recognising that in complex B2B sales environments, you'll never solve this problem by rebranding, clever taglines or throwing lots of money at "thought leadership" campaigns.

The only way of reliably and lastingly addressing the issue is by ensuring that every marketing message and sales conversation reflects a deep understanding of who your best customers are, what really matters to them, and how and why they choose to buy.

IP ALIGNING COMMUNICATION WITH CONVERSATION

It would be wrong to think of this as merely a marketing problem: in any complex B2B sales environment, marketing provides the prelude and the support to the sales conversation.

Yet the vast majority of B2B marketing content seems to be created with no or little regard for what sort of sales conversation the material is intended to stimulate.

It doesn't matter how smart the author of your latest white paper has been if your sales people have not been trained and equipped to initiate, sustain and elaborate the subsequent conversation.

Your sales people need to not only understand the issues you have chosen to focus your messages around, but also know how to explore and personalise the impact for each individual prospect.

This is another argument for creating fewer well-chosen materials, executing them well, and ensuring that they are used productively and effectively rather than wasted.



Inflexion-Point Strategy Partners are experts in systematic sales performance improvement for complex sales environments. Our clients are almost all B2B-focused businesses who face sophisticated, well-educated buyers and have to successfully master a complex sales process.

Using the principles laid out in this short guide, we help our clients to craft compelling, resonant messages that enable them to attract more of the right sort of prospects, and to have impactful sales conversations that qualify the prospect's intent and lead the sales process to a successful conclusion.

We'd welcome the chance to discuss how we might help your organisation do the same. Please use the contact points below to arrange an initial exploratory conversation.

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