When Best Practices... Aren’t the Best Practice

WHY A MARKETING AND SELLING APPROACH ANCHORED IN THE DECISION-MAKING SCIENCES IS SUPERIOR

CORPORATE VISIONS
Conversations That Win™
Ask yourself...

Is it a marketer or seller-centric approach – or is it a prospect-centric approach?

Before you answer, here’s a little more detail on your options. There are really only two opposing approaches to marketing and sales methodologies or processes in the market today:

1. **BEST PRACTICES**
   Forcing your company to imitate the marketing processes and selling profiles determined to be ‘best practices’ by research analysts looking at how companies work.

   **OR**

2. **DECISION-MAKING SCIENCE**
   Understanding and addressing the hidden forces that shape the way buyers frame value and make choices.
A Better Way?

The most reliable and compelling approach to great marketing and sales messaging, content and skills—one that will convince prospects to change and choose you—is based on the decision-making sciences.

This buyer-centric model will give you a better basis for addressing how and why buyers make the decision to leave the status quo and pick from the competing alternatives. That’s because it’s backed by decades of rigorous, unbiased research in the following disciplines:

- Neuroscience
- Behavioral Economics
- Social Psychology

The truth is, there’s a science behind why buyers buy. A buyer-centric selling model acknowledges and accounts for the forces that motivate those decisions.

If you can understand how these forces work and harness them in your messages, content and skills, you can guide your prospects on a pathway to change – one that leads to you and your solution.

In short, marketers can be better at developing status quo-busting, differentiated stories, and salespeople can be better at delivering them.
Defeating the Status Quo with Neuroscience

When you examine most marketing and sales content and training it is clear companies tend to jump to answering the “why you” question prematurely. More often than not, this isn’t a good idea. Why? Because most buyers—even once they engage a salesperson—still haven’t committed to doing something different. They still haven’t decided to leave the status quo.

Make no mistake, when it comes to your customer conversations, the status quo bias—not the other competitors in your market—is your biggest adversary. To defeat it, you’re going to need a “why change” story that actually confronts the forces that make people resistant to change.

Not surprising...

60% qualified pipeline deals end in no decision

Source: Sales Benchmark Index
Causes of Buyer Inaction

In his study titled “The Psychology of Doing Nothing,” research psychologist Christopher Anderson details several causes or “antecedents” of the status quo bias. His research offers a deeper look into why buyer inaction happens, while giving you a framework for developing a message to make sure it doesn’t.

Cause #1: Preference Stability

If a buyer’s values are static, they are more likely to stick with their status quo situation, according to Anderson.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

To disrupt the status quo, you need to engineer a shift in your buyer’s preferences. One of the most compelling ways to do that is to tell your prospect something they didn’t already know about a problem or deficiency they didn’t know they had. This adds uncertainty and urgency to your message, helping you destabilize your prospect’s values and open them up to persuasion – a crucial first step for convincing someone to change.

Cause #2: Anticipated Regret/Blame

Cause #3: Cost of Action/Change

Cause #4: Selection Difficulty
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Humans bristle at the mere possibility of regret. This is one of the biggest drivers of buyer inaction, since, according to Anderson, it elicits negative anticipatory emotions like fear, dread and anxiety. Interestingly, Anderson notes that while the consequences of actual regret will be experienced in the future, the “emotional experience (of anticipated regret) occurs in the present.”

**WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

To minimize the effect of anticipated regret, you have to reverse the broadly held perception that equates change with loss. That means you have to show that the pain of doing nothing stands to be greater than the pain of doing something different. And, you have to help the customer see themselves as being a hero in the story, not a scapegoat.
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Cause #3: Cost of Action/Change

Cause #4: Selection Difficulty

The prospect of change seems to have a risk or cost associated with it, while sticking with the status quo seems neutral or even beneficial – often in the face of contrary evidence.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Making change more appealing comes down to identifying and quantifying the cost of inaction – then adding that cost to the gain of change to accentuate the contrast between where your prospect is today and where they could be tomorrow. They need to see there’s a cost to staying the same. And, the sharper the contrast, the more success you’ll have at amplifying the perceived value of doing something different.
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Researchers have identified something called “choice overload,” which in the sales context refers to buyers being overwhelmed by information. Because of this, they perceive change to be too costly and complex to realize.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Use visual storytelling tools to make the complex simple and the abstract concrete. Simple, clear images depicting the current state and the future state can help you paint a contrasting picture that casts the status quo as a threat to their interests and your solution as a safe alternative pathway that helps them realize their goals.

Cause #1: Preference Stability
Cause #2: Anticipated Regret/Blame
Cause #3: Cost of Action/Change
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Did you know...

