

Brand benefits series –

Part 2: Differentiation

In this installment of the Brand Benefit Series, we asked Chris Wirthwein, author of the soon-to-be-published book *Different Rules – The B2B Marketer's Guidebook to Product Differentiation*, to share his thoughts on the why and how of brand differentiation for seed companies.

Seed is one of the most competitive markets out there, with plenty of perceived similarities between suppliers in the eyes of farmers. Here's where your seed brand can step up and deliver needed differentiation and a reason for prospects to believe and buy from you.

What makes your brand different?

The first article in the Brand Benefit Series explained how a brand isn't tangible. Instead, brands – including your seed brand – live as a collection of perceptions in the minds of customers and prospects. Let's face it, no company wants its brand to be lumped in with others or, worse yet, become a generic brand. So how do we avoid that? With differentiation.

What is differentiation? It's all the things you do as an organization to make your brand unlike, distinctive, unique and dissimilar from every other seed brand. Differentiation is often seen as the #1 most important job of marketing. To do it well requires knowledge of products, customers and competition. And it requires knowledge of one more thing: the rules.

Differentiation – The Rules

Rule #1: Be different

Neuroscience tells us the human brain has an amazing ability to perceive differences. Every able-bodied person reacts identically to something out of the ordinary. When we encounter a sudden darting movement, a loud noise or the smell of fire, what happens? We notice. We perk up. We pay attention! That's what experiencing something *different* does to the human mind. And we can't help it. It's automatic, out of our control, happens in a split second and requires no conscious thought.

Think back to your reaction to first hearing about Enlist E3[®] soybeans. Chances are you paid attention and can still remember what makes them *different*: three herbicide tolerances – 2,4-D choline, glyphosate and glufosinate

– and Enlist[®] herbicides with Colex-D[®] technology featuring near-zero volatility and reduced physical drift potential. These features – factual truths – make Enlist E3 soybeans different from any other trait technology on the market. You can use these differences to attract customers. For instance, if there's a farmer who grows soybeans near a residential area, spraying Enlist herbicides may mean one less thing to worry about. Being a good neighbor just might be the relevant difference that brings in a new Enlist E3 soybean customer for you.

What about your brand? What makes it different? If you answered with things like higher yields, superior service, best product lineup or better ROI, you've likely said something your competitors also say. And when you do that, you run the risk of sounding the same and not at all different. Boring. When you do that, people tune you out. Neuroscientist Dr. John Medina said this in his best-selling book *Brain Rules*: "We don't pay attention to boring things."

Digging out and conveying true differences in your brand is hard work. But the payoff is worth it: customers and prospects who pay attention! Even small differences can be important. Put those differences into your initial communications about your brand, whether it's a sales call, an advertisement or your website. Don't focus on what makes you better or best. That's usually best left until later. However, when you don't immediately express what makes you different, a prospect likely won't pay attention long enough to learn what makes you worth doing business with.

Rule #2: Be relevant

Nothing could be easier than just being different. Why not just show up on the farm in a clown suit, right? Wrong. The problem here is, while it may be different, a rep in a clown suit is not relevant to the customer. Relevance is about things that appeal to the self-interests of the other person. And how do you know what those are? Ask!



Chris Wirthwein,
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Dale Carnegie, author of the all-time best seller *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, had this to say about relevance: "The royal road to a person's heart is to talk about the things he or she treasures most."

Enlist E3 soybeans have a long list of key benefits. But not all of these appeal to each customer. The same holds true for your seed brand. Get to know the self-interest of your customers. And when it comes to your brand, look for patterns and trends. Do you appeal to certain self-interests of a market segment in a different way than your competitors? Be ready to talk about this. Neuroscientist Dr. John Medina would likely agree, saying, "The brain selects meaning-laden information for further processing and leaves the rest alone."

Rule #3: Don't just be...do!

Being different is great – but doing different is how to win in the marketplace. Infuse your difference and relevance into everything you do so that a customer or prospect can see and experience it. For a moment, let your mind wander. What are all the assets and activities of your brand in which you can present your difference: your brand name, imagery, physical "dress" such as trucks, field signs, clothing, packaging and website, the language and ideas you express to convey value and on and on? It should be a very long list! And each item on that list provides an opportunity to convey differentiation. Don't keep your differences hidden. Play them out to the customer in all that you do.

Differentiation: good for you; good for your customer

When you effectively differentiate your brand, you'll own a space that your competitors can't touch. And that can drive your success. But someone else also wins when you do a good job differentiating: your customer. In today's crowded marketplace, standing out and making your differences crystal clear helps customers better understand what your brand has to offer. That can make their job of seed purchasing easier and less time consuming. And that difference alone holds great value in today's world of too little time and too much to do.

In our third and final installment, we'll talk about brand continuity and making a brand that's built to last.



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