

Selling to Big Companies

**STRONG
VALUE
PROPOSITIONS**

*The Critical Foundation for
All Your Sales & Marketing*

JILL KONRATH

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All Your Sales & Marketing*

Jill Konrath

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What is a Value Proposition?

Without a strong value proposition, it's much harder to sell your products or services in today's economy, much less even get in the door of big companies. But what exactly is a value proposition? And how is it different from other commonly used terms?

A value proposition is often confused with an "Elevator Speech" or a "Unique Selling Proposition." It's essential to understand the differences between these terms because their purposes and sales impact are very different.

An Elevator Speech is a short, 1-2 sentence statement that defines who you work with (target market) and the general area in which you help them. About 10 seconds long, it's used primarily at networking events to attract potential clients and stimulate discussion. The following Elevator Speeches show you how some people describe what they do:

- "I work with small businesses who are struggling to sell their products or services into large corporate accounts."
- "We help technology companies effectively use their customer information to drive repeat sales."
- "I help small-to-medium sized manufacturing companies who have difficulties with unpredictable revenue streams."

An Elevator Speech is the foundation of a value proposition without the specifics that are needed to sell into the corporate market. (For more info, check out my eBook, "Attracting More Customers".)

A Unique Selling Proposition (USP) is a statement about what makes you and your company different from other vendors. Its primary value is to create competitive differentiation. A USP is often used in marketing materials or in talking with customers who are ready to buy.

Here are a few good USP examples:

- We specialize in working with financial institutions. (specialty)
- We guarantee service in 4 hours or your money back. (guarantee)
- We use a unique tool called SureFire! to analyze your critical needs. (methodology)

Helping customers understand your USP is imperative when they've already decided to make a purchase decision. But USPs have absolutely no impact when customers are satisfied with their situation or when they're frustrated but haven't yet decided to change. USPs are far more effective in the business-to-consumer market than in business-to-business sales.

Both the Elevator Speech and the USP are cousins of the value proposition, but lack the punch of a value proposition when selling to the corporate market.

A value proposition is a clear statement of the tangible results a customer gets from using your products or services. It's outcome focused and stresses the business value of your offering.

A strong value proposition is specific, often citing numbers or percentages. It may include a quick synopsis of your work with similar customers as a proof source and demonstration of your capability. Here are several examples to stimulate your thinking:

