

B2B SaaS MARKETING: SELLING THE INTANGIBLE



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INTRODUCTION

If you're an owner, marketer or work at a business-to-business software-as-a-service (B2B SaaS) company, you already know that it can be a challenge to sell an intangible product. Convincing a prospect to buy something they can't physically touch is a completely different game than more traditional sales, and it can be tempting to try and make your intangible product feel more "real" by marketing the product's features. Don't let this temptation get the best of you when marketing and selling your product.

Implementing the right B2B marketing strategies increases your effectiveness. Positioning your product in the right way, keeping your prospects engaged and keeping sales transactional while ensuring great service will put you on a path to success. In this ebook, we'll discuss these strategies and provide tips you should consider when marketing and selling your intangible product.

MARKETING STRATEGIES THAT DRIVE INTEREST

Prospects make up their minds about you before ever speaking with you. For this reason, it's important to have a strong web presence that clearly states what a prospect gets when they buy your product. Companies that talk only about themselves on their website, marketing materials or social sites will lose audience interest quickly, but you can stand out if you do the following:

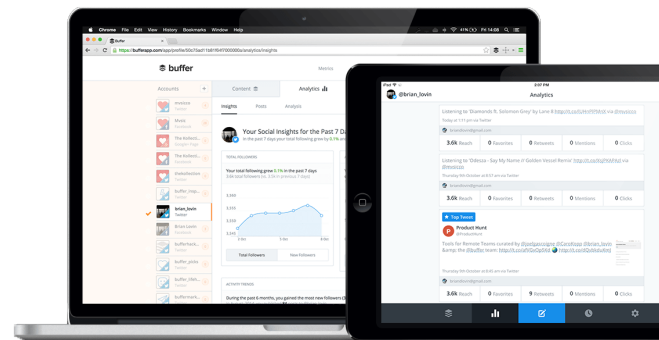
Lead with Benefits, Not Features

Think about the last time you downloaded an app on your phone or invested in technology. What about that app or technology interested you? There's a strong chance that you responded with a benefit the technology provides, not a feature within it.

For example, **Buffer** is a popular social media marketing tool that helps companies of all sizes automate their posts across all social platforms. Businesses typically use the tool because of how easy automation is, not because of the features within the tool.

Sounds easy, right? The problem for many SaaS salespeople and marketers is:

- They gravitate towards selling features because they seem tangible.
- They lead with features because they produce the benefit, but by the time the benefit information is shared, the prospect lost interest.



- They don't actually know the benefits of the product they are selling, so leading with features is their only option.

Prospects want to know how your software is going to impact their business, and then they may want to take a look under the hood at the specific features that drive the impact. Grab their attention with benefits first.

HERE'S A HELPFUL MARKETING TIP

If you're unsure what the benefits of your SaaS product are, don't continue to sell on features. Take time to talk to people both internally (sales, marketing, product developers) and externally (customers, prospects) to understand why your product is impactful and what pain points it solves.

Visuals aid benefits

Once you understand the benefits your product provides, market them using visuals. Why? Because prospects consume visuals much faster than text. When a prospect only has a finite amount of time to understand how you help their business and who you are, images and graphics are necessary for comprehension.

You may be wondering what kind of visuals should you post.

A few suggestions include:

- Recorded or animated videos
- Testimonial videos or case studies from current clients
- Third party reports about the benefits of your tools
- Infographics
- GIFs or animations of your product
- Screenshots of the product



Be careful with a few of these suggestions. Remember: you want to showcase the benefits of the tools first and foremost. If you've got a screenshot or animation of your product that doesn't clearly demonstrate a benefit, you're back to showing features. A good way around this is to add text on images, animations or even video demonstrations that specifically calls out a benefit that your customers experience.

Once you've picked the type of visual you'll share, you're not done yet. There are a few things you'll want to consider when posting visuals, ensuring:

- Clear visuals—Images should be crisp (not pixelated). Make sure your graphic designer or marketing team optimizes visuals at the correct resolution.
- Brand consistency—Don't post visuals for the sake of it; make sure they align with brand design style and message.

- They are inoffensive—This is common sense, but unless your brand allows for such things, you should always double check that images are free of cursing, violence, racism, sexism, ageism, gender discrimination and so on.
- Message matching—Review visuals and text together to ensure that any images or graphics relate and support the text around them.

When used correctly, visuals are a great way to share the benefits of your product in a quick and easily consumable way.

HOLD THE PROSPECT'S ATTENTION WITH PRODUCT INTERACTION

After creating marketing materials, a website, social profiles and the like to earn a prospect's attention by sharing your product's benefits, you now have to keep their attention. Do this by showing them how easily they can apply those benefits to their business while using your product, and how fast it is to get up and running. Here are a couple of suggestions to accomplish this goal:

Free Trials Turn into Acquired Customers (When Done Correctly)

Just as a consumer drives a car before purchasing, allowing interested prospects to “test drive” your product can lead to sales—when done the right way.

Free trials, or any sort of experience with your product that allows a “hands on” approach can:

- Make the product feel more real or tangible because the prospect can interact with it.
- Help prospects visualize how they can use the product to better suit their business needs.

THE TRIAL-TO-PAID STRATEGY

One specific trial strategy that is especially effective is the “trial-to-paid” experience.

Trial-to-paid is similar to getting a free trial at a new gym. Most gyms usually have a 7-14 day trial, which is completely free. You can use the gym as little or as often as you'd like, but during the registration for your free trial, you're asked for credit card information and will be charged as a member after your trial if you don't cancel.

Some business owners believe trial-to-paid may turn prospects away from trials, or their business, altogether. While this may be true, the people who turn away from those trials are generally tire kickers who ultimately won't purchase the software. In the end, trial-to-paid can actually **save your sales team time** by providing fewer free trials, reducing the time they spend following up on bad prospects.

