



Ewan Pearson

Incomplete Benefits

Ewan Pearson compares pitches with basketball to explain why so many of them need work

It's great to provide effective and efficient services, but what does that actually mean?

Not a lot, it would seem. We do a lot of work on pitches and other acts of persuasion every year, and have been doing so for over 25 years now. In that time, the reasons why someone wins and someone else loses have barely changed. They boil down to three main criteria that are: mainly logical and rational; sometimes emotional and rational; and occasionally emotional and irrational. Always though, there is a set of decision-level criteria that the buyer has, and the key to success is to get a better score on these than anyone else.

We help with all three of these categories, but to give me some focus and a reasonable word count, I want to look here at the idea of logical, rational arguments placed in support of case, and our frequent finding that these arguments are not well made.

Usually, you see, the problem is that people who pitch don't usually finish off the job. They play the game of basketball, bouncing the ball from person to person, observing the rules, and then take a shot at goal, only to stop with the ball freeze-framed, suspended above the net, as if

finished. All the spectators groan at the lack of a 'dunk', the ball is not put into the hoop, does not fall through the net, and does not score the points. Instead, we are left in suspense until time drifts on, the spectators go home, and the match is lost.

No, I have not taken leave of my senses or taken some illicit substance. It's a metaphor for what so many teams do when they pitch.

They are OK, and sometimes even quite good, at explaining what they would do if they won the work - the features of their products or services - but when it comes to describing how the client might benefit, they fall short so often.

A typical pitch will crescendo to the ultimate claim that what you would get is *insight*, or that they would *add value*, or that what they'd do for you will make your business more *efficient*, *effective*, *seamless*, *sustainable* or *productive*. The problem with all those lovelies is that the buyer nods wisely with an inane rictus grin on their faces, trying not to show the pain, but inside there is agony, fog, spaghetti, a dullness that only happens when we are thinking 'I don't have a bloomin' clue what you're on about, not a sausage, nope, nada, keine, nicht. It sounded

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Grant Pearson Brown
Consulting Ltd.

The Presentation &
Business Development
Specialists

Advice *squeezed*
straight from the
experts



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good, but... wha... huh?’

In polite circles we call these statements ‘incomplete benefits’. That is, the argument has progressed well from an explanation of what the product or service is (please leave the sales team now if you can’t even do that), but it never reached its destination. These words may be common in business pitches, but they are

abstract and thus almost meaningless without tangible examples or elaboration to advance them to match what the client wants to achieve. The ultimate destination should be a clear and explicit statement of how the client will, in the end, benefit most from the product or service that is being pitched, i.e. put the ball through the net. It has to be specific, relevant, and valued by the client, and that means if they want a watch, don’t try to sell them a clock. It also means you must ask them what they want, and if they don’t know, be skilful at discussion and asking questions to find out. The pitch also has to be better at that than anyone else’s proposition, but we all know that... even if sometimes, for example in audit pitches, it seems almost impossible to speak to that. That’s where we are called in, often a bit late in the game, to put the fire out. I do love Mixaphors (mixed metaphors)!

The most typical end benefits can be counted on one hand. They are saving or making money; reducing risk

(including financial and reputational); reducing hassle; making or saving time; and looking good. I can be clear about that list because, having derived it over the last 25 years, and having asked our clients continually to suggest others, none have come forth... yet.

If you do have to say words like *efficient* and *effective* (and pitchers often do say both as some sort of triumphant pairing), then you have taken the ball to the hoop, but to dunk it through the net you must



When you are pitching, always make sure you finish off the job.

go further.

In the next article, Hasnaê explains that price is normally not the reason why pitches are lost. It’s true. But it can be that one of the pitching firms has offered an excellent service at a premium price, and the client is thinking ‘but that’s not what I asked for, want or need’. It hits a huge Cold Button. They lose because they are offering something the client didn’t want, and that is all down to a combination of a shortfall in pre-pitch conversation with them to find out what really matters, and the building of a pitch based on that conversation.

So I have some simple advice for you: if you are preparing a pitch, find out what the client needs most of all, then build your pitch. And if then you hear one of these incomplete

benefits, ask the ‘so what?’ question. Ask what *efficiency* or *effectiveness* (or the others) mean in this specific context, and build the logic bridge to one or more of the end benefits I have listed above. Then all you have to do is be the best at providing that, and the best at explaining why. Simples.

Happy pitching.

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