

# Hunting with Arrows

I received a cold call recently from a sales rep who was pitching IT consulting services. I felt bad for her as the call was a disaster. She could not articulate any specific problems her company could tackle, the types of customers it targets or examples of how it had helped businesses similar to mine. Her employer had given her a list of companies to call and a value proposition of “we help companies solve their IT issues.” Basically she was hunting with a blindfold and a butter knife.

Many companies fail their salespeople by not equipping them with clear value propositions to hunt with. When salespeople lack clarity in their offering one of two symptoms can emerge. First, salespeople focus on existing customer relationships. It is much easier to go deep and wide in an account once the salesperson has developed rapport and understanding with the buyer. The second symptom, which can be even more dangerous, is each salesperson interprets the corporate offering and develops their own value proposition. When this happens your brand gets fractured every time a salesperson engages a customer.

## Why should I buy from you?

Most companies have a great product or service, but why should I buy? Customers are often hesitant to spend money, but they will make investments to solve problems. Developing your unique selling proposition (USP) should start by answering the key problems you solve in very clear terms. Buyers don't think in broad sweeping concepts, but in targeted issues that they can solve and push past. In the book *The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding*, Al and Laura Ries relate the story of how ACT software defined itself as a “contact



manager.” When the Rieses first engaged Patrick Sullivan, then CEO of ACT, they asked him what his software did. He responded: “Everything! ACT keeps track of your calendar, your correspondence, your mailing list, and your expense accounts. ACT literally does everything.” Could you imagine trying to sell a software package that does everything?

The company acquired its impressive market share and brand recognition once it brought clarity to its sales message. They redefined ACT as a “contact and customer management to individuals and organizations involved in selling and other functions where management of contact details, activities and communications is critical.” We can easily categorize it, define the problems it solves and when we should buy it.

**Companies fail their sales reps when they neglect to equip them with a clear unique selling proposition**

## Finding triggers to move people to action

Finding your USP is not about what you have to sell, but the problems you solve for your customers. The classic definition of a USP is a statement that clearly articulates what sets you apart and makes you different in the marketplace. The problem is it is focused on you, not the customer. When a USP is focused on your product or service you will see sales reps using lines like “total cost of ownership,” “return on investment,” and “improve efficiency.” These might be great overall deliverables, but they are not enough to trigger a person to buy. To bring a prospect to action you need to identify specific problems that carry an emotional connection for the buyer, a trigger event. A trigger event is a problem or event a person is willing to take action to solve.

