

Module 4: Match features and benefits

Module introduction

Welcome to Module 4 of the Best Practice Guide for Customer Service Professionals. In this module we explain the difference between the features and the benefits of the products and services that we supply to our customers. We try to match the features and benefits to what the customer wants. You will see how products and service services can be presented to customers so that they know what to expect from your organisation. We also cover the essential selling skills that are used to provide additional products and services to customers

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4.1 Learning outcomes

When you have successfully read through all the explanations and completed all the activities in this module you will be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of features and benefits of products and services that affect the delivery of customer service
- Identify customer preferences and match them to available options
- Recognise how organisations can set product and service standards
- Demonstrate an understanding of equality and diversity issues for an organisation
- Demonstrate an understanding of how to promote additional services or products to customers
- Identify an unique selling point for a product or service

4.2 Your organisation

First things first. To help your external customers, make sure you understand your own organisation. Find out about the basics, if you do not already know them.

Get to know:

- The purpose (or mission) of your organisation
- Its short-term objectives (say for the next year)
- Its long-term objectives (say for the next 5 years)
- Its organisational structure, and where you fit in

4.3 Features and benefits

Think about the organisation’s products and services and how these can be matched to customers’ needs. Regard all customers as individuals - they like to be treated that way. They each have their own preferences and requirements. As a customer service professional it is your job to ensure you meet these preferences and requirements as best you can.

If you can identify your customers’ individual needs, and match your products and services closely to them, then you will satisfy (or delight) your customers and gain a reputation for excellence. It is your reputation that makes a real difference to business success. And that applies to all types of organisation - profit makers, not-for-profit organisations and monopolies.

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Features of the product/service

Get to know your products and services inside out. Become an expert in what you offer to your customers. You need to understand the features and benefits. Look at these definitions, and then carry out the activity that follows.

Definition	The features of a product or service are its characteristics, such as size, colour, hours of business, power, output, speed and location.
Features of a Product or Service	

Definition	The benefits of a product or service are ‘what is in it for the customer’, for example it fits into the pocket, co-ordinates with an item of clothing, convenient shopping hours, easy to use, or near public transport.
Benefits of a Product or Service	

Activity

Meet your customers' preferences

You are a customer service agent dealing with enquiries from customers choosing Personal Computers (PCs). Each PC has a different specification, in other words a different set of features. Some of the product features and some benefits to particular customers have been stated. Where there are gaps, fill them in.

Product/service features	Benefits	
Desktop or Laptop	Desktop	Benefit to customer who works in an office or at home
	Laptop	Benefit to customer who travels a lot
Size of hard drive (e.g. 40Gb or 120 Gab)	40Gb	
	120Gb	Benefit to customer who stores large amounts of data - e.g. photos or database
Type & size of monitor (e.g. 15" Flat screen or 17" TFT Panel)	15" Flat screen	Benefit to customer who does mainly word processing
	17" TFT Panel	
Type of CD Drive (e.g. Sony CD-ROM or Sony DVD)	CD-ROM	
	DVD	
Maintenance contract: (e.g. Return to factory or 24-hours a day call-out)	Return to factory	Benefit to customer who does not need immediate repair, such as a home user
	24-hours a day call-out	

Try to match your customers' preferences to the specific features and benefits of your product or service. A particular feature may be of benefit to one customer, but of no benefit to another.

Think of the features of package holidays in Spanish hotel resorts. One feature is the location of the hotel. Younger customers tend to choose busy, popular resorts with plenty of clubs and bars. Older customers might prefer a quiet resort without too much noise late at night. (Of course, not all younger and older customers have these preferences). A customer service professional in a travel shop will try to match the type of hotel resort to the preferences of the customer. An older customer who wants a quiet holiday will benefit from a hotel in a quiet resort. If this older customer was sold a holiday in a noisy resort it would be due to a failure to match his or her individual preferences to the features and benefits of the package holiday.



Matching the product or service to the preferences of the customer

Activity

Features and Benefits

Choose a product or service that is offered to customers of your organisation (or one that you are familiar with). The product may have add-on services included. (For example, an electrical product like a refrigerator includes add-on services such as: finance, next-day delivery, and repair under guarantee). List some features and benefits of your product or service (or one that you are familiar with) below.

