

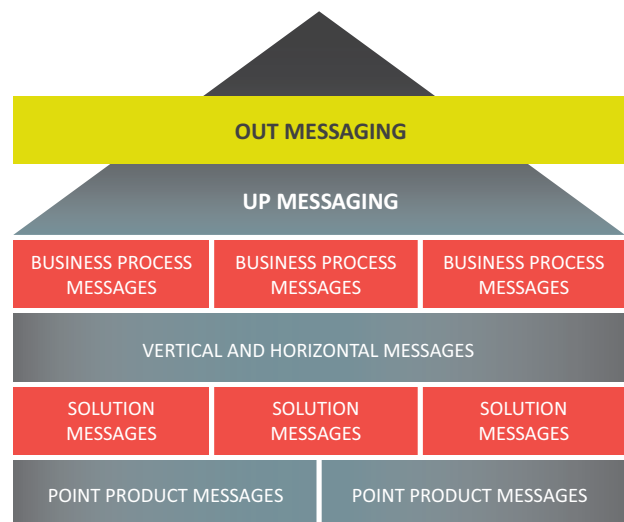
Messaging Matters Most

Everything you need to know about differentiating yourself in the crowded marketplace

Whether we are talking to a \$100 million company or a \$100 billion company, we hear the same story from most everyone: “our company messages are out of date or ineffective for today’s business climate.” And since a healthy percentage of marketing initiatives (are supposed to) leverage a company’s messaging, it should be no surprise when they can’t deliver the intended results. Trouble is, messaging doesn’t usually happen overnight. Yet deadlines for associated events, such as product launches, continue as planned – minus their messaging component. So how do you continue to build solid programs on a very fluid messaging foundation? First, build quality content and avoid jargon that can be perceived as branded terms. Second, make sure your content maps to audience needs and economic trends. But now more than ever, success means that you must have a story to tell that is different and more compelling than everyone else. What are your company’s messages, exactly?

To help you identify areas for improvement, we’ve regrouped them into categories based on their intended purpose. They are:

- Out Messaging
- Up Messaging
- Solutions Messaging



OUT MESSAGING

Out Messaging refers to the broad messages you present outward regarding your company, what it does, how and with what results. Typically posted at the “About Us” section of your website, these industry-facing messages evolve as your company expands and changes.

Out Messaging is messaging for the masses. That’s because the messages are horizontal in that they are designed for broader audiences, such as investors. They clearly articulate definitions from the highest level (company) down through individual point products.

From these messages fall more tactical elements, such as elevator pitches. Out Messages change based on the profile of the audience, and use varying degrees of business and technical content mapped to those audience needs.

Every company has an Out Message. An example of an evolving Out Message can be found at EMC Corporation. Originally known as a disk drive manufacturer, EMC has transitioned over time to a company that provides fully integrated solutions that include hardware, software and services. Today, the company's website defines them as "the world leader in products, services and solutions for information storage and its management." Five years ago that message looked dramatically different. The point? If your company is defining itself the same way it did five years ago, chances are good your Out Message needs some work.

UP MESSAGING

Up Messaging is a term we use to describe more differentiated messages that position you as a forward-thinking leader in your market space. Instead of messaging for the masses, think of Up Messaging as messaging for the millions, because Up Messaging directly supports sales efforts. Up Messaging integrates business issues into your Out Messages and demonstrates your ability to satisfy customer needs. It is becoming more and more critical in today's market, because it is through Up Messaging that executive-level competitive differentiation is built.

These messages often become the foundation for Thought Leadership programs and strategies that build competitive differentiation.

To appreciate the need for Up Messages, first consider today's economic trends. You see firsthand the slow but steady shift to a new growth economy. Your customers are starting to upgrade their aging infrastructures and investing in integrated systems and processes that drive business goals forward. Therefore, today's customer is rarely interested in throwing technology at a tactical problem as much as optimizing operations through more

visionary solutions that can support business growth for the long haul. Today's customer is more careful about buying decisions (which explains longer, more complex sales cycles) because that customer is making investments in both the technologies and the companies that deliver them. This customer/vendor alignment requires that customers understand and embrace the vendor's strategy and its place in the industry – and that the vendor communicates that position in all it does.

IBM's Dynamic Infrastructure strategy is an example of an Up Message. It elevates IBM corporate messaging of a developer and manufacturer of information technologies (and associated solutions and services) into a secondary message responding to customers' needs for more responsive technology environments. Both are high-level messages, but the latter touches its audience in a more intellectual, personal way.

Does every company need its own branded term like Dynamic Infrastructure? Certainly not, although we're watching lots of companies of varying sizes attempt to do just that, with varying levels of success. Few companies have the advertising budgets of industry giants like IBM to get market traction on their invented terms. But every company can leverage industry buzz – even other companies' branded terms – into their own Up Messages without the huge spend. Ride the wave.

Up Messages raise the intellectual value of subsequent conversations into more business-focused conversations. Like Out Messages, they require the building of tactical elements, such as elevator pitches, which are mapped to specific audiences. Ultimately, integrating Out Messages and Up Messages delivers the result required for salespeople to effectively present a complete and robust story to your customers and prospects.

Depending on your role in marketing, you participate in or manage some percentage of all messages that your company creates. The first challenge is building the messages. The second, and far greater challenge, is mapping messages to actual capabilities. This effort requires that product or marketing managers fully

understand customer behavior when, in fact, most companies afford these individuals little face-time with customers. So if you're in the process of working on Up Messaging, you have two choices for getting it right the first time: make sure you have customer-facing individuals involved in the process (like sales or professional services) or hire external resources that have experience specifically performing these kinds of mapping exercises.

SOLUTION BUILDING AND MESSAGING

According to industry analysts, sales of solutions are growing at a rate four times greater than individual point products. That makes sense given the economic buying trends we presented earlier in this brief. While most companies have done some level of solution-building, remember that it is much more than simply assembling a suite of point products into a single bucket and giving it a solution title. You need to build competency in the areas you present as solutions – including such topics as security and compliance and such vertical spaces as healthcare and education.

Once again, the greatest challenge in solution building is mapping the solution to individual capabilities based on customer needs, and then building messages around those capabilities. Because solutions are made up of many pieces, some companies have created “solutions marketing manager” positions to overlay individual brands. It's a tough role because success requires that the individual have a solid balance of technology, marketing and business development acumen in order to capitalize on market opportunities over time.

And, resellers with mixed portfolios from multiple vendors have their own set of challenges when it comes to building solutions. Integrating multi-vendor

products and services and creating something unique can be complex and time-consuming. For these types of companies, it is most cost-effective to use third-party talent that has experience with multiple vendor messages and how to integrate them into solutions that address specific business needs in that reseller's market space.

SUMMARY

In today's business climate, the role of messaging has become more important than ever. Yet few companies actually have the resources in-house to build effective messages. It's not a job for staff writers. It's not a job for product managers, though their involvement is very necessary. And most advertising agencies are lost once they get involved in mapping customer pains to solution areas. If you're going to build messages in-house, build a small but skillful team that has the proper balance of customer-facing (sales or sales support), technology-focused (product management) and creative (marketing) skills.

ABOUT LAUNCH INTERNATIONAL, INC.

Launch International is dedicated to messaging and value proposition development, sales and campaign cycle alignment, content framework architecture and content asset creation for technology companies. No other marketing services firm can match Launch International's experience and expertise in defining, designing and delivering high-value content that streamlines and accelerates selling processes and maximizes vendor value. WBENC-certified.

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