

Selling Technology: How to Create Value-Added Benefits Statements

Achieve Maximum Results with Your B2B Technical Marketing Message

Rev 1.0

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<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>WHAT ARE FEATURES AND BENEFITS?</u>	<u>2</u>
FEATURES COMMUNICATE FACTS	2
BENEFITS COMMUNICATE VALUE	3
<u>CREATING VALUE-ADDED BENEFITS STATEMENTS</u>	<u>4</u>
STEP 1: CREATE A TECHNOLOGY BUYER'S PROFILE	4
STEP 2: CREATE BENEFITS PHRASES	4
STEP 3: ADD CREDIBILITY WITH FEATURES	5
<u>COMMUNICATING TO YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE</u>	<u>6</u>
MARKETING TO EXPERTS: ENGINEERS AND RESEARCH SCIENTISTS	6
MARKETING TO IMPLEMENTERS: APPLICATION ENGINEERS AND TECHNICIANS	6
MARKETING TO DECISION MAKERS: MANAGERS AND TECHNICAL OFFICERS	7
<u>COMMON VALUE-ADDED BENEFITS PHRASES</u>	<u>7</u>
IT SERVICES AND SOLUTIONS	7
SOFTWARE TECHNOLOGY	7
HARDWARE TECHNOLOGY	8
<u>CONCLUSION</u>	<u>8</u>

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Introduction

Selling technology to a highly educated, well-informed business-to-business (B2B) audience is no simple task. Your success depends on how well you convey the value of your products and services from the customer's perspective.

In our "feature-saturated" high-tech marketplace, most technical marketing teams struggle to maintain proper balance between features and benefits. A quick search of the Internet proves that there are unlimited examples of companies still touting product specifications as benefits. Without a value-added message, companies dilute their technical marketing efforts and leave money on the table.

The goal of this whitepaper is to provide an outline that helps you:

- Distinguish between features and benefits
- Create benefits statements that leverage features
- Understand how to market to experts, implementers, and decision makers
- Craft generic benefits phrases used in key B2B technology sectors such as:
 - ✓ IT Services and Solutions
 - ✓ Software
 - ✓ Hardware

What are Features and Benefits?

Features Communicate Facts

Features are raw facts about a product or service. This information is usually found in product specifications, technical briefs, and engineering documents.

Examples of features include:

- "Supports 3D graphics acceleration"
- "Contains a CPU running at 4GHz"
- "New CCD with 8 mega-pixel resolution"
- "Supports Unicode multi-language"
- "Synchronized lyrics display"
- "Supports multiple formats"

Marketing teams typically use feature-based statements to "imply" benefits to jargon-savvy technical experts. Unfortunately, features tend to be subjective in value and depend largely on the technical expert's interpretations.

How to Create Value-Added Benefits Statements.....

A feature-based marketing statement dilutes your Unique Selling Proposition and confuses the target audience. For example, one prospect may translate “supports multiple formats” as a way to hack around issues with a particular data type, making her job easier. However, another prospect may translate “supports multiple formats” as masking problems with a standard format, making the prospect’s integration tasks more difficult.

Feature-based statements primarily target technical experts. However, technical experts are not the decision makers in a corporation — managers are. Instead, simultaneously target technical experts and managers through a value-added benefits statement.

Benefits Communicate Value

Within B2B technical marketing, value-added benefits are specific advantages a product or service offers, and shows the prospect what’s in it for “him”. Properly constructed benefit statements motivate a business to take action based upon technical needs, anticipated productivity gains, and a desire to accelerate time to revenue.

Your job as a technical marketer is to gain the prospect’s attention by framing the challenge that’s important to the prospect. Then, use value-added triggers to motivate the prospect to take action. To do this, you must first understand the prospect’s technical needs and market challenges.

Furthermore, benefits statements must tie into your corporate Unique Selling Proposition (USP) — how your product or service is different, unique, or fundamentally better than anything else in the market.

Simple examples of benefit statements include:

- “Accelerate time to revenue”
- “Reduce market risk”
- “Lower support and development costs”
- “Enable creativity and innovation”

Creating Value-Added Benefits Statements

Step 1: Create a Technology Buyer's Profile

The best way to determine the optimal terminology for your benefits statement is to harvest them directly from your target audience. This requires generating a buyer's profile that goes into further detail than your initial technical marketing analysis.

Seed the buyer's profile with information gleaned from prospect meetings, technical market research, and the prospect's corporate communications material (PR collateral, websites, etc). At a minimum, the profile should answer the following questions:

- What are the current and future trends in the prospect's market, and how could you leverage those trends to influence a buying decision?
- What ideas, facts, and phrases are likely to motivate the prospect?
- What tactics does the prospect's competition use to plant fear, uncertainty, and doubt in the marketplace?
- Should you be marketing to an internal audience (management/engineering), and if so, how?

Treat the buyer's profile as a living document, updated as market and technical conditions require.

Step 2: Create Benefits Phrases

Once you have generated the buyer's profile, create short phrases that frame the challenges specific to your prospect.

High-tech companies run lean and live or die based upon how quickly they can get quality products to market. Use this "uncertainty principle" as the basis for your technical marketing statements.

