

Features, Advantages & Benefits: What's the difference?--- Gavin Finn, Software Company CEO

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A sales associate at the bicycle store was struggling to get the prospective customer, a man in his mid thirties, to understand his point. "This bicycle has an advanced foam seat!" he kept explaining as his justification for the inflated price (as compared with the other bicycle that the prospect was evaluating.) The look of confusion would not leave the prospect's face. In all likelihood, he wanted to say "So what???" but was too polite, or shy. Ultimately, he bought the less expensive bike.

The sales associate failed to explain his point because he was selling a feature (the foam seat.) **No-one buys features.** This is particularly true in B2B marketing and sales. People, and companies, buy **benefits**.

In the case above, the sales person assumed that the customer would be able to figure out the benefit on his own. This is the also most common problem in technical B2B sales processes - sales and marketing people are so close to the features, they forget to articulate the key issue - *what differences do these features make to the customer, and how will their outcome be better because of these differences?*

Here is the breakdown in the above example:

- Feature: foam seat
- Advantage: softer than springs
- Benefit: rider's rear end hurts less

Is it worth the customer sending a bit more money to have a more pleasant riding experience? Probably. But the sales person implicitly expected the customer to come to that conclusion on his own. As a result, the customer could not justify an additional expense because, in his mind, the expense was associated with a feature rather than a benefit that he cared about.

If you are in B2B sales or marketing, **don't leave the logical progression from feature to benefit up to your customer** - particularly for very technical features. Explain the benefit *first*. If that is a benefit that the prospect cares about, they will be interested in how your solution is able to deliver that benefit. You then explain how your solution has the specific *advantage over other solutions* that leads to that benefit. The customer might want to know what it is about your

solution that gives it this advantage, and then you can explain about the *feature that delivers that specific advantage*.

Knowing the difference between features, advantages, and benefits is essential for marketers and salespeople - especially when there are multiple constituents in the buying process. Each person or group involved in the purchasing process needs a very simple and clear understanding of how their outcomes will be improved after buying and implementing the solution.

For **each** role/constituent in your customer's buying ecosystem, follow this three-step process for making this happen:

1. Identify their key business drivers (costs, time-to-market, quality, etc.)
2. Find a connection between the customers' business drivers and your solution - map your benefits to the key business drivers; (Your solution may not address every business driver, so identify only those that are actually improved by implementing your solution);
3. Link the competitive *advantages* of your solution to those business drivers, and find the *features* that enable each advantage.

When struggling to distinguish these within your own product, ask yourself: Is this the "foam seat", the "softer" advantage, or the "hurts less" benefit?