

THE HIERARCHY OF BENEFITS

How to connect your technology features to your high-order benefits and vice versa.

A Velocity White Paper for marketers



velocity



Velocity B2B Marketing White Paper

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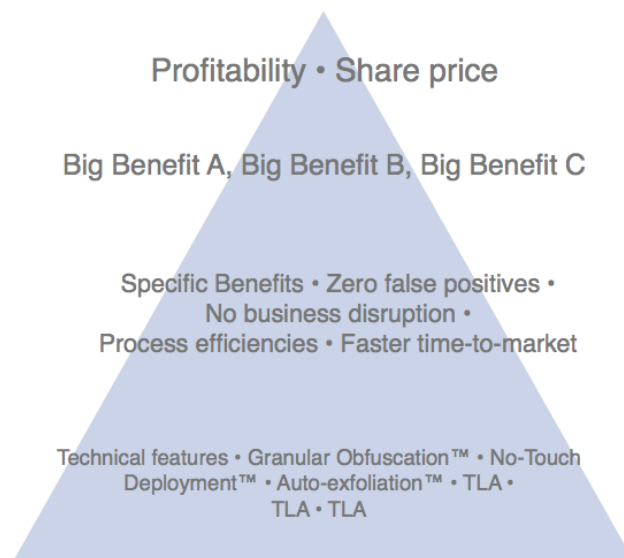
When companies bring Velocity in to 'sort out their messages', we always ask what's wrong with the way they're currently telling their story.

A surprising number say something like, "We're okay talking about our technology and not so bad talking about the topline benefits, but there seems to be a gap somewhere in between."

Even if they don't say that, they ought to – because almost every technology company seems to get stuck trying to find the right balance between tech-talk, feature-speak and business benefits.

If all you do is talk big benefits, there's no credibility. If you spend all your time on features, it's a big, "So what?".

To explore the issue, we like to present the Velocity Hierarchy of Benefits, which starts out looking something like this (with the client's real features and benefits inserted):



As you can see, the technical features are at the bottom -- they may be important but they're not benefits in themselves.

The next layer up holds what a lot of techies might think of as benefits. Things like 'process efficiencies' or 'best detection rates in the industry'. To people steeped in the market, just saying these things feels like benefit talk – but to others, they're means rather than ends.

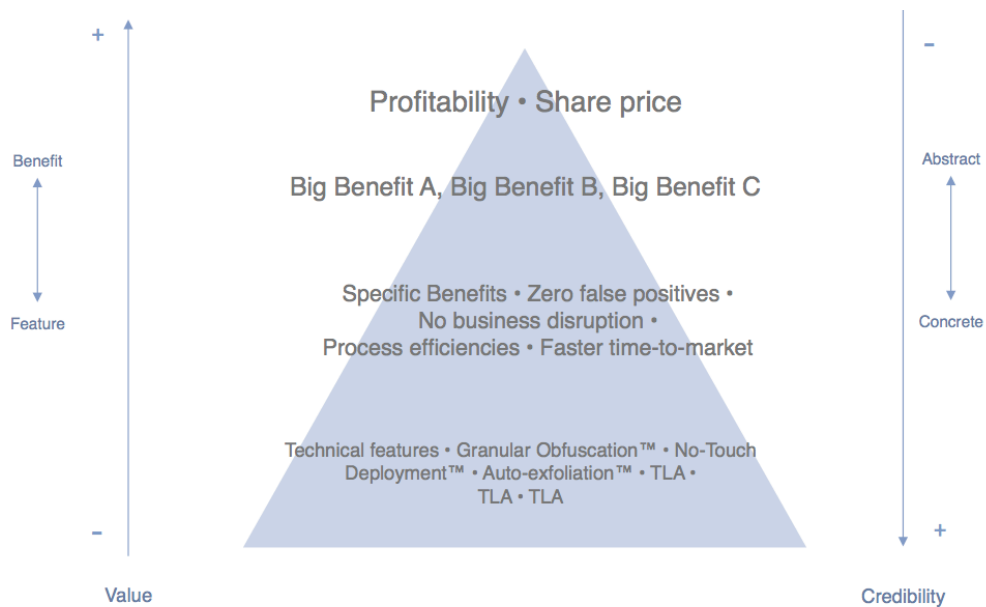
Next step up the pyramid are three Big Benefits – the core of the company's positioning and the heart of its messages. 'Drives down the cost of bunion removal'; 'Eliminates the need for expensive audits'; 'Lets you do three times more with the same people'.

These Big Benefits should be aired a lot. And sometimes, they're as high as the company should ever go. Because the very highest level is either beyond the target audience's domain or because it's heavily suggested by the layer below.

