

Perspective

By Roger Bostdorff

Recently I was presenting to a National Association's Annual Conference near Las Vegas. The presentation was entitled, "Selling in a Tough Economy." This presentation discussed the status quo of our economy and then described why some marketing representatives (fancy word for salesman) and companies, inspite of the challenging times, are successful and others are not!

While delivering my presentation I had someone in the audience stand up and tell me that he was just like everyone else in the audience. He and his company could not do or make anything any different than the other participants in the room. In fact, the same was true with the folks in his industry that resided in China, they could just make the product for substantially less \$\$\$. He certainly had an interesting perspective!

These comments were made after I had already led an interactive discussion on the need to differentiate. How do you think he liked the presentation up to that point? By the way, 21 out of the 24 participants provided feedback that the presentation was either good or excellent. My bet is this person was one of the three that had another opinion.

I had to do some fast thinking to save this presentation. However, before I could fully think thru my response I had another participant stand and layout how he differentiated his product from the one he competed with in China.

He told the story that he actually made a trip to China to see if he could source his items from China. At least that was the story he told his Chinese competitors. He sought and brought back competitive items to what he made here in the states. After he returned he had the metal analyzed and found out that it did NOT meet the specifications of the end user customer. He then took this analysis to his distributor who had already told the manufacturing company that the distributor was going to sell the Chinese sourced product. The conference participant then explained that the distributor could compete with the Chinese product or the ones made here in the US, this was the distributor's choice. However, if the Distributor decided to go with the Chinese product my participant would be contacting a competitive distributor and be conveying the information in regards to the inferior product. This would obviously lead to a lack of credibility with the end user customer and provide very good odds the distributor to would lose this order and many others in the future.

This manufacturer differentiated his product from the low cost alternative. He went the extra mile to do so. By the way, I am not sure the guy that went to China did not have a conversation regarding buying the company of the person who thought his company and products were like everyone else's!!

These two individuals were in the same industry, competing for the same type of business. They each had their own perspective regarding how their company could be successful. What perspective do you have at the moment? Have you spent any time quantifying your differentiation factors? What makes your product or service unique or special? Or are you the same as everyone else in your marketplace?

The economy is tough, no doubt about it. It has been tough for some time. This might be an excellent time to take the temperature of your perspective. Trust me; it matters to you, your employees and to your company's longevity and success!

Good luck and good selling!

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