...the part of the human brain that makes the decision to change—sometimes called the “old brain” or “lizard brain”—doesn’t have the capacity for language. Instead, it relies on images to create contrast between competing alternatives. (The “new brain,” or the neocortex, is the logical region that validates and justifies the decisions we make).
Did you know humans have a three-times-stronger preference for avoiding loss than for achieving gain?

That’s according to Nobel Prize-winner and social psychologist Daniel Kahneman, whose body of research led to the development of Prospect Theory, which describes the way people choose between alternatives that involve risk.

Prospect Theory consists of two major findings:

**LOSS AVERSION** – which shows people are 2-3x more likely to change a behavior or make a decision to avoid loss than achieve gain

**RISK SEEKING** – which demonstrates that people are far more likely to seek out risk (like making a change) to mitigate loss than they are willing to seek risk to get a gain.

Knowing this, how would you refocus your messaging, content and skills to create more urgency around the powerful human motivation to avoid loss?
Defeating the status quo depends on having a unique perspective you can advance throughout your customer conversations, in your messages, content and skills.

Developing this distinct point of view is the key to telling a “why change” story that disrupts the status quo.

A compelling, status quo-busting “why change” message will:

- Deliver insights that challenge your prospects’ current assumptions about how they’re doing business today.
- Redefine their needs and their understanding of the market.
- Help you avoid the “commodity trap” that results from getting into a competitive bake-off too early.
- Create a buying vision that tilts the balance in your favor – all before ever mentioning your products.
In his book, “To Sell is Human,” Daniel Pink writes that your products and services are “far more valuable when your prospect is mistaken, confused, or completely clueless about their true problem.”

One of the best ways to take advantage of this dynamic?

Start by telling your prospect something they don’t already know about a problem or deficiency they don’t know they have.

This is called **messaging to your prospect’s “unconsidered needs”** – the challenges or deficiencies in their status quo that make that situation unsafe or unsustainable.
A message based on your prospect’s unconsidered needs stands in stark opposition to the so-called best practice known as “voice of the customer” messaging. You know how it goes: This is where you and your competitors all gather the same inputs from prospects and customers, which you then respond to with similar, expected capabilities.

This approach commoditizes your message and puts you at parity with competitors. And, because you’ve failed to tell your prospects something they don’t already know, you might actually validate their status quo situation – since the pain of doing nothing doesn’t seem as dire as doing something different.

By messaging to what your prospects don’t know—their unconsidered needs—you’ll inject uniqueness and urgency into your customer conversations, helping you create a buying vision that’s clearly superior to the status quo. And, you’ll be able to further tilt the balance in your favor by taking the next important step: linking the unconsidered needs you’ve identified to your solution’s unexpected strengths.
Three Types of Unconsidered Needs

By identifying your prospect’s unconsidered needs, and connecting them to your unexpected strengths, you can generate the urgency you need to dismantle the status quo – while avoiding commoditized positioning.

Here are three types of unconsidered needs you can introduce in your customer conversations:

- **UNDER-VALUED NEEDS** – These are rapidly approaching trends or problems whose impact has been underestimated by your prospect. Your job is to assert the gravity of these potential problems, and to underscore how the risks associated with them could jeopardize your prospect’s desired business outcomes. You do this by using provocative insights and research that amplify the size and speed of these problems, turning them in your prospect’s eyes from mere afterthoughts into pressing priorities. After that, you can link these new considerations to one of your previously unspecified strengths.

- **UN-MET NEEDS** – These are needs your prospect or customer doesn’t realize they have because they’ve used stopgap measures and other workarounds to conceal the nature of the pain. But the pain is real, and it’s your mission to show how their current situation is unsustainable because of it. Once you’ve done this, lead your audience to the notion that you’ve developed a more viable, long-term solution.

- **UNKNOWN NEEDS** – These are often longer-range issues that come to light when a vendor has a fix for a problem the prospect didn’t know they had. You can enhance the value of your deals by identifying these “off the radar” problems and bringing them into the life cycle of the buying decision.
The process by which people become open to change typically follows a specific three-part sequence.

**HERE’S A LITTLE GAME:**

Guess which of the two sequences below most accurately reflects how humans come to embrace doing something different:

- Analyze – Think – Change
- See – Feel – Change

If you guessed the second option, you’d be right. While conventional wisdom holds that change follows a more rational sequence (analyze – think – change), John Kotter and Dan Cohen, authors of “The Heart of Change,” note that almost all successful change management projects follow the more emotionally and visually charged sequence of “see – feel – change.”
Visual Storytelling for the “Lizard Brain”

Picture Superiority Effect

Your ability to maximize this can have a profound impact on your customer conversations.

People remember only 10% 2 days after hearing it.

65% recall when presented with visuals.
Here’s a way to think about structuring your own visual story in a way that guides your prospects on a pathway to change—and that follows the “SEE – FEEL – CHANGE” SEQUENCE.