At the very top of the Hierarchy are the real reasons companies do things: to increase profit, drive up the share price or both. Again, this level may be too high to use overtly in marketing, but it's good to remember what the end-end benefit is, to keep everything else in perspective.

Now comes the interesting part.

We like to add two scales down the right and left sides of the Hierarchy, so it looks like this:



On the left hand side, we have "Value", showing that the highest value things appear higher on the pyramid and the lowest value at the bottom.

On the right hand side, we have "Credibility" – but this time the arrow is reversed. The highest-value benefits are also the least credible and the most credible things are, unfortunately, the ones your prospects care least about.

The inversion of these two scales and their attributes – Value vs Credibility – strikes at the heart of the communications problem that the hierarchy represents.

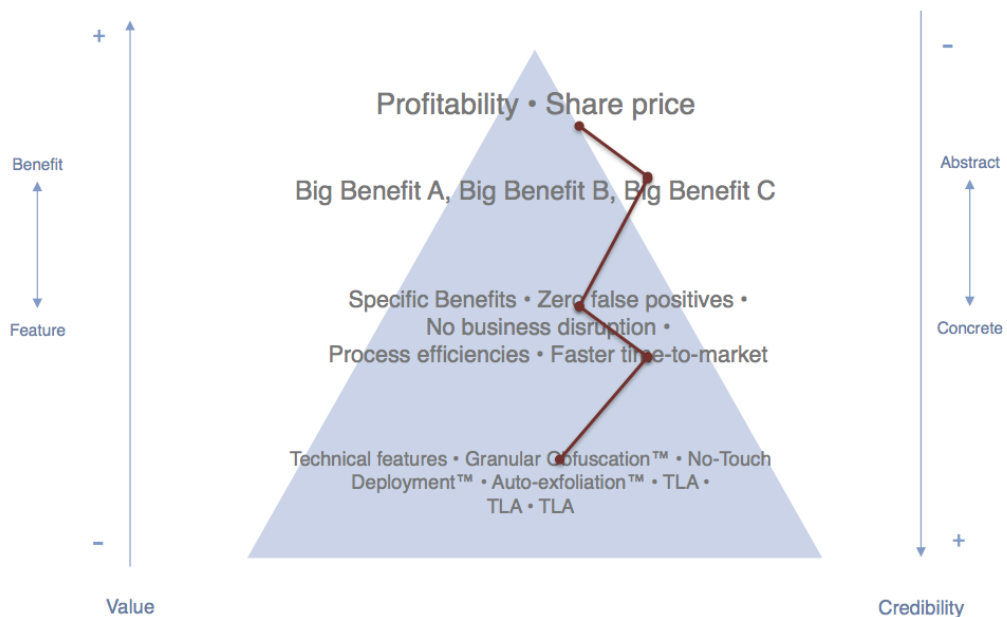
The things people care about, they don't believe. The things they're happy to take on trust... don't matter anyway.

Making Vines

When people first see their Hierarchy of Benefits, there's a lot of talk about 'where we should be aiming'. It's as if the challenge were to find the right level and put all marketing efforts there.

But that's not the point. The point is to *connect* the lowest and highest levels in meaningful ways.

To create vertical chains, 'Vines' if you like, that link each feature to the benefit levels above; and each benefit to the lower-order benefits and features below. Kind of like this:



These Vines do two very important things:

They bring value to your features.

They give credibility to your benefit claims.

So instead of saying 'We're the only widget with Auto-exfoliation™' (who cares?), you find yourself saying, "Our Auto-Exfoliation™ technology means excess bytes are removed on-the-fly – saving administrators time and dramatically reducing the cost of sale."

And instead of saying, "Our Widget makes you more profitable!" (says who?), you add credibility with something like, "Our Widget uses patented auto-exfoliation to remove the tasks that take 60% of every administrator's day – and slow time-to-market by weeks. The result is more productive IT people and products that generate revenue instead of costs."

Where you need Vines

You need Vines wherever you communicate sales messages to the market. On every web page, in every blog post, white paper, product demo, sales deck, webinar and video.

If you spot a tiny tech feature floating out on its own – link it up to a benefit. And if you find yourself making big bold benefit claims without support, link them up to credibility-builders from lower down the hierarchy.

Over-simplifying? No doubt. But keeping yourself aware of the inverse relationship between value and credibility is a powerful guide for finding the right balance in your own messaging and positioning work.

About Velocity

Velocity is a consulting-led B2B marketing agency specialising in technology markets.

We help our clients build solid arguments, tell them in a compelling way and incite action in their target markets. Our services include Strategic Consulting; Market Acceleration Programs; and Digital Engagement (including some innovative ideas we call Web Motion).

You can learn more about us by talking to us or by visiting www.velocitypartners.co.uk

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