"We help large companies reduce the cost of their employee benefits programs without impacting benefit levels. With the spiraling costs of health care today, this is a critical issue for most businesses. One of our recent clients, a large manufacturing company similar to yours, was struggling with how to reduce spending in this area. We saved them over \$800,000 in just six months. Plus, they didn't cut any services to their employees, nor did their employees have to pay more."

~~~~~

*"I help technology companies who are launching an important new product into the marketplace – and need it to be successful to achieve their sales forecast. Where I help my clients is in the often dropped hand-off between marketing and sales. As a result, they're able to more easily meet projected sales goals and significantly shorten time-to-profitability."*

Again, notice the specificity of the value proposition and the use of business-oriented language. Prospective customers should be able to visualize exactly what value you could bring their organization.

## The Epidemic of Weak Value Propositions

If you're selling to the corporate market, one of the biggest challenges you encounter is getting face time with decision makers.

### **Stressed Out Buyers**

Corporate buyers, after years of continual downsizings and reorganizations, have way too much work to do and not nearly enough time to do it in. Under constant pressure to deliver "results," they zealously protect their schedule, refusing to meet with anybody who can't help them achieve their business objectives.

Busy decision makers screen all callers, using an administrative assistant as a gatekeeper or their ubiquitous voicemail. And, if you're selling something – you're an undesirable interruption. Customers don't have time to update you on their company, sit through an extended needs analysis or explore the possibilities of working together.

They don't want to learn about your products or services just so they can know what's out there. With every dollar they spend being scrutinized by higher-ups, wasting money on frivolous products or nice-to-have services is out of the question. So unless something can be cost-justified and provide a significant return on their investment, they don't want to take time to hear about it.

Not only that, but they're also bombarded with people and companies trying to get their attention. It's not unusual for corporate decision makers to average over 100 emails per day. Their voice mailbox is flooded with calls from co-workers, customers and outside vendors.

And what do they usually hear from people like you who are trying to get in and sell their products or services? A typical phone message sounds like this:

*"Hi Mr./Ms. Decisionmaker. This is Tony from Super Duper Products, Inc. We specialize in leading-edge financial software applications and have been rated as having one of the best software by Krumstock Research.*

*"The reason I'm calling is that I'd like to set up an appointment with you to introduce myself and to tell you more about how we might be able to help your company speed up your reporting capabilities.*

*"I'll be in your area in two weeks and was hoping to sit down with you for about a half hour. Please let me know if that will work for you. My number is ..."*

Why in the world would corporate decision makers take time out of their already overcrowded schedule to meet with this seller? They wouldn't. Pure and simple. Even though the seller mentioned a benefit, it was weak – very weak.

### **Ineffective and Unappealing**

One of the biggest reasons businesses struggle in today's market is because they have weak value propositions. Over and over again, I hear people who sell deliver ineffective statements about the value customers get from working with their organization. It doesn't matter if these sellers are from big companies, small firms, or are independent professionals. They just aren't saying things that get prospective buyers to say, "Come on in. We need to meet."

*And the worst thing is that many of the products or services these people sell have extremely high value to corporate accounts!*

*But their failure to articulate it in words that appeal to corporate decision makers is their downfall. Instead, they limp along trying to drive sales but unable to even get in the door.*

In discussing their company's products, many people use value propositions such as:

- It's the most technology-advanced system in the market today.
- We offer the most robust enterprise system with the widest range of capabilities available.

- Our system was rated best-in-class at the recent Big Deal Conference.
- We are the low-cost provider of this kind of product/service.
- We offer one-stop shopping.
- We have a full range of products to meet your every need in the manufacturing area.”

Service firms and independent professionals often say:

- I’m an OD consultant. I do team building and process re-engineering.
- We design brochures, web sites, and packaging materials.”
- We help improve creativity and innovation in organizations.
- I do sales training.
- I help companies decide which technology best meets their needs.
- I’m an attorney. I do corporate tax work.

BORING!!! If you’re like most people, you’re saying, “So what? Why should I waste my valuable time talking to you?”

Plus any time people hear words such as best, leading, superior and so on – they immediately dismiss them as self-promoting aggrandizement. These words are simply not believable and detract from your message.

## Customer-Attracting Value Propositions

With today's tight economy, a strong value proposition breaks through the clutter and gets the attention of overburdened decision makers. If you haven't found a way to state your value in business terms, you're in for a never-ending struggle to get business.

Strong value propositions open doors and create opportunities for you to sell your products or services. They're financially oriented and speak to the critical issues your target market is facing.

