

Find Features, Boost Benefits

Feature-Benefit Selling

Features vs. Benefits

Obvious, unique, or hidden?

**3 steps to charting features
and benefits**

So What

Think back to the last major purchase you made. Maybe it was an iPod, a new pair of running shoes, or a brand-name handbag. What was your interaction with the salesperson like? You may not have known it, but chances are good that s/he used feature-benefit selling in the sales presentation. If you bought an iPod nano, the salesperson might have pointed out its miniature size. To you, the tiny size might mean more convenience in taking it from place to place. Did you know that the iPod's size is one of its features, and its convenience is one of its benefits?



You can see examples of feature-benefit selling everywhere, if you know what you're looking for. It's an important phase of the selling process that you should be familiar with if you plan to pursue a career in sales or marketing. Read on to learn more about features, benefits, and how to create a feature-benefit chart.

Objectives:

- 1 Describe feature-benefit selling.
- 2 Prepare for feature-benefit selling.

What Is Feature-Benefit Selling?

Our highly competitive market economy produces a wide variety of goods and services—everything from skincare products to dog-walking services to industrial-grade steel beams—you name it, you can buy it. And, believe it or not, *new* goods and services are appearing on the market every day. Like the wide range of products available on the market, modern consumers also have wide ranges of desires and interests.



An important part of your job in selling is to determine what each customer is looking for in a good or a service. You must then prove to customers that your good or service has the features that will benefit them. This phase of the selling process is known as **feature-benefit selling**. Although feature-benefit selling can occur at any time during the selling process, it should always occur during the sales presentation as part of the sales dialogue and product demonstration.

It's important to keep in mind that customers do not actually buy features. They buy benefits. In other words, they are not buying the product itself; rather, they are buying what the product can do for them. Customers do not buy treadmills—they buy the ability to work out in the privacy of their own homes. Customers do not buy toasters—they buy the ability to make toast! This means that merely describing or pointing out features to customers will not persuade them to buy. The customer wants to know, "Will the features you are describing give *me* the desired benefits?" To complete sales, you must be able to translate the features of your product into benefits for the individual customer or client. And to do this, you must have adequate knowledge of your product.





Buyers almost always “shop around” before making a final purchase decision, especially when it comes to big-ticket items like cars and appliances. Can you think of something you’ve “shopped around” for recently, comparing different products or companies? By explaining product features in terms of benefits, you will enable customers to understand the differences between your products and those of your competitors. This is particularly important when dealing with hidden features and benefits. It’s helpful to research the features of your competitors’ products beforehand, so you know how your products compare.

Feature presentation

A **feature** is a physical characteristic or quality of a product. It is something the customer can touch, feel, smell, see, or measure. It helps to describe the product. In short, a feature answers the question, “What is it?”

Some features are obvious. Customers or clients can see them as soon as they look at a product. For example, when looking at a shirt, a customer can easily see features such as its color, its sleeve length, and its style. When holding a puppy at a pet store, a customer can tell if the puppy is big or small, short-haired or long-haired, friendly or shy.

Other features are less obvious and may even be hidden so that customers can’t see them. For a shirt, less-obvious features might be that it’s 100-percent cotton and has double-stitched seams. For a car, hidden features might include steel-reinforced doors and side air bags. For the puppy, less-obvious features might include the puppy’s breed or pedigree papers.



To relate the feature of side air bags to a customer, a salesperson might say, “This means that your family will be safer in case of an accident.”

There are three types of benefits that a salesperson should be able to explain to customers or clients:

- **Obvious or apparent benefits** are advantages that need little explanation by the salesperson. The customer already knows, or can easily recognize, the benefit. Let’s say you are selling neutral-colored carpeting. An obvious benefit of this carpeting is that your customers will not be limited in their selection of colors for their furniture. Or say you are selling microwaves. An apparent benefit of microwaves is shorter cooking time than conventional ovens.



Even though these benefits are obvious, you should still point them out and use them to prove the value of the product to customers.

- **Unique or exclusive benefits** are advantages that are available only from your good, service, or business. If your product has one unique or novel feature that can be translated into a benefit desirable to customers, you have a definite selling advantage over your competitors. For example, a car that “parks itself” is certainly a novelty and can offer a huge benefit to customers who have trouble parallel parking.