Product or Service:

Features	Benefits

Make the best of features and benefits

Now think carefully about how you use features and benefits. Give an example of how you make the best of your features and benefits to help your customers.

Of course you can use features and benefits wrongly. Give an example of how you might damage the service given to your customers by using features and benefits in the wrong way.

4.4 Product and service standards

Match your products and services to your customers' needs by keeping to standards. Standards should ideally be written down so that customers know what to expect. (Make sure that you understand the difference between product standards and service standards).

Product standards describe key features of the product. These often appear in catalogues and brochures that are used to promote the product. Once the customer has bought the product the product standards are often provided in more detail. For example, if you buy a personal computer you will receive with it the product specification - details of the hardware and software components, which versions, what performance you can expect, and so on. These are product standards.

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Service standards are just as important. The customer needs to know what service to expect along with the product itself. The best business organisations have clear service standards. These are written statements. They show the level of service that customers can expect, and the level of service that employees need to provide. For example if you order goods from a website you should be told how long the goods will take to arrive. This is a service standard.

Service standards have these advantages:

- Organisational and personal standards help us to provide excellent customer service
- Standards are a guide to help you do your job
- Standards help to ensure consistent levels of service
- Standards help you to measure the effectiveness of your customer service

Some sectors and organisations publish a customer charter. This is also a way of letting the customers know what to expect.

Definition	A customer charter is a statement of intent and is generally not part of the contract that a service deliverer makes with its customer.
Customer charter	



In the next activity, think about your own service standards, and those of your organisation.

Activity

What are your service standards?	
<i>List three service standards that apply to your own customer service</i>	
1	
2	
3	
<i>Does your organisation have any statements or charters setting out the standards of service that customers can expect? If so, what aspects do they cover?</i>	

Try creating some service standards yourself by completing the next activity.

Activity

Create service standards

For this activity put yourself in the role of a customer service agent working for a large, national furniture retailer. The retailer has branches in many cities and towns across the UK. The company wants to set service standards, because some customers have complained recently.

Following a television advertising campaign, sales of certain sofas and beds increased dramatically. However, the furniture manufacturers could not meet the delivery deadlines, and so some customers did not receive their furniture orders within the delivery guideline of six weeks. Some customers who ordered Italian leather sofas had to wait over four months for their furniture to arrive. This is damaging the reputation of the company. Not only that - when complaints were made they were not handled well, and some customers then cancelled their orders.

You have been asked by your supervisor to give your views on what service standards could be put into place. Write down three service standards which would be relevant to customers of this business. For each one, describe what actions would need to be taken to make sure the company can meet these service standards.

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Service standard		Actions needed to meet standards
1		
2		
3		

4.5 Welcome diverse customers and colleagues

Equality and diversity is about the day-to-day issues that affect people: our differences, our similarities, how we communicate and how we relate to each other.

The law requires organisations to create a 'level playing field' in the workplace. Individuals, irrespective of their race, sex or disability should have equal access to employment opportunities and the services that different organisations provide. The law plays an important part in ensuring that 'the rules of the game' are fair.

Legislation

There is a range of legislation that affects equality and diversity, including:

- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the 2003 Sex Discrimination (Gender Re-assignment) regulations
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- The Race Relations Act 1976 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
- The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Act (SENDA) 2001
- The Equal Pay Act 1970/84
- Race and Employment Directives of 2000 agreed with the European Union in 1997 [The Treaty of Amsterdam] to implement Article 13 of the Human Rights Act (2000/43/EC).
- The Equal Treatment Directive of 1976 for men and women (1976/207/EEC) and of 2000 for religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation (2000/78/EC).

Refer to Module 8: Laws and codes of practice, for further information about laws affecting sex discrimination and race relations.

The purpose of this legislation is to ensure that people are treated fairly and equally at work, in terms of recruitment and employment conditions. An employer must take account of all the legislation. Organisations must have policies, procedures and working practices that ensure fairness, respect and equal treatment for everyone. As a customer service professional you should know and understand the implications of this legislation.

How it can go wrong

Discrimination and harassment could occur under the headings below.

Age You should not treat someone unfairly or harass them because they are seen as being too old or too young.

