

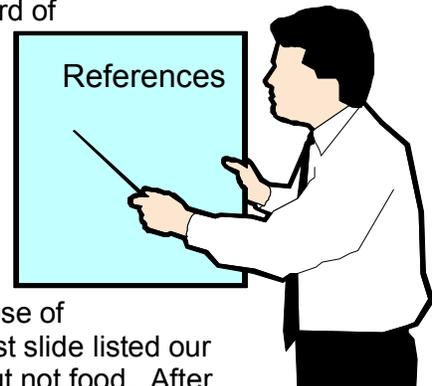
The Dry Bean Story – Or, Who Is Your Prospect?

By Olin Thompson

Do you know who your prospect is? Not their name but who they think they are. If you think they are something that disagrees with what they think, you lose credibility and your message does not get through.

The Dry Bean Story

Let's look at an example, the Dry Bean Story. At one point in my selling career, I was invited to join a rep's presentation before a prospect's board of directors. The rep was excellent and therefore did a great job of briefing me about the prospect and my role in the meeting. The rep told me what they did for a living, a bean packer, and that I was to present our references. We were a process ERP vendor with over 1000 accounts so references were not a problem.



When my turn came, I had a series of reference slides, aimed at highlighting the quality of our references over those of the competitor (a very much less focused vendor). My first slide listed our process references, chemical, pharmaceutical, and etc, but not food. After talking about these references, I stated, "But you are not process, you are a food company."

My next slide listed food references, soup, dairy, bakery, and etc. but not vegetables. After talking about these references, I stated, "But you are not a food company, you are a vegetable processing company."

My next slide listed vegetable processing companies. I covered a number of these companies talking about the value we created, why had selected us, their experience with our company and product. As a sales person, I hope you get that rush of knowing you are doing a great job during a presentation or discussion. I had that feeling; I was at the top of my game.

Then the chairman asked, "But don't you have any bean companies?" Ugh! I went from a high to near panic. Thinking hard, I came up with three companies who used our product to process beans, I was quite proud of myself once again.

But then, the chairman stated, "No, they do wet beans, we do dry beans*. So I guess you have no references in our business." I was crushed.

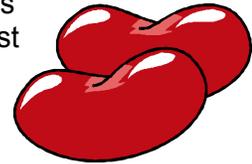
Well, we eventually won the deal. Later we found a dry bean reference and then, and only then, did the prospect believe we could do the job in their business.

The Dry Bean Lesson

What can we learn from the Dry Bean Story? The question, "Who is the prospect?" can only be answered by asking the prospect who they think they are. The fact that we have an opinion is not meaningful. If we do not identify the prospect as they do, we will not get through to them. They know they are a dry bean processor and any other label we put on them will be less effective.

But how do you ask? I suggest you look at their web site (the about page may help) or you simply ask them, "I think I understand something about your business, but how do you define it." Their answer will tell them who they think they are. Sell to that image of who they are.

What about marketing? The Dry Bean Story brings a dilemma to marketing. How tightly do you define sales materials, mail campaigns, web site, etc? To get the maximum return on these dollars, we want to aim them at a higher level (process or maybe food) but to have the maximum impact on a prospect, it must be targeted to who they think they are. No right answer exist, trade-offs must be made. Of course, the more tightly defined your product and market, the easier this becomes.



Summary - The Dry Bean Story and the "Your Market"

Your market is defined in the terms that your prospect thinks, not what you think. Each individual company in that market may have their own words to define that market. To sell that individual company or the market, you need to use their words. Any other words mean you are failing to reach your market effectively.