

How can we attractively differentiate our offerings from those of our competitors?

It's crunch time during the evaluation of options phase and your prospect is scrutinizing you against your competition. Will they see you as different and superior in a way that matters to them? Here's what we've learned about how successful salespeople distinguish their offerings from the field.

Thoroughly Assess All Competitor Attributes and Vulnerabilities

1. **Know** who all of your direct competitors are, including their strengths and weaknesses
2. **Competition** may also include buyer's own internal resources, competing uses of funds

Exploit "Hard" Differentiators Where You Enjoy an Advantage

Examples include: Price, size, weight, speed, compatibility, delivery

Where you enjoy a competitive advantage:

- Develop corresponding customer needs
- Pursue straightforward selling strategy
- Expedite decision before competitors change the game

Where you are vulnerable to competition:

- Soften outline of hard attribute so it is less easily sized up
- For example, if "low price" is priority, introduce subjective cost of-ownership factors like operator training and downtime
- Buy time to make a case for "softer" attributes where you may enjoy an advantage

Reposition "Soft" Differentiators as Concrete Business Requirements

Examples include: Quality, responsiveness, service standards

Where you enjoy a competitive advantage:

- Educate buyer on how to quantify "soft" differentiators
- Use 3rd party experts, customer proof sources, Socratic line of questioning so buyer won't see your efforts as self-serving
- Reinforce consequences of stronger performance in softer areas like "service support" to get differentiator seen as business requirement
- Rehearse lower level decisionmakers in making the case for the "soft" differentiator to more skeptical higher-ups

Resist Challenging a Given Competitor Head On

1. **Our** research: the more you mention a competitor by name the less likely you'll get the business
2. **Buyer** apt to see your efforts as biased and rise to your competitor's defense
3. **Takes** away time better spent making your own case
4. **Better** to expose generic shortcomings in methods and technologies - not specific competitor

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