Ethnicity, religion and culture Treating someone unfairly or harassing them because of where they, or their family, originate from, or because of their faith, culture or skin colour; or failing to respect their religious or philosophical beliefs would be seen as discrimination.

Sexual orientation and Trans-sexuality People should not be treated unfairly or harassed because they are a gay man, a lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

Gender Ensure that people are not treated unfairly or harassed because they are male or female.

Disability There is a wide range of disabilities. Treating people unfairly or harassing them if they have a disability such as a sensory or mobility impairment, a form of disfigurement, or a learning or mental health problem must not happen.

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Diversity

Diversity relates to every aspect of human culture, outlook and experience. To some extent, we all have our own opinions on some or all of the core aspects of diversity - be it gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, age or disability. But the important thing to remember is not all of them are going to be right or appropriate in today's highly diverse society and that sometimes it is necessary to separate our attitudes from our public behaviour. Treat the people you deal with professionally, as customers. If you do that, you will recognise their needs and differences as individuals.

The difference between equality and diversity

You have heard and read about "equality and diversity." The two concepts go together but are different. Diversity initiatives go further than equal opportunities. They aim to take people's diverse characteristics fully into account and to get maximum benefit from their uniqueness as individuals.

Diversity recognises that each of us is different and unique. That uniqueness is made up of a mix of visible and non-visible individual characteristics. Consequently, it makes sense that treating everyone the same is not necessarily going to work. Different people will have different aspirations, expectations, opportunities, responsibilities and needs. Therefore treating people fairly means recognising those differences, respecting them and

acting accordingly. An organisation that values diversity not only has a strong sense of social justice but also sees the business benefits of pursuing good equality and diversity strategies. In short, diversity is about valuing differences.

Organisations cannot afford to ignore large sections of the population. People from diverse backgrounds, age groups, etc. may be attracted to a particular organisation because of its reputation for equality and its respect for people. This includes customers as well as employees.



Ensure that people are not treated unfairly or harassed because they are male or female

In your customer service role, try to recognise all forms of diversity amongst your customers. Respond to their individual needs and expectations. Look for signs of diversity. These signs could include dress, appearance, accent, behaviour and many others. Get used to recognising both verbal and non-verbal clues that show the individuality of your customers. Use these clues to become really responsive to your customers. However, be careful not to stereotype your customers. Not all people from one country or culture adopt the religion or customs of that country. Not all people who have a hearing impediment need to be treated in the same way. Be very careful not to make assumptions about people - they might be offended if the assumptions are wrong! Use your questioning skills and your active listening skills to find out more about the individual need of customers. But again, be careful to make sure your questions are tactful and respectful. Keep everything on a professional level. Your aim is to help customers identify the products and service which they can benefit from, and to make the transaction easy to carry out from their point of view.

Find out about your organisation's approach to equality and diversity. Read the equal opportunities policy and get advice on how to deal with customers by following your organisation's guidelines. Discuss with colleagues how you can adopt a really inclusive approach to gain maximum benefit from meeting all your customers' expectations.

Activity

Equality and Diversity Checklist	
<i>Do you adopt best practice in Equality and Diversity? Answer the following questions honestly and see if you can improve your responsiveness to diversity.</i>	
Are you familiar with your organisation's policies and procedures for Equality and Diversity?	
Do you treat your internal and external customers fairly and with respect?	
List the groups of customers to whom you regularly provide customer service.	
What behaviours should you avoid so as not to offend to these groups of customers?	
Can a wide range of customers with disabilities or impairments access your products and services?	
Think of three actions you can take to be more inclusive and responsive to the needs of these groups of customers.	1
	2
	3

4.6 Sell or promote products and services to your customers

Every organisation communicates, persuades and negotiates with customers. These are the skills needed for selling products and services. To enhance your skills as a customer service professional, learn how to sell to your customers. Even if your main role is not

selling, you will find many opportunities to introduce additional products and services to your customers. These can enhance your customers' satisfaction.

The benefits of selling additional products and services

In your role as a customer service professional you match your products and services to your customers' needs. In a profit making organisation this means selling to your customers to enhance profits. Even in not-for-profit and public sector organisations it can be of benefit to sell or promote additional products and services.