1 **INSIGHT**
   Show and tell your prospects something they don’t know about a problem or challenge they aren’t aware of. Deliver a provocative, visually rendered insight—an unconsidered need—that highlights an uncertainty or inconsistency in the way your prospect is doing business today.

2 **UNSAFE**
   Use powerful visuals to show your prospects why their status quo situation is untenable, and to underscore how sticking with the current situation could stop them from realizing their most important business goals.

3 **NEW SAFE**
   Tie your prospects “unsafe” to a “new safe” by depicting a contrasting pathway that resolves the issues you’ve identified.

4 **PROOF**
   Conclude with a story highlighting a comparable scenario in which you helped another company find a “new safe” through your solution. Visually accentuate the contrast between the pain that company experienced in its status quo situation and the relief it found by changing to yours.
The “Three Cs” of Visual Storytelling

To tell a compelling, visually powerful “why change” story that speaks to the decision-making part of the brain, keep these “three Cs” in mind:

**Context**
To vividly demonstrate how your prospect’s status quo is unsafe, you need to highlight the gaps and deficiencies in their current situation and show how those shortcomings threaten to block your prospect from achieving their objectives. You can connect that level of urgency and risk with their current situation by visually depicting the emerging issues and industry trends that, if left unresolved, could pose problems. By visually creating this uncertainty around your prospect’s status quo, you help them see and feel the threat—and you make them more open to the possibility of persuasion.

**Contrast**
You can be especially persuasive to the decision-making part of the brain if your visuals establish clear contrast between the pain they feel with their solution and the value they’ll receive from yours. This “to and from” approach allows prospects to visualize where they are now and where a change management project, led by you, can take them. That helps them clearly discern the value of making a change.

**Concrete**
The “old brain” is not analytically driven, so using too many abstract visuals will dilute the power of your message. Instead, use numbers, stick figures, basic shapes and arrows to translate potentially complex concepts into more digestible ideas. Change can be complex. With the right visuals, you can give it a gloss of simplicity.

A story told with words alone cannot measure up to one told using pictures. But what kinds of visual stories actually maximize the **Picture Superiority Effect**? Find out in this video highlighting a study by Dr. Zakary Tormala.
The Language of Change

As powerful as images are in terms of tapping into the hidden forces that influence decisions, your salespeople won’t be able to defeat the status quo without actually articulating value. Thankfully, many of the same principles of great visual storytelling underlie the delivery skills needed to create the buying vision.

Here are some messaging tips to keep in mind when you’re in front of prospects:

**Start and finish strong.** The old brain puts a major emphasis on beginnings and endings. Make sure you have a powerful opening to grab people’s attention, and conclude your presentation with another point you want them to remember.

**Simplify.** Don’t overwhelm your prospects with surplus information. Reduce your message to simple, resonant concepts like “why change?” and “why you?” Do this in a way that plays into the old brain’s tendency to make fast, instinctive decisions.

**Bring emotion into your message.** The old brain uses emotion to bypass analytical clutter and arrive at decisions more quickly. As a result, you can’t win with just logic and data. You have to win on the emotional, intuitive level first. Personal stories or easily relatable analogies and metaphors can work wonders toward that end.

**Be personal and concrete.** Start your message with your prospects’ objectives and challenges, and use “you phrasing” to transfer ownership and place them at the center of the story.
Conclusion

The latest sales fads and selling profiles won’t help your prospects and customers feel the urgency to do something different. For great “why change” and “why you” stories, your messaging, tools and skills need to address the part of the brain that governs decision-making.

The fields of neuroscience, behavioral economics and social psychology can transform the way you approach your customer conversations. By leveraging the decision-making principles from these fields, marketers and salespeople alike will be better prepared to deliver compelling, visually powerful stories that break the status quo barrier and swing the balance of the deal in your favor.
More Resources

For more decision-making science-based content, check out the following presentations:

- **Keynote from BMA:** Visual Storytelling
- **SAVO Summit Presentation:** The Value of Unconsidered Needs
- **Find out why following the best practices was a problem in the seventies, too**

For a more in-depth discussion of these ideas and more, order your copy of *The Three Value Conversations* today.
CONVERSATIONS THAT WIN

Corporate Visions is a leading marketing and sales messaging, tools, and skills company that helps global B2B companies create more sales opportunities, win more deals and increase sales profitability by improving the conversations salespeople have with customers. Companies engage Corporate Visions to help in three key areas:

• Developing compelling messages to break the status quo, differentiating their solution, justifying a purchase decision and protecting margins;

• Deploying that message through tools and visual stories to enable salespeople to engage multiple decision makers across the buying cycle; and

• Delivering sales skills training that helps salespeople confidently use these messages and tools to create, elevate and capture more value in their customer conversations.

Corporate Visions helps clients such as ADP, Motorola, Philips, UPS, Cisco and others align marketing and sales with a repeatable approach for developing and delivering winning customer conversations.