I recently read an article in Business 2.0 about a company called DemandTec. Their software calculates exactly how much retailers should charge to squeeze the maximum profit from every product and at any time.

During an 8-week test with one retailer, revenues jumped 10%, unit volume increased 6% and net profit grew 2% due to their price-optimization capabilities. Payback is expected within 12 months. That's their value proposition!

What retailer wouldn't want to learn more about what this company does! As I was reading the article, I could almost see the retailer's senior management team salivating over the information in it.

*That's the power of a strong value proposition.*

A while back I had lunch with the president of a \$1/2 billion division of a major corporation. She told me that if someone contacted her and said he could reduce waste by just 1%, she would meet with him immediately. Why? Because she knew exactly how much her company spent on waste – and it was a lot of money. Every penny she saved would go right to the bottom line.

Again, powerful value propositions open doors – quickly! Taking time to really clarify yours is well worth the time invested in the process.

### **Business-Oriented Terminology**

Strong value propositions are always stated in business terms. Corporate buyers are particularly attracted to phrases such as:

- Increased revenues
- Faster time to market
- Decreased costs
- Improved operational efficiency
- Increased market share
- Decreased employee turnover
- Improved customer retention levels
- Increased competitive differentiation
- Faster response time
- Decreased operational expenses
- Increased sales per customer
- Reduced cost of sales
- Improved asset utilization
- Faster collections
- Reduced cost of goods sold
- Minimized risk
- Additional revenue streams
- Increased market share
- Improved time-to-profitability
- Increased billable hours
- Reduced cycle time
- Increased inventory turns
- Faster sales cycles
- Reduced direct labor costs

Can your business do any of these things? How about something similar?

Perhaps you've never really thought about your products or services in these terms. But this is what corporate decision makers want to hear so it's time to revisit your value proposition.

Think about translating what you do into the language of decision makers. Remember, they don't care about your product's speed or efficiency. They don't care about the wonderful methodology you use. They care about the results it delivers.

When you find the right words to describe your offering, you'll immediately notice a change in how you're treated. Corporate buyers will want to learn more about what you do.

### **Tangible, Measurable Results**

The very best value propositions deliver tangible, measurable results that are highly desirable to prospective buyers. Yet many companies fail to extend their "benefits" into actual numbers. If it's possible for you to do this, it is highly recommended.

Specificity sells. The more specific your value proposition, the more attractive it is. Stories are another way of providing specificity, enabling you to get your message across but without having to make unsubstantiated, across-the-board claims.

I recently wrote a book, "Winning More Sales: Take Your Business to the Next Level with Insightful, Powerful Questions." One of the first people to purchase the book from my website wrote me a note saying that my advice helped him land a \$26,000 sale the very next day. With his permission, I'm using that quote to promote my book. It makes the price seem miniscule compared to the value received!

### **Sellers as the Real Value Proposition**

In today's market, with less and less differentiation between products and services, sometimes the seller is the real value proposition. Customers buy the knowledge, expertise and ideas he or she brings to the relationship.

For many salespeople this is a totally new and unfamiliar paradigm – and they're unprepared to sell their own personal worth. But many sellers do bring extraordinary value to their customers – sometimes in easily quantifiable ways, sometimes not.

A woman I know is a sock salesperson who does business with major retailers. Socks are commodities and pricing is often the primary criteria in decision-making. But not for this salesperson. She helps her customers increase sales to their clientele by:

- Regularly shopping the competition and advising her customers about market trends.
- Designing packaging alternatives to encourage customers to buy more socks at one time.

- Developing creative displays that entice customers to buy socks more often.
- Creating unique designs for trendy sock styles for special occasions and seasons.

These things are NOT part of her job description. She's chartered to sell socks. But instead she's bringing her knowledge of design, color and style to the customer relationship. Her customers reap huge benefits. Inventory is turning faster than ever before, sales are up and so is profitability.

Her value proposition is highly personal, but it's what differentiates her from everyone else in the marketplace. When she's in a competitive situation, she needs to share what she herself does for customers – and let them know they're getting a business consultant in addition to a sock supplier.

This is the new and emerging reality in value propositions. In a world where products rapidly spiral into commodities and service offerings can be copied overnight, the only real difference between suppliers is the people involved. You, the seller, become the value proposition – and a huge factor in the decision that's made.

## Value Propositions & Service Businesses

Many consultants and professional services providers find it difficult to quantify the measurable results customers realize from using their offerings. Because of this, they think they can't come up with a strong value proposition.

