

# A Word about Technology Marketing

## Seven Reasons Why You Do Not Need Marketing Collateral

(And What's Wrong With Each of Them)

May 2007

Michael J. Selissen  
Case Mountain Communications, LLC



---

## Summary

You just finished your product design and prototype. You've contracted with a manufacturer, lined up a couple of customers who are eager to buy, and are even negotiating with a potential distributor.

Life is good...

Well, maybe.

If your marketing collateral consists of a product brief, a set of datasheets, design guides, a few web pages, and a lone technology white paper written by the CEO, you may think that's good enough.

Here are some of the reasons you could be giving yourself for not producing the right collateral and consequently why you may be facing an uphill selling battle over the long haul.

---

**Reason #1: Uncovering leads is a sales job.**

I am (barely) old enough to remember the Fuller Brush Man. He went house-to-house selling specialty brushes and household cleaning supplies. The same salesman came knocking on our door year after year. He remembered what products my mother ordered and he pulled new items from his sample case he thought she might be interested in buying.

People who bought from Fuller Brush knew it as a trustworthy company, one that sold quality, affordable products that were hard to find in stores. By the same token, The Fuller Brush Company knew the difficulties their customers faced in keeping a household going and offered products that were dependable and helpful.

Selling technology, especially for newly formed companies, calls for establishing that same level of mutual knowledge and comfort between you and your customers well before the sales team goes knocking on the door. And that requires a marketing plan that communicates your company's value and credibility before you start handing out the technical specifications.

Marketing folks carry out a plan like this by creating core messages using the right mix of collateral, which is distributed in an ordered fashion to the target customer base.

Marketing is to a large degree an education process that keeps potential customers engaged until they are ready to buy. When successful, the sales team ends up with the names and phone numbers of qualified prospects that are informed and prepared to buy what you have to offer.

Selling without a cohesive marketing and communications plan will leave you knocking on lots of doors where no one is buying.

**Reason #2: We're a technology company that sells to technology customers.**

So goes the rationale that all marketing collateral must be deeply technical. That way you can show off your product's innovative features and impress your prospect's technical decision makers.

But not all of those decision makers have technical jobs. Members of finance, the executive team, purchasing, manufacturing, legal, and research may all have a say not only in whether to buy your product, but what the contract terms will be.

Waiting until you are deep into the sales cycle to address these constituencies may uncover some hidden objections that could force you to push your prospect back to the "unqualified lead" status and start over again -- if you're lucky. At the worst, it may create factions within your prospect's company that are not resolvable, and for you that means no sale.

You can save yourself a lot of grief by identifying the key stakeholders and providing them with the information they're interested in right from the start. Helping them to visualize the benefits of your product in terms they are familiar with will keep the key stakeholders informed and improve your chances for a smooth and timely sale.

You can do this using:

- Introductory emails
- Executive-level web seminars that introduce your company
- White papers that address a specific market or topic such as ROI
- Case studies from a customer in the same line of business as your prospect

You may also need to reckon with industry and customer influencers such as journalists, bloggers, consultants, and analysts, all of whom may not have the time or the inclination to delve into the technical details of your product until they first understand your basic value. Having collateral available that communicates your core message and benefits is one way to break the ice with influencers.

**Reason #3: Our prospects ask for technical details right away.**

Many prospective customers will indeed ask for engineering specifications and datasheets as soon as they are aware of your product.

But the request typically comes from the technical guys – and certainly one of the hardest things to tell a customer is, “wait a bit.” After all, who wants to be accused of losing a sale for not emailing a datasheet?

Whether or not you comply with early requests for technical material is something that you can only decide one customer at a time on the basis of risk and need.

But what you can always do is to include additional material in the form of a white paper, case study, or research paper that communicates the core benefits of your product and describes the industry landscape and the problems you are solving.

And by all means, if you must deliver technical material in the early stages, send along your introductory collateral for the other stakeholders, especially at the executive and financial level.

Use every opportunity to let your prospects get to know you and recognize that you understand the problems they are trying to solve.

---

**Reason #4: We hired a PR agency to establish our brand and create market awareness**

Studies by various marketing research organizations credit activities such as conference speakerships, published articles written by key employees, product reviews, and company profiles as indispensable in establishing a company's credentials. PR makes your brand recognizable, creates awareness and instills buyer confidence.

What PR does not do, however, is communicate your core message repeatedly, with content and a rhythm that you control.

