

## Is There Value in Your Value Statement?

By Sharon Berman

"What is your value statement?" This critical question is challenging to answer, but doing so strengthens your marketing.

Value statements tell your prospective client or referral source in a clear and concise way what value you will deliver—how they will be better off after going through your "black box."

Unfortunately, the vast majority of those marketing professional services cannot succinctly describe the value their service provides. They can describe what they do but not what the essential value is of their services. Most professionals will tell you they know what value they bring, but when asked to articulate its worth, they need three paragraphs to describe it. By then, however, the listener has long lost interest.

Not only does a strong statement help you capture the attention of prospective buyers, but it also goes a long way toward differentiating you from your competition. The advantage will be yours if you can clearly communicate how the client will be better off because of you, as opposed to simply describing a transaction.

The question isn't whether you bring value, but how to communicate it quickly and clearly. The more succinct something needs to be, the more challenging it is to develop—and the more thought that needs to be given to it. In this way, value statements are similar to taglines—because they're short, they look deceptively simple to create. You see a lot of generic taglines, e.g., "a commitment to excellence," because businesses and professionals give up when they realize the amount of thought, analysis,



and cost it takes to develop a worthwhile tagline.

However, value statements often differ from taglines, which have more of a promotional bent. Your tagline may be clever, catchy, and memorable, which is what it should be, but you have to consider whether it conveys what you do and the value the client will receive from purchasing your services. Additionally, your tagline and logo go hand-in-hand in your marketing materials. That's not always the rule with your value statement. There is a place for both taglines and value statements in your marketing program.

Let me interrupt here and say that we can extensively debate the definitions and differences between your value statement, value proposition, tagline, slogans, etc. The definitions vary among marketing professionals. What I'm concerned with is how to create your own value statement.

### What Do You Do?

To develop a strong statement, begin by answering a few questions, whether

individually or in a brainstorming session with colleagues. Consider what you do, and write down the essential value you bring clients. You can have a statement for each service line, then find the common thread and wrap them up into one. Don't censor yourself or your colleagues, and don't stop to wordsmith your thoughts. Just get the ideas flowing. Start with these questions:

- What do we do for our clients?
- Why is that important to them?
- What do they appreciate about our service?
- What is the essential value we're bringing them?
- What does our firm do differently than others?
- Why do our clients think we're different?

In terms of identifying the value you bring clients, you want to dig deeper than just the end result. Consider that the benefit you bring clients is more than what you ostensibly leave them with.

For example, an IT consulting firm gets and keeps a business's systems up and running so that the business owner doesn't have to think about it. The IT firm can also identify efficiencies and help improve how clients use technology. On the surface, that is what that professional is doing. The essential question, though, is: "What ultimate value does this bring the

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client?" The real value goes beyond the service provided; it includes the peace of mind that frees clients to focus on other aspects of business. Likewise, the real value of increased efficiency is ultimately a contribution to the firm's revenue potential.

Write down words that relate to the answers to your questions, e.g., efficiency, reduce, increase, smoothly, finely tuned, etc. Think in terms of action words and phrases, such as we generate, we create, develop, reduce, increase, etc.

Now comes the more challenging part. You want to think about how to distill the answers to your questions into one statement that encapsulates the thoughts you've generated. Your statement should be short and sweet, ideally 10 to 12 words; however, don't worry about the length at this point. Play around with sentences. Again, don't censor. One imperfect sentence can lead to a perfect one. Ask others for their input on what you've developed.

Take a look at your longer phrases and think about how you can further reduce them. Share them with others you trust to get their feedback. Put these thoughts aside

and return to them the following day. If you find yourself stuck, you may want to engage professional marketing support.

Here is an example of a value statement:

- From author and consultant Andrew Sobel – "I help companies and individuals build clients for life." He uses it as a tagline by shortening it to "Helping Companies and Individuals Build Clients for Life."

Begin listening and looking for value statements in other professionals' elevator speeches, websites, etc. You'll see that good ones are hard to find. Once you have your value statement, start incorporating it into your marketing in proposals, on LinkedIn, in other marketing materials, and one-on-one with referral sources and prospective clients.

You can see what a challenge it is to develop a resonant value statement. However, once you do, you have a tool in your marketing arsenal that can cut through clutter and make you heard. ■

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