

DO CUSTOMERS REALLY COME, "IF YOU JUST BUILD IT?"

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Those who have watched Kevin Costner's 1989 movie "Field of Dreams" should remember the famous line "if you build it, he will come".

The movie's underlying themes are indeed the fulfillment of dreams, and how people can overcome any regrets they may have about the life choices they make. Sure, towards the end of the movie, after Costner had built the baseball diamond in the middle of the corn fields somewhere in the rural area of Iowa (a.k.a. in the middle of nowhere), long lines of cars began approaching and people DID come to watch the baseball game.

However, the truth of the matter is that this is not always the case, particularly in the business world.

I always ask any of the salespersons that I have known the question: what are they selling? Most of them will start to get excited and tell me they are selling cars, insurance, real estate or I.T. products/services that have such great features and functions.

If you ask me the same question, my answer will be: I am selling BENEFITS – nothing but BENEFITS. If I just build something without understanding what the customers want, then I am afraid they will never show up.

The philosophy is simple: customers will not spend even a dime if they do not see what the products are bringing to them.

People buy cars, insurance, real estate, or I.T. products because of a reason, whether obvious or otherwise. I've heard reasons that sometimes seem to be very unthinkable.

Salespersons or product/service providers have the responsibility to recognize the reasons or needs of the customers and then fulfill the said needs and do so consistently. That reason for buying must be conveyed not just to salespersons but everyone in their company so that they can react and behave according to the customers' reasons for choosing to buy their product or service.

Just ask any Disney executive and they can tell you all about it: imagine if you let a child find out "Snow White" smokes at the backstage, even if she is off her duty.

In my opinion, most companies that have collapsed have done so because they were so fascinated by their own inventions, their products, their business models, their field of dreams. They fail miserably because they think the customer should think the way they themselves think. They fail to recognize what the customer needs, and they fail to make adjustments. They fail to understand that it is the customer who makes the final call and that the customer that is always right. This is such an old cliché and yet most of us keep forgetting, even though we are also customers ourselves.

Remember those products that had been labeled "Sure Win" - satellite phones, new taste Coca-Cola, the supersonic Concorde, and all those others that have once looked so promising.

Functions and features do not make the sale. Instead, the benefits are the deciding factor whether a certain product is going to sell. Lastly, whether any feature or function is considered a benefit depends ultimately on the perception of the buyer.

Why would a customer buy a ski jacket if he/she is going to spend the next holiday in Hawaii? Why would a customer want a car that goes from 0 to 100 km in 4 seconds when he/she just wants some transportation mean that can bring his/her children to school every morning, and bring them home afterwards? And why would somebody want to go to IOWA (a.k.a. middle of nowhere) to watch a baseball game when he/she does not even know what "Three strikes and you're out" means?

So, if someone ever wants to make a sequel for "Field of Dreams", it better be "if you fulfill it, they will come" – and never forget what the audience wants to see before you ever start the production.

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William is a senior veteran in the business world, also helped to attract and confirm investors to set up overseas companies; and was involved in a few merger and acquisitions throughout his career. He earned his stripes through his practical experience in the actual market.

He is keen to help and coach companies to explore their own potential, understand their core competence, and ride through the adversity of the economy. He is especially interested in situation where companies have to deal with constant changes, new market developments, multicultural environments, fierce competitions, and leadership development, particularly in sales.

His expertise lies in building and managing sales and marketing teams, key account management, tactical negotiation and closing deals, forming alliances and partnerships through training and coaching within the organization to develop a sales- and subsequently results-oriented culture.

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