The benefits of selling or promoting of additional products include:

- For a profit-maker, higher profits through increased sales
- For a public sector or not-for-profit organisation, healthier finances through increased revenue
- For customers, increased satisfaction
- For any organisation, enhanced reputation and customer loyalty through higher customer satisfaction

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Know your organisation's procedures

First of all, make sure you know your organisation's procedures for selling or promoting additional products and services. Whether or not you are a sales person you should learn how your organisation wants you to deal with this aspect of your customer service role. To help you do this, complete the next activity.

Activity

Procedures for selling or promoting

Find out how your organisation wants you sell promote additional products and services to your customers. You can include customers asking for further information. For the procedures that apply to you, just make a note of the procedure, if there is one. Then briefly say what you should do.

Offering additional products	
Offering additional service	
Giving further information	
Referring onto someone else	

Know your products and services

The first priority is to know your products and services. Learn them inside out. If your organisation has hundreds of products you cannot expect to know them all - but try to become an expert advisor for your customers. Learn how and where to find the answers to your customers' questions. Discover who to refer them to if you cannot answer their questions. (Remember, though, that customers prefer to deal with as few people as possible. They will soon become frustrated if they are passed from pillar to post).

Remember that nobody buys just the product or service. They buy the benefits that ownership brings. Benefits are often emotional as well as logical and it is those benefits that encourage customers to part with their money.

The phrase to remember for selling is "people buy people." Customers are interested in your additional products and services if they are interested in you. If they relate to you they will listen to what you have to say.



Know your products and services



Communicate with your customers

Communicate with your customers. Communication is a two way process. Use your listening skills. We can all present information, but the challenge is whether the customer understands - are they even listening? Ask the right questions, listen carefully to the customer's needs and then motivate them to buy. Your own attitude towards customers makes the difference. If you come across as a warm and friendly person and you will receive a positive reaction.

Create a rapport with your customers - instantly

An experienced sales person might tell you that most customers say they are “just looking.” The sales person may have been taught to say, “Can I help you?” The answer is usually “No thanks.” The thing to remember here is to greet your customer with a friendly smile, using your eyes as well as your mouth. Try saying something like “How are you today?” You may be surprised how many customers will respond, saying “Fine thanks - how are you?” Instantly you have opened up a conversation. You have created a rapport with your customer.

Your most important skill in selling is building that rapport with the customer. This is the same skill that you need to develop for all your customer communications. Customers love to be treated individually. They want to be somebody special - they like the personal touch. Customers do need to know how much you know - but initially they want to know how much you care. Whatever product or service you are selling, you are also selling your skills as a customer service professional.

Observe your customers' body language

Observe your customers as they approach you. (Module 5 of this Best Practice Guide deals with body language. Up to 80% of face-to-face communication is done without speaking - using body language. Body language is a collection of expressions on our face and gestures we make using our hands and body).

Customers can tell you a lot about themselves if you observe their body language. You may be tempted to rush in too quickly. This could put your customer off if they are not ready to communicate. Alternatively, you could leave it too late - and customers will become annoyed and possibly leave. Even if you are busy talking to another customer, acknowledge the new customer and tell them when you will be able to give them your full attention. That way they have the chance to return when they can. By observing customers you can judge the best time to approach them.

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Be sensitive to what is happening around you. Try to understand your customers' emotions. If a customer looks angry, maybe because their children are misbehaving, empathise with them. It is a great way of starting your conversation. You will start to build that rapport. On the telephone a customer's tone of voice can indicate how they are feeling.

Introduce your products and services

As you introduce products and services to your customer you need to explain clearly their features and benefits. Show the customer what the new products and services can do for them. If it is a physical product, demonstrate the benefits if you can. Confirming at each stage that the customer understands what you are saying and demonstrating.

Even if the customer stops and says that the product is exactly what they want and they want to buy it, still go ahead and finish the demonstration. If the customer was happy to pay the price knowing only half the benefits, imagine how they will feel when they know all the benefits. You can increase their satisfaction (and therefore their loyalty) by showing further benefits.