In other words, even with a strong PR strategy you still need to create a set of marketing content that:

- a. Builds slowly starting from a simple core message through to describing the complexities of your product
- b. Addresses the hot buttons of each stakeholder (finance, purchasing, legal) to demonstrate you understand their perspective and can guide them to the correct solution.

**Reason #5: Our datasheets and product briefs already list our features and benefits.**

When you spend your days building and selling technology, it's all too easy to get caught up in the fabulous features and functions you built into the products. So much so in fact, that you might assume the problems your products address or the needs they satisfy are self evident.

Consequently, there is a tendency to fall back on that tired string of clichéd benefits – the very same ones your competitors use by the way. Benefits such as:

- Extensible
- Robust
- Value-oriented
- Reduces time to market
- Improves efficiency
- Easy to use
- Makes your teeth whiter

Prospective customers need to understand the context within which your product will be used, and if they are currently using one of your competitor's products, why it is worth their time, money and risk to switch. They need to know that you understand the hurdles they will face in adopting your technology and that your solution is the best choice in the long run.

Explaining true benefits and making the case for your product takes time. It is an ongoing process -- something to which one table listing features and benefits in a product brief can't do justice.

Instead, you are better served if you produce a series of collateral pieces that coherently describe the problem you are solving, why it needs to be solved, and how your product provides the best solution.

Take time to develop these pieces. Knowing in your gut that you have a superior product is one thing. Getting that message across to customers who are busy in their own jobs takes patience.

**Reason #6: Our technology is complicated.**

Without a doubt you need collateral in the form of technology briefs and datasheets that explain your product in excruciating detail. But to pull attention away from your competitors, you also need to communicate your technology to a non-technical audience.

Even those with a technical background will perk up sooner if your initial message focuses on their problem from a different perspective.

The trick is to do it in such a way that keeps you from slipping into untranslatable *marketingspeak*. To the contrary, if you focus on your core messages, your communications will be both understandable and credible.

Use the “who cares?” approach to hone your product’s benefits. When you think you have a good benefit, ask “who cares?” or “so what?” This helps you to simplify your message even further and get to the heart of what is really important to your customers.

Think about what medium is best suited to each audience you want to target – email, case study, podcast, newsletter, web seminar, white paper or research study. Then write your message with the medium and audience in mind.

Draw on stories, analogies and humor when developing your collateral. There are enough dry case studies out there. If it’s interesting to read, then you might have a leg up on your competition as well as get your message across.

Watch your language. You don’t ask your neighbor, “Can you provide me with a market-leading lawn shearing solution that will enable me to address the challenges of accelerated growth associated with Spring seasonality thereby reducing my time-to-beer?” So why explain your product that way?

Use the words of your current customers. They can tell the story of how your product saved the day with credibility and honesty.

And above all, do a little market research. Validate your views of the marketplace with trusted customers. Ask them how they want to get their information and what catches their eyes and ears. They’ll be happy to tell you.

**Reason #7: We can't afford to create marketing collateral that doesn't have a measureable ROI – it's just not in the budget.**

The Fuller Brush Man didn't sell brushes. He established long-standing relationships with each of his clients and knew the problems of running a household. He didn't ask himself if taking time out for a cup of coffee with a customer would reduce his ROI. He knew it was part of building a bond.

How does a new business build relationships in a fast-paced global market? Just like you do in real life -- keeping it simple at first and letting the complexity build slowly. That means your collateral strategy should reflect that slow growth and not jump right into the heavy-duty stuff.

Remember, your partners and your distributor's sales force cannot sell your products as well as you can. And your in-house sales team can't be everywhere. Your best surrogate is the collateral and messages you communicate out to your prospects.

What you do have today that the Fuller Brush Man didn't 40 years ago are the Internet and software systems to measure how well each relationship is progressing. Using web analytics, email tracking and download statistics, you can see who is receiving your message. Through follow-up actions via phone, emails or web landing page, you can track the progress of your prospects and hand each one off to sales when the interest level is right.

Your competitors, especially the big ones, understand the persuasive value of collateral content. Where you can outshine the competition is by communicating the benefits of your products in a clearer and more informative way. The more informed your customer is about what you offer, the more likely you are to ring up the sale.

The bottom line. You don't have to do it all at once, but you do need to begin by creating a strategy, developing your core messages for each audience, and testing your concepts. From there, you can create one piece at a time that builds up from that foundation.

## About Case Mountain Communications

Case Mountain Communications helps companies identify and convey the strengths of their technology and vision through clear and concise writing.

We reach beyond the ordinary and create a point of view that speaks to the technical, business and market needs of each audience.

Visit us at [www.casemountain.com](http://www.casemountain.com)

