

Services Marketing: Creating a differentiation in a commodity business

As easy as it sounds and really is, IT enabled services is a low-barrier entry market: no overheads, no time-to-market, nothing required to make out some quick dollars. The very nature of the industry creates a demon—*commonality*. Here are some of the common pain points we have often hear from our clients:

- Our customers do not see us to be any different from another Indian offshore company, and in fact, consider us expensive to other bids
- We want to sell consulting, but are given opportunities for staffing or tactical projects like testing and migration
- For every bid that we submit, our clients ask us for references that we are unable to provide due to non-disclosure agreement clauses

How do you fight this? How will you ensure that your customers are receiving the right messages about your company?

Your services portfolios are the same, the vertical and horizontal expertise in your team are the same, and your engagements are no

different from what other companies are delivering to other customers. Today, services companies do not need to stand out—it is not a benefit that can be sustained in the long-term. The critical need for services companies is to provide *conviction*—of capabilities, of commitment, and of customer-driven thinking. How do you communicate these to convince your customers, especially when you are not even going to see them face-to-face?

Is there a “bite” in your communication?

In the rush to sell your capabilities and solutions, there is intense pressure to create massive laundry lists of solutions, expertise, methodologies, and so on in your communication. This does nothing but firmly place you back in the quagmire of commonality, where every services company is saying the same stuff.

So, let us stop for a minute and ask ourselves:

1. Are customers interested in your capabilities? Yes? *No*. They are interested in solving their

problems. So why should your capabilities interest them? The first purpose in your communication should be “**Benefit.**” What is in it for your customer to spend time reading your communication that can benefit them in their businesses? The trick here is to turn your capabilities into business benefits for them.

2. If you manage to stop customers with your first level communication, you have achieved a good deal of success. The next challenge is to retain that interest. An example is when we shop for food. We have two thoughts running in parallel—the boredom of need (we need food) and the expectation to be surprised (we will find something new). Check if your communication has an element of “**Interest.**” Do you build a theme? Is there a philosophy? Have you created a new method of resolving common business challenges?

3. Do customers believe in what you say? Yes? *No.* Today, decision making is a tough choice for your buyers, and they have numerous compliance issues to deal with too. So how will you prove yourself? The next purpose of your communication should be “**Testimony.**” If you can provide sufficient layers of belief in your communication—from case studies to analysts’ calls to industry awards—you are making it easier for the customer to make a choice. We have seen many client sites use their web-

based content like case studies and whitepapers as lead-capture services. What *were* you thinking? Will a prospective client freely give away his or her identity to receive information about you to help him or her make a decision about you? Well, no.

4. Are your past customers and prospective customers truly aware of your expertise and experiences? As they have evolved, so have you—in business, capabilities, process maturities, and so on. Many of you have moved on from pure staffing to business consulting and other value-added services. How do you showcase your growing maturity in front of the client? Consider the element of “**Evangelism.**” If you have gained deep experience in a particular vertical, and are slowly gaining reputé as the go-to company for that particular service, you should be evangelizing your service capabilities. Your communication should move to a higher plane, where customers can freely read about how your service model or engagement helps businesses gain distinct advantages.

Review your current set of material—from website to case studies to whitepapers to your sales presentations. Are they filled with “bite” that will engage your customers? Are you selling features or are you delivering customer benefits? Are you hawking wares or are you convincing your prospects?



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