

THE CUSTOMER WHISPERER | BY GREG BILLINGS

Presentation: Part 2

Customers buy emotionally and only later apply logic to reconcile their decisions. Exactly the opposite of what you would expect in a rational world.

Of course, we don't live in a rational world. We live with about 6 billion other individuals, each more unique and idiosyncratic than we could ever imagine. The customer whisperer's task is to guide these unique individuals gently through the decision-making process using calm, assertive leadership. The good news is we offer musical products, and music can stimulate powerful emotions. We must be the luckiest salespeople in the whole world!

In previous articles, we saw how the customer whisperer established rapport with a customer in the initial greeting and developed a relationship with his new best friend during qualification. In the first part of presentation, he used his pitch to become his client's expert.

Oddly, he hasn't done any selling — yet. He hasn't taken a position, endorsed a brand or made a recommendation. Why? To do so would undermine the customer whisperer's credibility before the client has come to view him as a trustworthy, knowledgeable source. However, during his pitch, he planted seeds that will bloom in a client's subconscious as he or she considers specific instruments.

Because the customer whisperer has laid a firm foundation, when he does make a recommendation, it's going to have impact.

Now he's ready to present actual products. And he's going to use music as the fuel to get clients' emotions boiling. The demo is about to begin.

GOOD, BETTER, BEST

Those of us in the music products industry view our product world vertically. We've decided what is good, bad, great and terrible. Our view might be colored by our first love, the blond Tele we got brand-new for \$189. Or, it might be hard facts — the Hammond M-2 we dragged around the country for 12 years that never broke

down. We might have been to Hawaii on a manufacturer's nickel, or our personal hero might be an endorser. It really doesn't matter if we are right or wrong. We have made up our minds, and we're sticking to it.

Customers, on the other hand, view the product world horizontally. They see an instrument relative to the one next to it or to the one online or to the one their grandmother owned. Their perceptions will also be affected by things like prices and endorsements. Their opinions are a mile wide and an inch deep. The customer whisperer has two powerful tools to help a client sort it all out.

+ CUSTOMER WHISPERER:

A calm/assertive sales associate who gently turns prospects into customers.

Those tools are the good-better-best and the feature-benefit demonstrations.

I recall first seeing good-better-best choices in a turn-of-the-century Sears, Roebuck catalog. (My grandmother called it the "Wishbook.") Obviously, the first great mass marketers knew something about how customers make choices. Humans have a natural tendency to drift toward the middle. (It might even be a primal urge to conserve heat or find protection from predators.) When asked to pick a number between one and five, most of us choose two or three. This behavior is hard-wired into our genes. It's transcultural and as reliable as the bell-shaped curve. It has been proven with rats in a maze and in electoral politics. Eventually, we gravitate toward the center.

Consider the math: If you present one option, there is (at best) a 50-50 chance a client will select it. But, if you present three carefully thought-out choices, two out of three customers will pick the one in the middle. And one out of six will pick the best option. The cus-



The demo is an opportunity to personalize the product to the customer

tomers whisperer knows prospects see items horizontally, so he will fill the field with choices before a competitor does.

Displays are very important. Products need to be arranged so there's a better model to the right and a lesser model to the left. The customer whisperer presents instruments on a horizontal plane his clients can easily understand. (It's important to display these choices deep in the store. You don't want to demo next to the exit or around distractions.)

As a piano rep, I worked for a B-line manufacturer. Most of our dealers carried a widely distributed A line. They often found themselves competing to see who could sell the least profitable model of the A line for the lowest price. One smart dealer figured out he could price our

piano in between the entry-level and step-up models of the A line. This was counter intuitive because conventional wisdom held the A line as better (though in reality, the bottom of the A line wasn't that great). When he put the pianos side-by-side and started presenting them as good-better-best, many clients picked the very profitable middle choice. As an unexpected bonus, he occasionally sold the very profitable top model. The hard part for me was getting the dealer to move the pianos physically.

Customers need choices, but the customer whisperer knows they don't need many choices. Mostly, they just need three. The widely held idea that a large selection drives sales has never been proven. On the contrary, we've seen our share of superstores fail. A highly focused

product presentation is beneficial for our clients — and our profits. Visit any of the major big-box retailers, and you will have a hard time finding many specific products where there are more than three choices.