While free trials are a great way to get your software into the hands of prospects, they can go wrong in a few ways:

- When a prospect doesn't understand how to use the product or gets lost or confused while navigating it.
- When a prospect has issues with the product acting slow or buggy.
- When the prospect isn't very tech-savvy.

COMBAT FREE TRIAL PROBLEMS:

- Before starting the trial, have the prospect sit with sales or support to walk through a basic demo, or even better, provide a video walk-through.
- Make sure the prospect has contact information for your customer support team.
- Ensure that sales is checking in during the trial.
- Send automated emails with tips and tricks, and to check in on the prospect.

When providing trials, be on alert for prospects who take advantage of a trial just to have access to your product for a limited time without paying for it. You can limit your exposure to this issue by offering short trials and asking how the prospect plans to use the product during their trial, either person to person or via a question in your form that gates access to the product.

There are a few challenges to be aware of when providing free trials, but they can be easily handled and ultimately help you sell more. When used correctly, trials can make your intangible product and its benefits real.

Free Onboarding

Imagine this scenario: a prospect feels the pain points that your product will solve and is the perfect fit to become a customer of yours. Their one objection? They're afraid that once they buy your product, they'll be left alone trying to figure out how to use it themselves, let alone train their entire staff. How often does this happen to you?

One easy way to combat this issue is by offering free onboarding. While offering a free service may not be ideal for your business, there are ways to make this profitable for you while also keeping a prospect's interest and bringing in more business. You could:

- Bake the cost of free training into the price of your product.
- Provide different tiers of training. Basic training is your free option and provides quality training for a certain number of days. From there, you can also provide 2-3 additional training tiers that provide more onboarding services at a fee.
- Provide free training for a certain number of people at each business. For smaller businesses, it might be one. For larger businesses it might be 10. Whatever number you choose, set a rule that every person after that number will be charged with for training.



- Create training videos that are pre-recorded and can be used over and over by any customer using your product.

Whatever option you choose, training is crucial to the success of your business. Providing at least one free onboarding option reassures prospects during your sales process, help maintain interest in your product and ultimately brings in more sales for your business.

CLOSE QUICKLY AND RETAIN WITH GREAT SERVICE

A long sales cycle shouldn't exist

The definition of a “long sales cycle” is different for every business, but once you've researched and decided how long your sales cycle should be, use it to differentiate the serious buyers from the people who are just wasting your time.

For most B2B SaaS companies, the sales cycle is really a transaction. The business you're working with either has the need for your product, or they don't. SaaS prospects and consumers make purchase decisions rapidly. They research online, talk to others who may also be using your product or another similar product, get a demonstration or trial and then decide to buy or pass. It's as simple as that.

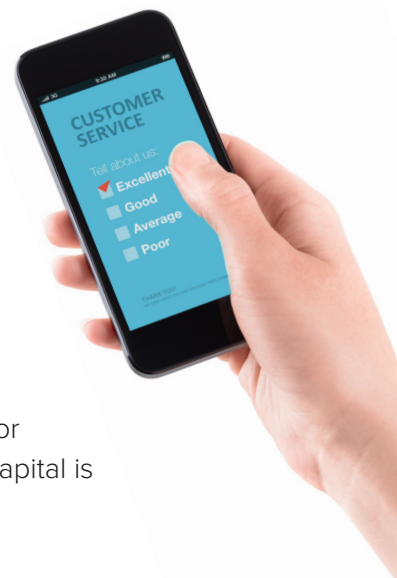
Short sales cycles might scare some buyers away, but remember, these probably aren't your top prospects. You'll waste more time on uninterested parties if you allow the sales process to drag out. During sales conversations, let the prospect know that most people make up their mind about buying your product in a week, a month or whatever your target sales cycle time may be. Of course this varies depending on your product. Setting the expectation up front about the short sales cycle will allow you to find the prospects that are truly ready to buy.

Great Service is a MUST

You've got an impactful tool that provides ample benefits, but it's nothing without great service. Your intangible product may not always feel like a secure purchase for businesses, and that's why should provide them something tangible: You. Human capital is key not only to sales, but also retaining your customers.

During the sales process and after the sale, make sure prospects and customers understand:

- How they can access your support team or help desk
- Next steps for working with the training team
- How to access training videos or a training catalogue



Laying out these details in an obvious way will ensure success. Remember, this is SaaS, software-as-a-**service**, and your service needs to be as quality as the product you provide.

Great customer service can differentiate many B2B SaaS companies from their competitors. Some of your competitors may not provide training or support at all. If you do offer these services, make sure you emphasize them to prospects. If you don't, think about implementing these things in your business immediately. Always keep in mind that training and service can be automated in a way that fits the capabilities of your business by providing videos, written FAQs and more.

CONCLUSION

While marketing the intangible can be a new challenge, there are a variety of strategies that you can execute to successfully sell your product. Highlighting the benefits of your product and using visuals allows you to gain a prospect's interest. You can keep their interest and attention by providing interactive ways to connect with your product, and make transactional closes that keep tire kickers at bay and let you work with the highest quality prospects. Finally, ensure great service to retain those new customers and increase sales.

These strategies don't need to be implemented all at once. Start small: pick one strategy, implement, then test how it works for your business. Prioritize by what you consider to be the most immediate need, then work down your list. Even one small step will help you make the intangible appear more real.

ABOUT ACCELITY

Accelity Marketing was founded in 2013 and is located in downtown Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The agency is passionate team of experienced marketers, writers and designers. Together, we work with B2B software and service companies to boost online lead generation and increase sales. We create content, execute campaigns and deliver a strong return on investment to our clients every day.