I understand why they feel this way. With 15 years of consulting under my belt, none of my product launch clients measured or assessed the effectiveness of my work. There are many reasons for this - not enough time to compare before/after results, the lack of a benchmark and the multiple factors that impact a new product's market success. But like many of you, I lacked good hard data.

However, this did not stop me from talking about what I did in business terms. Rather than giving exact figures (which was impossible), I emphasized the:

- Lag time between product launch and achieving projected sales results.
- Critical need to shorten time-to-profitability.
- High costs of sales rep downtime preparing PowerPoint presentations and proposals, as well as the problems caused by delivering inconsistent messages to customers and channel partners.
- Lost "windows of opportunity" enabling competitive inroads.
- Inconsistent messages being delivered to channel partners and customers across the nation/world.

This value proposition was extremely attractive to senior marketing and sales leaders. As a result, I had a highly profitable consulting practice in this area for years.

The other day I talked with an independent professional who also works with sales organizations. She told me she did training based on the appreciative inquiry model which builds on what salespeople are already doing right. I asked her what the outcome was of her methodology. She replied, "It energizes the sales force."

After 25 years in the sales field, I can assure you that I've never met a sales manager or sales executive who wanted their salespeople to have more "energy." They want results – pure and simple. More orders. Fewer losses to the competition. Bigger or more profitable contracts. Better customer retention. These are the words that belong in your value proposition if you're selling to sales management,

How could you describe your firm to prospective customers if you did web site design? You might talk about:

- Driving more traffic to the web site.
- Decreasing the number of customers who abandon full shopping carts.
- Increasing the transaction value per customer.
- Improving search engine rankings.
- Freeing up corporate resources with improved online capabilities.

What if you do something more nebulous like team building or organizational development? Perhaps you could talk to your customers about:

- Reducing the high cost of employee turnover.
- Speeding up time spent on making critical business decisions.
- Eliminating management time spent on handling employee conflict.
- Maximizing employee productivity at work.
- Streamlining processes to increase operational efficiency.
- Creating a work environment where creativity flourishes, enabling customers to create a competitive business advantage.
- Minimize destructive turf issues that cost companies millions each year as management scrambles for power.

Here's one last example: I have a Mentoring Program that helps individuals and companies boost their sales. I could easily describe it as "telephone consulting." But it's far more effective to tell about the regional engineering firm that called me in to help on a Request for Proposal. They were a major underdog – a regional firm competing against all the big players in their industry.

The buyer was conducting one-hour interviews with eight firms. Only three would be invited back for the second round. My client's only goal was to make the first cut – to prove they could compete with the national consulting firms.

Winning the contract wasn't even a possibility in their minds. They were delighted when they were invited back for the 2<sup>nd</sup> presentation. Several days later they received another call from the customer. They'd decided the second round of interviews was unnecessary – everyone wanted to work with my client.

With my help they landed a large contract that grew to over \$1 million in just 6 months. Now, wouldn't you like to work with me if you could achieve similar results? This story significantly enhances my credibility and demonstrates I know what I'm doing.

Whatever profession you're in, it's critical to talk about your work in business terms. As a result of working with you, what are the outcomes? What business results are attained? They're there! You just need to find them.

## Clarifying Your Own Value Proposition

So how does your value proposition look? Can you describe what you do in terms of tangible business results? Do you have documented success stories?

Or do you need to do some work to enhance your value proposition? If it's not strong enough yet, don't despair. Like I said earlier, most people and companies have a much stronger one than they use. They just get caught up describing "what" they make or "how" they do things.

Both hard values and soft values need to be considered as you work on strengthening your value proposition. You'll want to explore how you impact customers in each of these areas.

### Hard Value

This is the most easily identifiable because it's directly related to your offering and is highly measurable. Hard value is typically expressed in numbers or percentages. Examples might be:

- Reduce cycle time from 3 days to one.
- Cut labor costs by 25%.
- Save \$100,000 in energy costs.
- Increase market share 5%.
- Improving productivity 17%.

Typically hard value gains also have related indirect value gains that aren't as obvious, but help strengthen an already strong value proposition. For example, improving productivity means fewer workers. With a smaller workforce, the company saves a significant amount in the benefits area. Less money is spent in recruiting and hiring. These savings can also be quantified as part of your value proposition.

A well-designed web site may cut the need for customer service staff. A more efficient JIT ordering process decreases the amount of warehouse space and its associated costs. A digital asset management system's ability to repurpose data reduces advertising expenditures. Always try to quantify the indirect values as well as the direct ones.