Benefits package

Features translate to benefits if they give customers what they are looking for in products. A **benefit** is the personal satisfaction or advantage that a customer wants from a product. It is how a feature helps a particular buyer. For customers, it answers the questions:

- “How will I benefit?”
- “What’s in it for me?”



- **Hidden benefits** are advantages that cannot be seen or understood without the assistance of a salesperson. If a customer is buying a pair of shoes, s/he can see the shoes' color and style but won't be aware of how comfortable they are until the salesperson persuades him/her to try them on. Or, if a customer is buying a computer, s/he won't know about the available warranties or the 24-hour helpline unless the salesperson explains.

Being thoroughly competent in pointing out the benefits of your product—whether obvious, exclusive, or hidden—will enable you to increase your sales. Remember, customers buy a product for what it can do for them—not for the product itself.

There are several variations on feature-benefit selling. One is FAB selling, or feature-advantage-benefit selling. An example of this would be, "Our lawn-care service includes free waste removal (feature), meaning you don't have to do it yourself (advantage), which helps you spend more time on other projects (benefit).



Another is FEBA selling, or feature-evidence-benefit-agreement selling. An example of this would be, "This cold medication has the highest concentration

Summary

An important part of selling is determining what each customer is looking for in a good or a service, then proving that your good or service has the features which will benefit them. This is known as feature-benefit selling. A feature is a physical characteristic or quality of a product. A benefit is the personal satisfaction or advantage that a customer wants from a product. Three types of benefits are obvious or apparent benefits, unique or exclusive benefits, and hidden benefits.



1. What is feature-benefit selling?
2. What is a feature?
3. What is a benefit?
4. How do features and benefits differ?
5. What are obvious benefits?
6. What are unique benefits?
7. What are hidden benefits?



of the drug that is currently available over the counter (feature), as shown in this study by *Consumer Reports* (evidence). This will provide you with the relief you are looking for (benefit), don't you agree (agreement)?

No matter what the name or variation, feature-benefit selling is an important phase of the selling process and demands that you be thoroughly knowledgeable about your product(s).

Preparing a Feature-Benefit Chart

In most selling situations, the customer or client looks to the salesperson for information and advice. You must be thoroughly familiar with the features of your product and be prepared to translate features into benefits for individual customers. To do this, it's helpful to create a feature-benefit chart for your product. Therefore, you must know:

- What features to look for in a product
- Where to get the information you need
- What to do with the information when you get it



Step One—Find your product's features.

Products may have many different features. Some of the most common ones are:

- **Construction and materials.** Customers or clients often ask questions such as:
 - ◆ What is this material?
 - ◆ Who makes it?
 - ◆ How is it made?
 - ◆ What's the difference between these two items?

For example, a customer in a furniture store might ask a salesperson, "What is the difference between this innerspring mattress with 560 coils and the one with 364



coils?" The salesperson's answer would be, "The higher number of coils gives a greater degree of firmness. This means the mattress will last longer and will not sag." Knowing the details of construction and materials will help you show the quality of your product.

- **Appearance and style.** We live in a very fashion-conscious society. Customers consider color, line, and design in everything they buy—cars, clothes, accessories, appliances, furniture, and more. Appearance is a dominant factor in many buying decisions. A salesperson might point out the appearance and style of a woman's coat by saying, "This coat is a classic style and made from fine cashmere. It should be wearable for several seasons."



- **Unique or novel features.** You have a definite selling advantage if your product has desirable features that your competitor's does not. For example, if your dry-cleaning business is the only one in your area that offers free pick-up and delivery service, you have a unique feature to point out to customers.
- **Durability.** How long a product will last and give dependable service is essential information that you must be prepared to give your customers or clients. Again, a thorough knowledge of your product is necessary to answer questions such as, "How many miles can I expect to get from these tires?" or "How many hours of use will I get from these batteries before they need to be replaced?"

- **Product uses.** The customer wants to know what the product will do and how it can be used. If it is not possible to demonstrate the product, the salesperson should explain its uses to the customer. For example, a kitchen appliance that functions as a food processor, mixer, and blender has many features with which the salesperson should be familiar in order to explain its uses.



The Gray Zone

Brad is a salesperson at a local electronics store. He specializes in selling high-end televisions—LCD, plasma, HD-TV, etc. Today, a customer came in and told Brad that the electronics store down the street has a similar television for \$200 less. Brad knew he had to kick his sales presentation into high gear. He wanted to point out features and benefits to the customer that the other store's television doesn't provide. How-



ever, he hadn't exactly done his homework on the other store's product. He was *pretty* sure that his competitor's product had a more limited warranty than his own product. Is it ethical for Brad to mention this to the customer when he's not completely sure?