Often there are only two.

FEATURES & BENEFITS

The good-better-best presentation invariably leads to a features-and-benefits discussion. After all, the difference

+ 6 KEYS TO A DYNAMIC DEMO

1. Keep your personal preferences to yourself.
2. Build upon the foundation laid during your pitch.
3. Present three choices: good, better and best. (It's OK to start with best.)
4. Show only features that have important benefits to your prospect.
5. Always turn features into benefits, and make them personal.
6. Use short, simple, emotionally packed musical gems.



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between good, better and best is the features. Feature-benefit is our most fundamental presentation and the one most rarely done correctly. Here's how it should be done.

1. State the feature. "This guitar has a volume knob."

2. Give a simple explanation. "Turning the knob to the right or left will make the sound louder or softer."

3. State what the benefit means to the customer. "This means you will be able to adjust your volume, so you get exactly the level you want."

4. Go for the heart. "You'll be able to stand out when you solo and provide the right back-up when you're not just by moving your little finger. The other guys in the band will love you."

This is an absurdly simple example, but you would be amazed how difficult it is to do correctly. The natural inclination is to state the feature, give a complicated explanation and never

get to a benefit, or skip the explanation and go to the benefit.

Try this exercise. Form a circle with two co-workers. Start by stating a feature to the person on your right, who does a feature-benefit presentation for the person on his right. Rotate around the circle. You will be surprised how difficult it is. When you do feature-benefit properly, your presentations become much more meaningful to your customers.

The customer whisperer knows better than to overestimate his prospects' knowledge. If he's too simplistic, customers will say so. But if he's talking over their heads, customers will tune out rather than risk embarrassment. Things we take for granted like a volume knob may be new to our clients.

If we rattle off features, without making them relevant to our clients' needs and desires, we sound a lot like salespeople. The customer whisperer knows a feature without a benefit is like a

date with his sister (all of the flash, none of the heat), so he always follows through to the benefit and makes it personal. He also presents features that build upon the foundation laid during his pitch at the presentation center and features his client made obvious during qualification. The customer whisperer's making it easy for clients to determine if the benefits of the better models are worth the increased cost. Features don't necessarily add value in the customers' perception, but benefits do.

NO SHOWING OFF

The customer whisperer encourages prospects to play. But he understands many people are shy and can be intimidated in a music store, so he's happy to demonstrate for them. This is where he can use the power of music to excite clients. He knows better than to show off his talent. That would be counterproductive and could further intimidate clients. Rather, he shows off the

instrument. He has five or six short musical gems in his arsenal. These are simple, so he never has to think about them. He *always* uses the same ones. They've been tested and refined over the years, and he has a pretty good idea what affect his music will have on prospects.

The customer whisperer knows the most powerful music to play is popular music from his clients' teenage years, or standards that evoke specific moods. Hormones run wild when we're teenagers, and they sear music into our subconscious. Therefore, music from that period can trigger a strong emotional response. The customer whisperer has prepared a demo that uses short musical gems to show off the product's features and turn them into benefits his client must have.

He also knows that his demo is over when emotions have sufficiently risen. If he ignores his customer and demos until the end, he may play right through the close. Timing is crucial.

Having shown three appropriate choices, explained features and turned them into benefits, and introduced music that hit the right emotional tone, the customer whisperer is ready to ask his client to make a choice. Dan Ariely has written a remarkable book, *Predictably Irrational*, about how we make decisions. In the next installment, the customer whisperer will examine how to use our clients' predictable irrationality to structure choices in a way that's beneficial to both buyer and seller. Until then, work on your demo, find the good-better-best options in your store, practice your feature-benefit explanation until you can actually do it and memorize a few musical gems that will make your clients smile. **MI**

Greg Billings whispers to customers at the Steinway Piano Gallery in Bonita Springs, Fla.

THE SALES PROCESS

The customer whisperer organizes the sales process into nine stages. For those he has already discussed, we've given a brief explanation and the issue of *Music Inc.* they appeared in. Go to musicincmag.com to download these articles.

