

Marketing 101: Make the Customer the Hero

If you want customers to buy from you, tell their story not your story.

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The most consistent mistake companies make in sales and marketing is to position their company or product as the hero of the story. If you want customers to buy, you must tell a story where the customer is the hero--not you.

What is a hero? In stories, the hero (or heroine) is the star, the person who takes action to overcome obstacles in order to win the prize. Along the way, the hero typically meets enemies and helpers, but the story is about the hero, not about the other characters.

If you're selling or marketing something, you probably have a story where you, your company, or your product plays the starring role:

- "For decades, our company has been the industry leader."
- "Our product solves problems, reduces costs, and increases revenue."
- "We are personally committed to providing the best service."

Even when you tell this story with enthusiasm and confidence, you're making a huge mistake, because you're turning the customer into a minor character in your story, rather than the star of the show.

Instead, you should tell a story where you, your company, and your product play a supporting role in making the customer into a hero. As sales great Mike Bosworth once told me: "be the wizard who gives the hero a magic sword."

How It Works in Practice

Here's an example of what I'm talking about:

Wrong: "We recently saved ABC a million dollars. To learn more about our products, don't hesitate to contact me."

Right: "I recently worked with ABC to save them a million dollars. If you're interested, I can tell you how they did that."

Can you see the difference?

Earlier today, the CEO of Dale Carnegie Training, Peter Handal, gave me a perfect example of telling a story with the customer as the hero:

"When I give presentations to prospects, I don't explain how wonderful we are or why what we do works. Instead, I tell how Warren Buffett, when asked why he's successful, gives two reasons: 1) value investing, and 2) learning to communicate at a Carnegie seminar."

See how clever this is? Peter's story is about how Buffett (and by extension every other customer) became a successful hero through his own ideas (value investing) and with Carnegie playing a supporting role.

So your next step is clear. Go through all your sales and marketing materials and expunge every story that's about you. Only describe your company and products in the context of how a customer used them, or could use them, to win.

In short, make your customers into the hero of YOUR story as well as their story. When those two stories align, you'll make the sale.

It's really that simple.