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What's in a proposition

A lot of the work we do is helping clients develop their value propositions and messaging frameworks. Yet sometimes people are uncertain what form their proposition messaging should take. In this article we look at the main elements of a proposition messaging framework.

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Communicating the value

In a B2B context a value proposition is a way of succinctly communicating to your target customer how you address a need they have in a way that creates value for their business. People use a variety of formats to create the single line value proposition statement – many in the technology industry will be familiar with Geoffrey Moore's template which he describes in *Crossing the Chasm* – but at a basic level most good value proposition statements cover:

- Who's the target customer?
- What's the need or problem we're addressing.
- What's our solution to address that need?
- What's the value to the customer?

Defining the what comes next

But a single sentence, although important to enable us to communicate the essence of our proposition, isn't sufficient for most requirements. If the purpose of the value proposition is to attract our prospective customers' interest, we need to make sure that when they turn around and say "OK that's interesting, tell me more" we know what comes next, or else we won't be able to hold their interest for very long.

Unfortunately many companies don't bother defining the 'what comes next' and as a result the next level of message that gets delivered is unclear or confused or descends into a description of product features, or all of the above.

Full message framework

That's why when building our value proposition it's important that we build the full message framework, which includes defining the 'Pillars' of the proposition. By pillars I mean the most important things for us to communicate that explains how we're going to deliver on the promise of the core value proposition – typically a series of 4 – 6 benefit statements.

To ensure that our message has substance we then need to identify Proof Points that reinforce each of those benefit statements by providing evidence that we can deliver on our promises, which might be through reference to specific capabilities, resources, assets, accreditations or customer testimonials.

Developing the conversation

When developing messaging I like to think in terms of a conversation – whether that's a physical conversation or a virtual one. How will the conversation flow? In most situations – unless it is the proverbial 30 seconds in a lift – you're not going to open a conversation by pitching your value proposition.

You're probably going to establish the context first by discussing what's happening in the market or the customer's own business. To capture the customer's interest and build credibility you're hopefully going to have some insightful opinions to share, which ideally explain why the customer should care about fixing the problem you're focusing on with your value proposition.

The important point of view

That's why defining a Point of View alongside your Value Proposition is an important part of the overall message. It establishes the relevance of your proposition by positioning it in a wider context, as well as earning you the right to present your proposition in the first place.

The other key element of the Proposition Messaging Framework is the answer to the question 'Why You?', or in other words your Competitive Differentiators. Let's say I'm a prospective customer. Your Point of View has persuaded me that I need to take action. Your proposition has explained how you're going to fix my problem and you've offered Proof Points which suggest that you can deliver on your promises. But there are probably other companies out there that do a similar thing. Why are you better than the competitive alternatives? You need to be able to explain why you're the better choice.

So that's a brief summary of the key elements of your Proposition Messaging Framework. As well as your core Value Proposition Statement you need your Proposition Pillars, Proof Points, a Point of View and your Competitive Differentiators. Get all of those elements clearly defined and you'll be in a good position to start communicating out to your target customers and generating demand.

About OneGTM

OneGTM specialises in helping clients in the technology and telecoms sectors to create and execute go-to-market programmes that deliver profitable growth. Our services range from market research and strategic planning, through to channel enablement and demand generation.

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