

Selling Commodity Products

Finding ways to build value in your sales process

by: Derek Shebby, Modern Sales Training

Can you build value when selling a candle? Absolutely. Let me explain: My family recently moved into a new home and, shortly after moving in, we invited all of our neighbors over for a get-together. It was around the holiday season, so some neighbors brought us “welcome-to-the-neighborhood” gifts. One of them was a candle.

Now, I am not a candle connoisseur. My wife is the one who typically buys the candles for the house. Me? I couldn't tell you the difference between the types of candles on the market. A candle is just a candle.

However, this candle was different. It was inside a small blue box, maybe 3 inches to 4 inches high, with a fancy emblem on the front and the name “diptyque” written on it.

Inside the box was a candle with a gold lid and a small, 2-by-2-inch mini paper booklet describing the contents. All of the pages inside were in other languages, from French to Chinese. Somewhere in the middle of the booklet, I found the one English page I could decipher. This is what it said:

“Diptyque candles are the product of luxury craftsmanship. Fine, rare and precious, the raw materials that compose each perfume are selected with the utmost care. Because each fragrance concentrate reacts to heat in a different way, meticulous care is taken to strike the right balance between the concentrate, the wax and the wick. To achieve a perfect diffusion of the perfume, each candle benefits from a unique blend of high-quality waxes, with wick material and diameter selected for optimal combustion. It takes two days to make each candle and eight separate processes, most of which are still done by hand. A range of accessories has been specially designed to care for the candles and ensure they are enjoyed throughout their lives: wick trimmer, snuffer, stands, lid and candleholders.”

I could not help but think this might be the most luxurious candle I had ever heard of. This candle sounded expensive. Why was I feeling that way after reading this passage? As a salesperson, I found myself appreciating the tactics that Diptyque strategically used to build value around something as commoditized as a candle. As someone who is



always looking for practical ways to build value in products, this made me want to dive in further on what worked on me here and how I could systemize it to apply it to other industries (like our beloved office technology space).

What stood out to me was the detailed, step-by-step story taken to describe how the candle was made. Every line in the booklet explained the process the maker went through to reach perfection and the resulting luxury product. This particular part of the passage — “it takes two days to make each candle and eight separate processes, most of which are still done by hand” — blew me away. This was not just a candle; this was a one-of-a-kind gift. No wonder it is priced at the premium level that it is today.

How much do you think this candle should cost? \$25? \$50? \$100? \$200? After all, we are just talking about a candle here.

If you managed to resist going to the Diptyque website to look these candles up, I will spoil the price for you. The candle is \$76, and it is also the most inexpensive candle option on their website. It makes sense that it is \$76 — after all, it should be. You get what you pay for.

So how could we follow a similar process to build value in the products that we sell? If we take the case of Diptyque candles, then we need to ask ourselves if our salespeople can clearly talk about the process, care and passion that goes into making the technology we are providing our customers. Do they understand the step-by-step care that is put into the manufacturing process or the amount of time our engineers put into solving real problems our customers are facing? Because being able to explain that leads to value.

We could do the same thing with the solutions we provide, from VoIP to PaperCut to water solutions. Why were they made? What were they made for? What level of care was taken to design them to solve the exact problems being faced by our customers? How skilled are our salespeople at explaining this in a way that builds value?

We could do the same thing for our MPS or MITS programs. A lot of companies out there provide similar programs. What makes our programs different? Maybe there is an opportunity

to be better at explaining the step-by-step process we go through to provide exceptional customer service. The level of detail should be covered and spelled out to showcase the passion our program has to better serve our customers.

In all cases, there is a story about our product, our solutions and our programs that gets lost in the sale. Our prospects rarely hear about it, and that is a mistake. We are missing out on an opportunity to build value and differentiation.

If you are fighting that commodity battle in your business and you are always in that price war, then you need to remember that if a candlemaker can sell its candles at a premium price, so can you. There are plenty of ways to build value in your sales process. ■

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Imaging Systems in 2009. During his tenure, Shebby oversaw the performance and development of hundreds of salespeople and sales leaders across the state. Specializing in the entire sales process, he helped grow MRC from \$40 million to more than \$100 million in annual revenue (30 to 500 employees). Since 2020, Shebby has coached dealership sales managers, vice presidents and presidents to sales growth and profitability by implementing proven industry strategies and modern sales leadership processes. He also runs a sales boot camp that is being utilized by the top dealers in the country and has a Building Value Training Series that helps reps of all tenures gain more profit and income in their deals. Shebby can be reached at derek@modernsalestraining.com and has exclusive sales trainings for BTA members at www.modernsalestraining.com/BTA. Visit www.modernsalestraining.com.