The following foundational phrases cover a wide range of technology sectors:

- "Accelerates time to revenue"
- "Reduces market risk"
- "Lowers support and development costs"
- "Enables creativity and innovation"
- "Generates easy migration"
- "Boosts productivity"
- "Enables reuse and extensibility"
- "Keeps you ahead of the technology curve"

Step 3: Add Credibility with Features

In B2B technical marketing, specifics sell. That's why catchy phrases alone rarely open doors — you must focus and qualify your benefits phrase with specific features.

The most powerful benefits statement uses terminology familiar to your prospect, frames the challenge most important to them, and contains features that reinforce the claim.

Note how the benefits phrases developed in Step 2 above become credible after adding features:

- “STL’s OOP components accelerate time to revenue by removing barriers to algorithm integration.”
- “Reduce your market risk by leveraging the proven CMM standard used by 99% of Enterprise solutions.
- “The MAC32’s PCI IEEE interface lowers support and development costs by eliminating custom coding.”
- “User-configurable menus and hotkeys enable creativity and innovation throughout your organization.”
- “NanoTime boosts simulation productivity by eliminating time-consuming analysis iterations.”

With a little more creativity, you can deepen the benefits message with a second sentence that parallels the first:

“The NET6 128-bit interface improves office productivity by quadrupling server throughput over your current environment. As a result, you’ll get 60-hours of work from your 40-hour a week employees.”

In summary, adding features and product details elevates your benefits phrase into a complete value-added benefit statement.

Communicating to Your Target Audience

Technical marketing professionals understand that each target audience has different motivators and perceived needs. The sections below provide an overview of the primary audience you will encounter during B2B technical marketing: experts, implementers, and decision makers.

Winning a technical sales engagement requires that you sell to all three categories simultaneously.

Marketing to Experts: Engineers and Research Scientists

Engineers and scientists are typically the most challenging target audience to deal with. They are the experts, and can be your best friend, or worst enemy.

Because engineers and scientists demand complete control over technology, your marketing message must specifically target their interests: algorithms, performance, and tangible features. When presenting to experts, back up every one of your value-added benefit statements with technical descriptions, flow charts, and verifiable case studies.

Beware that engineers and scientists tend to mistrust marketing and sales professionals, and demand objective verification of technical claims to expose “fluff” from “utility.”

Make sure that you communicate your product or service as a significant leap over the prospect’s in-house solutions. Otherwise, your client’s experts will trump your efforts by claiming that given enough time and resources, their team can implement a “more optimal” solution than yours.

For best results, communicate to engineers and scientists using feature-heavy benefits backed by verifiable case studies.

Marketing to Implementers: Application Engineers and Technicians

This audience represents the “application specialists” whose role it is to implement the engineer’s ideas and convert them into real products and procedures. The application specialist’s approach to technology tends to be practical, and limited to what is necessary to get the job done.

Like engineers and scientists, application specialists will detect “fluff” in a marketing message given their expertise on what really works. In reality, the application specialists will be the grunt workers responsible for implementing the technology you are marketing.

For best results, communicate to application specialists using interoperability, ease of use, maintainability, and accessible customer support as part of your value-added benefit statement.

Marketing to Decision Makers: Managers and Technical Officers

Managers are your primary technical marketing target since they typically hold the purse strings. Managers will generally be your key point of contact throughout a technical sales engagement. Once you establish a positive relationship, management will put you in contact with the technical experts within their organization.

Managers evaluating new technology consider the following questions during their analysis:

- Is the technology compatible with the current process or will it disrupt operations if implemented?
- How quickly will the technology pay for itself?
- What is the technology's success record at other companies with similar challenges?
- Will the technology be reusable for the next project?
- Will the company selling the technology still be in business and supporting the technology 18 months from now?

For best results, communicate to managers using anticipated gains in productivity, improved reuse, high quality, and long-term customer support as part of your value-added benefit statement.

Common Value-Added Benefits Phrases

The examples below are common value-added benefits phrases used as triggers during technical marketing. Each benefits phrase becomes a targeted value-added benefits statement after expansion with your product or service's unique features.

IT Services and Solutions

- Guarantees network and data security
- Network optimized for maximum efficiency
- Proactive support ensures zero-downtime
- Disk mirroring prevents data loss
- Improves migration opportunities

Software Technology

- Reduces requirements analysis, development, and testing workload
- Small data footprint optimized for high performance

How to Create Value-Added Benefits Statements.....

- Modular approach improves design reuse and enables extensibility
- Improves quality
- Boosts usability
- Faster time to market

Hardware Technology

- Small footprint improves ergonomics
- Low power consumption for portable applications
- Low EMI emission for consumer applications
- Contains few moving parts for high reliability
- Easily accessible expansion ports for user configurability

Conclusion

An audience-targeted, value-added benefits message is a solid foundation on which to build your technical marketing strategy. As shown in this whitepaper, you must clearly understand the key differences between features and benefits — features communicate facts, benefits communicate value.

Before creating your message, research your target audience thoroughly to discover key phrases and terminology. Then, design and frame your value-added benefits statements to simultaneously target the experts, implementers, and decision makers throughout your technical sales engagement.

Keep in mind that that experts and implementers demand performance, control, and tangible features. Decision makers demand gains in productivity, time to market improvements, and ROI, but will rely on input from experts and implementers prior to buying.

Once you have created a baseline value-added benefits message, leapfrog your competition by including it in all of your pre-sales, sales, and post-sales efforts.