## **Soft Value**

Sometimes the value of your offering is not quite so measurable – such as lowered risk, increased teamwork, improved marketplace image, or better morale. Soft value doesn't sell well in today's economy. Most decision makers consider it a nice added benefit, but won't spend money for a solution that only provides soft value.

To increase your sales success, take these intangibles and make them tangible. Find ways to quantify their value to customers.

Opportunity Costs can also strengthen your value proposition. An opportunity cost is something your customer can't do now because of their current methods of operation. For example, it's what they could be doing with the \$500,000 savings they'd get from using your product. Or it's the business strategy and associated profits they can't aggressively pursue because of the internal conflicts that delay decisions.

*To strengthen your value proposition, follow the multiple suggestions discussed in the ensuing pages.*

### **1. Conduct Customer Interviews**

Your existing customers are your very best resource to find out what value you bring. Tell your customer you need help understanding the real value of your offering and you'd like a chance to learn their perspective.

This builds your relationship with customers at the same time it gives you a chance to learn an incredible amount of invaluable information.

Most people are scared to ask their customers about their value. I know it took me awhile to get up the guts to do it but when I finally did, it was a real eye-opener.

I had no idea that certain "little" things I threw in at no charge were extremely valuable to sales leaders. Not only did these discussions change my value proposition, but they also changed my offering and my own self-perception.

Anytime you ask customers for input, you open yourself up to hearing the not-so-good things too. If your customer is upset at your company (or you) for any reason, take notes on the issue and promise to resolve it as soon as possible.

If your customer says negative things about you personally, listen and ask questions. While this is not what you wanted from this meeting, it is critical data that can help you improve.

Make sure you don't get defensive, make excuses, pass the blame or tell your customer they're wrong. If you do, your customer will shut down fast and your credibility will be at risk.

Most importantly, **be curious** at these meetings. Explore all your customer's answers in depth to really learn the value you provide.

*Example: If your customer tells you that communications improved because of your work – find out what it meant to them.*

- Did they spend less time settling arguments?
- If so, how much less time?
- Lost "windows of opportunity" enabling competitive inroads. What was the value of that extra time?
- Did they use it to accomplish more? Like what?
- Because less time was spent bickering, what decisions were easier to make?
- How has the company benefited from those decisions?
- What additional profits or cost savings were realized from those decisions?

*Explore ... Explore ... Explore. This is how you uncover the strength in your value proposition.*

On the next page are questions you can ask customers to determine your true value proposition. Remember – your customers haven't thought much, if at all, about the value you provide. Therefore, the responses you hear may be somewhat vague and initially seem like little help in clarifying your value proposition.

Don't jump on your customers and demand they quantify your value. Remain conversational and curious. Gently poke and prod your customer to explore different areas. People need and

deserve time to think things through – and agitating them by demanding hard value answers right away won't help at all.

Have you ever seen any old Colombo movies or TV reruns? Is so – remember how Colombo, a wily detective who knew a whole lot more than he let on, slowly and softly kept asking questions until he found what he was looking for. Emulating this behavior during these customer meetings will have a high payback for you.

Before you meet with your customer, write down the various problems you think your product or service solves for them. Next write down the business impact of these problems.

Finally write down the value you think your offering provides. Take this list into the meeting; use it to prompt you to explore the full-range of your potential value to the customer.

### **Customer-Value Questions**

To get better data, customize your questions to your product or service offering. Consider the questions below as guidelines for this meeting.

- What value did my service/product/solution provide to your company?
  - Where do the benefits show up?
  - How did that help your bottom line?
  - What improvements did you realize?
  - How did it impact performance?
  
- What were the three most important benefits you received as a result of our product/work together?
  - Why were these valuable to your organization?
  - What cost/time savings did you realize?
  
- What did our solution enable you to do that you couldn't before?
  - What else? And how did that help your area?
  - And what else?
  - What is that worth to your organization?
  
- You said that working with us enabled you to reduce/increase \_\_\_\_.
  - Why was that important to you?
  - How would you quantify its value?
  - What other areas in your company received benefits because of our work together?
  - Tell me more about those areas.

- How have things been better since we worked together or you implemented our system?
  - What impact did it have in \_\_\_?
  - How did it affect \_\_\_?
  - What were the ramifications for \_\_\_?
  - What was the effect on \_\_\_?
  - How would you quantify the value of these improvements?  
*(Note: This is where you probe for specific areas based on the list you developed.)*
  
- How did our solution help you achieve your goals/objectives?
  - What's the value of that?
  - What problems did it alleviate?

