



BEST PRACTICES

BELLWETHER FOOD GROUP, Inc.

DATE: January 7, 2011
TO: Bellwether Food Group Friends & Clients
FROM: Mac Brand
RE: Transforming the Sales Culture – **The Capabilities Presentation is Obsolete**

"Often times, the best presentation you ever give, is one that you never pull out of your briefcase"

This is the second in a series of four articles, taking a new look at how the smart organizations are approaching the important task of identifying, developing and sustaining profitable business relationships with key chain restaurant operators.

After this article, we will address two additional topics separately: The Four Essential Sales Skills; and Making Silent Selling Work in Your Organization. This article and the previous one, *Demand Creation versus Demand Fulfillment* are available on our website at www.bellwetherfoodgroup.com

Why Customers Don't Value Capabilities Presentations

In our branding, facilitation and real estate modeling work with chains we have learned quite a bit about what **not** to do. Their interest in your capabilities is very limited. What are they very interested in is how your **competencies** help them get what they want and need.

At the top of the most ineffective techniques is the well traveled, old school capabilities presentation. There are many reasons customers find these presentations a waste of time:

- The presentations are **never about** their business, their problems, their issues or their goals – it is always about you personally, and what you think your company does best – whether it has any relevance to the customer or not.
- They rarely learn anything that actually will help their business – which is about getting customers to come more often or to spend more when they do come in.

- Whatever “insights” are presented, are usually the same presentations (CREST or Technomic) that they see from every other vendor – and they are almost never customized to reflect the business position of the customer – that would provide value.

The fundamental problem with this old style approach is comprised of two parts. First, customers see the same types of presentations from every vendor – there are very few real differences. They are not compelling – the customers have seen all this before. Worse yet, many manufacturers spend time talking about how great their facilities are, in an environment where the customers later ask themselves:

“What is so special about having efficient plants? Do they think we make it a point to tell our customers how clean our restaurants are? If we did that we would probably attract much undo attention!”

Chain executives expect you to have state of the art facilities, totally integrated communication systems, shipment tracking, quality assurance competencies and protocols – you don't get any extra credit for any of those. These elements are basic requirements, **not differentiators** in the eyes of your customers.

Second, if you do all the talking when meeting with a customer, then you don't have any opportunity to find what is important to them, anything about their priorities, or how they really make decisions. We would argue that each of these three items is quite important to know if you want to be successful with a customer.

In our view the best capabilities presentation is one you never give. These presentations are not relevant to their business; it is only relevant to you. It only matters to them if that capability specifically relates to a set of competencies and skills that will provide them something they have identified as a priority for them. Under those circumstances, then they are very interested – but keep in mind that is usually **one** capability – not all of them.

The problem comes when trying to connect with those who set direction and overall strategy- The heads of marketing, operations, those in the "C" suite are focused on other issues, so a capabilities presentation around your plants, technology, etc. is very likely to fall flat and in some cases can do more damage than good.

Business literacy and professional demeanor--the new competitive differentiators

Two core competencies drive success today beyond all the things your customers expect you to have: your organizational professionalism and the level of business literacy your firm shows to the customer in every point of contact.

In our work, we often have in-depth discussions around what best vendors do, and what gets the attention of senior management. At the top of the list is the professional who manages the relationship and how that individual manages the support, as well the level of business literacy and knowledge in evidence in the day to day work.

At the senior or strategic level, they are interested in your skills and competencies, after they believe you and your organization understand:

- Their overall strategy as well the business, operations, and specific needs
- Their goals and objectives for their business over the next 18-24 months
- How what you have to offer helps them move towards their goals and objectives – does it resolve an issue or help them attain a goal? If not, don't talk about it.
- A demonstrated understanding of their culture and how they like to work with outside suppliers

At the same time, we strongly support and agree that having customers visit your facilities is an excellent idea, especially if you are proud of the facility. The greater opportunity is to have customers as guests into your organization, so they get exposed to your culture and level of professionalism, which is more important today than the facilities; everyone has excellent plants or they won't be competitive.

Meeting Preparation-Two Common Mistakes

Senior executive executives from the supplier community often make two types of mistakes. They are simple, but we keep hearing the same stories – the first is to know at least something about their operations, the second is that manufacturers don't listen to the customer.

The operation of the restaurants, the facilities, your experience with the food and service, as well as how that compares to some of their competitors is the cultural currency of the chain restaurant business. You don't need to be an expert – but you do need to demonstrate that you have at least made an effort to know their brand and operations. This is what they are most interested in; their business.

In these types of discussions is when you get the keen insights and tidbits that will give you a competitive edge. This includes things like what they are focused on, what they need, as well as the priorities, goals, challenges, and pressures they face.

At the risk of repeating ourselves, ***please visit at least 2-3 of their restaurants before going into any meeting.*** We appreciate that for many of you this may seem redundant yet our friends and clients in the chain restaurant industry tell us that even today sales people, chefs, and senior executives come in unprepared. If you are a senior executive and you come in to a

meeting with your peers at a chain restaurant company and you haven't done your homework on their business – don't go! Under those conditions, you run the risk of doing more harm than good.

The first thing the person on the other side of the desk wants to know, and will figure out in about 15 seconds, is do you know their brand and their operations! If you don't it is an immediate disqualifier and few of them will ever tell you. You don't have to be an expert, but you do need to be able to converse intelligently about their business and the related challenges. The key is that it is apparent to them that you have at least made a good faith effort.

"They don't listen". The other feedback we get is that the senior leadership team members don't listen! Enough said about that.

However, if you want to do a presentation in a first meeting with a customer, then by all means go ahead. The key to success in that first meeting, if you chose that path, is to prove to them that you have done a deep dive on their brand, their operations and their customers; that would impress them!

In summary, you will get a lot more out of your time with customers, if you think through their issues, and what they hope to accomplish as a result of investing the time with you and your organization first. Focus on what is important to them, their challenges, goals and overall direction.

Give them a short summary presentation on what you see going on with their business, and in their segments to start the meeting – and then ask for feedback and additional insights versus just telling how great your company and facilities are. You will see the difference!