What would you do in this situation?



- **Service and warranty.** In some cases, whether or not a customer buys depends on the service your company offers and/or the warranty on the product. This is especially important when selling products such as appliances, electronics, and cars. If your company also services its own products, you have a definite benefit to offer your customers. When selling a dishwasher, you might say to your customer, "All our dishwashers are guaranteed for three years. This means that we will replace any parts and make all repairs without any charge to you."

Step Two—Know where to get facts about product features.

You know what features to look for in your product, but where do you get this information? Here are the best places to look:

- **The product itself.** The salesperson should study and, if possible, use the product before selling it to customers or clients. Many sources and types of information may accompany the product itself. For example, a customer might ask, "Do you know how these jeans look after they have been washed?" The salesperson would have no idea unless s/he learned this information by buying a pair and trying them. Firsthand knowledge, gained by experience, tends to give a salesperson confidence.

- **Customers.** If it is not practical for you to learn the features and benefits of your product by buying it yourself (if you are selling expensive sports cars, for example), the next best source of information could be your customers. Let's say that Mrs. Wisby, a teacher, is on her feet all day, walking and standing in her classroom. Even though she had purchased several pairs of shoes at various stores, none of them had been comfortable to wear for hours on end. When she finally found a pair at your store that gave her the benefit of comfort, she came back and bought several more pairs of the same shoe in various colors. She said, "These are the only shoes I have found that I can wear comfortably all day." You can imagine the value of such testimony in making future sales.



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- **Manufacturer's brochures and publications.** These materials furnished by the manufacturer are usually free. Additional information may be obtained by writing the manufacturer or checking online. This is the best source of information on construction and materials.
- **Other sales personnel.** If you are just starting out in sales, you should rely heavily on the knowledge and experience of others in your organization. Don't be afraid to ask questions if you need information about the features of your product(s).

• **Promotional materials.** A great deal of product information is given in product bulletins, catalogs, manuals, and other promotional materials. For example, a catalog might give the following feature-benefit statements for a pair of hiking boots:

- ◆ "Premium, full-grain tumbled leather and an advanced arch-support system provide comfort."
- ◆ "Rubber outsole provides excellent traction."



Step Three—Create a feature-benefit chart.

Now that you know what type of information you need and where to obtain the facts about your product, what should you do? Your next step is to prepare a feature-benefit chart for your product.

Each product you sell has a number of features. List all the product's features on the chart, beginning with the ones that a customer or client will see first. Then, list the less-obvious or hidden features of the product. For each feature that you've identified, ask yourself, "What does this mean for the customer?" Write each benefit beside its feature. A feature can often provide more than one benefit. The following example shows how features and benefits may be arranged on a chart for quick reference.

Product	Features (What Are They?)	Benefits (What Do They Mean?)
Computer	Variety of models	You will be able to select different components to build a system that meets your specific needs.
	Monitor size	The large monitors that come with these computers enable you to see the entire page you're working on. This gives you a clearer understanding of how your document looks. You don't need to print the page to see it.
	Monitor screen	The non-glare screen helps to reduce eye strain, letting you work longer without feeling tired.
	Memory	These models can be loaded with sufficient memory so that your computer can handle virtually any program you want to install.
	Print capability	You'll be able to handle all your printing needs in your own home or office. You'll be able to print everything from letters to complex reports and colorful brochures.
	Software	Several of the most popular software packages are pre-installed on this system. This will save time since you won't have to install the programs yourself. It will also save money since you won't have to purchase the programs individually.

If you sell a wide variety of products, it will be helpful to arrange them alphabetically. Preparing this chart will help you remember the features and benefits and should aid you in developing meaningful selling techniques.

Summary

The first step in preparing a feature-benefit chart is finding your product's features. Look for construction and materials, appearance and style, unique or novel features, durability, product uses, and service and warranty. The second step is looking for product information in the right places—the product itself, customers, manufacturer's brochures and publications, other sales personnel, and promotional materials. The last step is to create the feature-benefit chart, listing the product, its features, and the benefits those features provide to customers.



1. What information must you know to create a feature-benefit chart?
2. List some common categories of product features.
3. Where can a salesperson get information about product features?
4. Describe how to create a feature-benefit chart.

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