Ask these same questions to more than one person in your customer's organization. Talk to people in different areas and in different positions. They each have a unique and highly valuable perspective. Sometimes you'll hear something totally new from one person that will lead you to a much stronger value proposition.

Strengthen your value proposition by looking at the results attained over time. Annual savings are always better than hourly, daily or monthly savings.

## **2. Brainstorm With Colleagues**

Get together with a group of colleagues to discuss your value proposition. Your collective wisdom and experience provides a broad perspective. Plus it keeps you from only maintaining a focus on what your product or service can *do*. Even if you slip back into a description of your offering, your colleagues will challenge your thinking.

Review your marketing materials. Reflect on your customer knowledge. Think about what you say that interests and excites your customers and prospects. As a group, here are some questions you can discuss:

- How does your product, service or solution impact your customer's bottom line or expenses?
  - What costs have been eliminated?
  - Time saved?
  - Can you quantify a specific hard dollar value gain?
  - What soft values has it provided?

- What positive impact has your product, service or solution had on bringing additional revenue/business to your clients?
  - What has the gain been?
  - Can you determine a specific hard dollar value gain?
  - What soft values has it provided?
  
- Does your product, service or solution enable your customer to achieve any competitive advantage?
  - What has the gain been?
  - Can you determine a specific hard dollar value gain?
  - What soft values has it provided?
  
- Does your product, service or solution have an impact on your customer's customer?
  - What has the gain been?
  - Can you determine a specific hard dollar value gain?
  - What soft values has it provided?
  
- How has your product, service or solution impacted your customer's bottom line or expenses?
  - What costs have been eliminated?
  - Time saved?
  - Can you quantify a specific hard dollar value gain?
  - What soft values has it provided?

If tangible results aren't forthcoming, challenge the group to take the discussion to the next level. Keep asking each other, "So what?"

- So what if it's an efficient system?
- So what if we have a replicable process?
- So what if it's high quality?
- So what if they have improved communication?
- So what if we cut turnaround time by 2 days?
- So what if the morale has improved.

Asking these question over and over again, gets you much closer to the real value you bring to customers. Look for the impact your offering has in the organization. What financial affect do your products, systems or services have on the business?

Determining your value proposition with only an internal analysis can be dangerous though. Outside validation by your customers is far more important. It doesn't matter what your

marketing department thinks is valuable. When it comes down to spending money, it's only your customer's perception that counts.

Remember, many companies tout really weak value propositions. And, worse yet – nobody realizes just how bad their value propositions are. Don't let another day go by with a weak value proposition. Use all the resources at your disposal to strengthen your value proposition.

If you're an independent professional, get a group of colleagues together and brainstorm each other's business case. You need each other to get to your primary value proposition – you're much too close to it to discover it without help.

### **3. Use Industry Statistics**

For a variety of reasons, sometimes it's difficult or impossible to measure your value proposition. If this is your situation, I strongly recommend using industry statistics to support your work. For example:

- 75% of executives in big companies involved in a complex sale (long term, multiple decision makers) blame poor value propositions as a major cause of their new products failing to achieve projections.
- 90% of everything learned in training is totally forgotten in 3 months unless sales management reinforces the learning.
- 50% of a manager's time is spent resolving people issues related to trust issues and poor communications.
- In a recent study done by a well-known management consulting firm, it took laid-off executives over 100 informational interviews before they started seeing results.

If you think about your business, I suspect you can come up with some statistics also. Again, they can be great proof sources of the need for your product or service in the market.

## **Exercise I: Finding Your Value Proposition**

### **1. Establish the Customer's Current Situation**

Without your product or service, how do they do things today?

### **2. Define the Problem or Gaps**

What problems does your offering solve?

What opportunities does it create?

**3. Clarify the Business Implications**

Explore the “Ripple Effect.”

Find other areas impacted by the problems/gaps.

**4. Determine the Value of Change**

What’s the pay-off from using your product/service?

(hard value, soft value, opportunity costs)

## Exercise II: Writing Your Value Proposition

Use the space below to write the first draft of your value proposition.

### Comments from Others

When you're done, go get feedback from others. Describe your customer and request that they listen from that perspective.

Ask: "What caught your attention? Is it reflective of the true value I bring customers? How can I make it stronger?"

## Value Propositions & New Products

When companies introduce new products or services to the market, they frequently fall victim to the same weak value proposition problems. A recent study on new product launches by Siebel found that executives overwhelmingly blamed weak value propositions (75%) as the key factor in not achieving success with the new offering.