Explain the unique selling point (USP)

Definition	An unique selling point (USP) is the one distinctive feature or benefit that makes an organisation’s product or service different from all others on the market.
Unique Selling Point	

Now plan how you will demonstrate the features and benefits of your own products and services in the following activity.

Activity

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What attracts your customers?	
<i>Pick one product or service that your organisation (or one that you are familiar with) offers. Think carefully about the features and benefits that the customers will find attractive. State the USP (unique selling point) if you can identify it.</i>	
The product or service	
Its features	
Its benefits	
Its USP	
How can you sell or promote this to your customers?	
<i>Write down three effective ways you can promote or sell this product or service to your customers.</i>	
1	
2	
3	

Close the sale

You will reach the stage when the customer is ready to buy the product or service. This is called closing the sale. It is important that you do this correctly.

Definition	To close the sale is to reach the end point in a selling transaction. After explaining the features and benefits and overcoming any reservations, the customer decides to purchase the product or service.
Close the sale	

The customer may need a statement of what has been bought. There may be other details - how much was paid and perhaps when it will be delivered. Get the process right so that the transaction runs smoothly. It wastes everyone's time if the customer receives the wrong product or service, or something else goes wrong. Your process has been designed complete the transaction successfully, so ensure you know it and use it.

After the sale - follow up

Complaints are often caused by the salesperson not following up. Some complaints about products are to do with delivery, for example. It is better to under promise and over deliver, so always be honest but do your best to follow through on the customer's behalf.



Customers buy the benefits that ownership brings

Here are your guide-lines for successful selling:

Guide-lines for successful selling

- Create a good first impression - with a selling environment that is well presented and clean
- Be knowledgeable and passionate about your products and services
- “People buy people” - so feel positive about yourself
- Get the first few seconds right - observe your customers’ body language to choose the best time to approach them
- Show an interest in your customers and show them you care
- Build a rapport with the customer by choosing the best way to start the conversation
- Observe everything that is happening around you, particularly customers who might be in a hurry
- Make it personal by remembering names, likes and dislikes if you can
- Ask the right questions and listen carefully to the customer’s answers so that you can identify their requirements
- Demonstrate the features and benefits of your products and services,
- Emphasise the Unique Selling Points (USPs)
- Close the sale and follow through - do not promise what you cannot deliver
- Challenge yourself every day, set yourself a target to learn something new about your customers or your product range

4.7 Self-assessment

Module 4 Self-assessment				
<i>In each case tick the answer that best fits the question.</i>				
1	The benefits of a product or service are:	What's in it for the organisation	A	<input type="checkbox"/>
		What's in it for the customer	B	<input type="checkbox"/>
		What's in it for you	C	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	A specific feature of a product or service is likely to be:	A benefit for nobody	A	<input type="checkbox"/>
		A benefit for all customers	B	<input type="checkbox"/>
		More of a benefit for some customers than others	C	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Some organisations publish a customer charter. This is so that:	Customers know how to complain	A	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Customers know what to expect of the organisation	B	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Customers know the prices of the organisation's products	C	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	The law requires organisations to:	Create a level playing field in the workplace	A	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Pay all employees the same wages or salaries	B	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Treat all employees in the same way	C	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Diversity is a concept which recognises that:	Everyone is the same	A	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Everyone has different needs and aspirations	B	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Everyone is on a different rate of pay	C	<input type="checkbox"/>

4.8 Learning log

Now complete your learning log.

Activity

Learning log for Module 4	
<i>Add items to your learning log. When you get to the end of the programme you will need to refine these items to produce a clear action plan.</i>	
What I have learned	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
Actions planned	Target date
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Module summary

- Well done - in this module you have learned the difference between features and benefits. Features are part of the product or service, and benefits are “what is in it for the customer.” You have understood the importance of trying to match the features and benefits to what the customer wants - in order to produce satisfied, loyal customers.

We then looked at product and service standards as a way of helping the customer to make the best choice for him or her. A customer charter is one example of how these standards can be made available to customers. In the final activity of the module you created your own service standards and planned actions to meet those standards.

You considered how you and your organisation deal with the important issues relating to equality and diversity. You have learned the importance of selling skills for all customer service professionals. You know how to use your listening and observation skills. When you introduce products and services you know how to explain their benefits and close the sale.