Several years ago I worked with a company that introduced a new digital system into the printing market. It worked in conjunction with another company's product. This company felt that the primary value of their offering was in its extraordinary color matching capabilities that were far superior to anything on the market.

However, sales weren't taking off as expected. I was asked to help with a relaunch. In the process, I interviewed a number of customers. One was big into measurement – they had all the numbers. By using this new product, they were able to:

- Cut the staff in one area by 33% and still handle the same amount of work.
- Redeploy valuable workers to other areas of their company. (Finding qualified employees was a major issue in their industry.)
- Reduce project turnaround time by days, creating a significant competitive advantage.
- Decrease the number of customer changes at a savings of \$2000 for each one.
- Balance out their workflow, enabling them to delay purchases of extremely pricey equipment and reduce overtime expenses.

This was my client's true value proposition. But they weren't aware of it because they had never looked at their product beyond its attributes. Great color was nice, but it didn't sell. Customers needed tangible business results to justify their expenditures.

What's the solution? Prior to introducing new products or services, look at the value from the customer's perspective. If your organization conducts beta tests or trials prior to a full rollout, make sure you don't just focus on working out the bugs.

Instead, ask customers about the value of the capabilities they get with the new offering. Don't settle for simplistic responses such as, "It speeds up our process" or "It's compatible with our legacy systems." Ask questions such as:

- What does that mean? Why is that valuable to you?
- How does that help? What is the real benefit to your organization?
- What does it eliminate? What's the value of that?
- What does the faster speed mean to you? How else does it affect your organization?
- What impact does it have in other areas in your company?
- What's the benefit of the compatibility to your legacy systems?
- Can you help me quantify the pay-off you get from these capabilities?

When you ask questions like these, you get a much better understanding of the true value proposition of your new offering. The more you know about the customer's perspective, the stronger your value proposition. And, the stronger your value proposition is, the faster you'll see sales results.

## Using Your Value Proposition

Strong value proposition are your best tool for getting appointments with prospective buyers. Corporate decision makers will nearly always meet with sellers who offer tangible outcomes and measurable results. And they will only meet with sellers who talk their language and are focused on helping them achieve their business objectives.

You can also use your value proposition:

- To develop a telephone script with bullet points that highlight the key business results your product, service or solution delivers.
- To craft a business letter to decision makers who work at targeted accounts.
- As a basis for your marketing campaign and in all your marketing collateral.
- As the foundation for a customer-centric PowerPoint presentation.
- As the core message delivered in your totally customized customer proposals.

But based on what I've seen in working with sellers, the biggest benefit you get from understanding your value proposition is ... (drum roll) ... a strengthened belief in your own offering.

If you truly understand the value you bring to customers from a business perspective, you'll work harder to get into accounts and be less discouraged by rejection. You won't question or doubt if there's a market for your offering because you will know that what you offer makes a difference. And ultimately you'll sell a lot more!

*Remember, a value proposition is a clear statement of the tangible results a customer gets from using your products or services. It's outcome focused and stresses the business value of your offering. Now – go strengthen yours!*

## **Jill Konrath**



Jill Konrath, President of [SellingtoBigCompanies.com](http://SellingtoBigCompanies.com) and Leapfrog-Strategies, is an expert in major account sales and new product launches in the highly competitive B2B market. For over 20 years she has helped sales organizations leverage high-gain strategies for increased sales results.

Jill publishes a leading online newsletter, "Quantum Leaps Selling: Ideas & Insights to Increase Sales" which is being read in over 70 countries around the world.

She is the author of "Winning More Sales: Take Your Business to the Next Level with Insightful, Powerful Questions", the "JumpStart Your Sales" self-study guide and numerous eBooks on critical sales topics. She has been featured in Sales and Marketing Management, Selling Power, American Airlines in-flight magazine, Entrepreneur, Business Advisor, The Business Journal, Sales & Marketing Excellence, Sales Tribune, Sales Vault, Finance and Commerce, Management Consulting News and numerous on-line publications.

Her website, [SellingtoBigCompanies.com](http://SellingtoBigCompanies.com), is an excellent resource for salespeople, small businesses, entrepreneurs and independent professionals who want to win big contracts at corporate accounts.

Since forming her consultancy in 1987, Jill's clients have ranged from Fortune 100 technology companies to small professional services firms. She has worked with well-known corporate giants such as 3M, Imation, General Mills, Medtronic, eFunds, and Honeywell.

She's successfully launched numerous new products for her clients, as well as trained and spoken to thousands of salespeople. Her speeches and workshops are filled with real-life experiences, giving her instant credibility with even the toughest sales audiences.

### **Contact Information**

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## Quick Order Form

**Email Orders:** <mailto:jill@SellingToBigCompanies.com>

**Fax Orders:** 651-426-0983. Send this form.

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