

Marketing Munchies Podcast Transcript

Episode #4: Features and Benefits

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Announcer: Welcome to the *Marketing Munchies* podcast series, hosted by Dr. Bridget Behe. Each week, Bridget and her guests will share information, insights, research based findings and her 30 years of experience to help your horticultural business connect better with current and future customers. Now, let's join our host Dr. Bridget Behe.

Dr. Bridget Behe: Hi. Welcome to episode four of *Marketing Munchies*. I'm your host Dr. Bridget Behe. Last week, Dr. Charlie Hall was visiting with me, talking about his work with Madeline Dickson on the benefits of plants. I thought this week would be a good time to reflect on the differences between features and benefits and what we market when we market plants to our customers.

Features are product attributes. If you think about buying a computer, you might hear product features described in gigabytes, megahertz, how many pixels the screen has or how wide the screen is or how much the computer weighs. Features are those attributes about products that are very technical in nature. Most of the time, professionals are really comfortable talking about those technical features.

For plants, features are things like how tall it is, how wide it grows, maybe the flower color or the bloom season. Again, since we're horticulture professionals, we're very comfortable talking about features with our customers. When people buy products or services though, they're buying benefits not features and benefits are features in action.

If you think about a plant that's going to be tall and annual like a snapdragon or a zinnia, the benefit is that you can see that flower over other flowers or you can see that plant over other plants. Another alternative might be a short plant like a calibrachoa. That might grow in the front of the bed, and so the benefit of it is that you can put plants behind it or you can get up close and see it very easily up close and personal. The benefit of flower color is that it either complements or contrasts with the exterior of the home or maybe with the furniture that is on the deck.

Most of us are more comfortable talking about features than benefits but when it comes to buying, people really buy benefits. The reason that we buy a computer with a lot of gigabytes of storage is so that we can store more pictures or videos. The reason that we buy a computer that has a higher megahertz is so that it will run faster. Translating features into benefits is really a very important skill that everyone in the retail arena should have.

Where do we communicate these features and benefits? Often times we see them on signs. I see a lot of signs in the retail garden center that are very feature focused. They have the name of the plant, maybe they have the name in Latin which matters to some customers but not to all customers, and then usually I see a litany of features. Here's how tall it is, here's how wide it's going to grow, here's the time when it's going to bloom. People buy benefits though. They don't buy features.

One of the ways that we tested the impact of features and benefits was to modify some signs in an experiment that we did in 2015. On some of the signs we had feature information, those product attributes. While on other signs with the same plant, we converted those features into benefits. Here's what we found. When we had a plant that was at a relatively low price, the only thing we needed to communicate was that price. It really spoke volumes that this was a good deal, this was a good bargain. So at a low price, you don't need to report features or benefits.

However, what we found when we were marketing plants at a moderate price, we needed both features and benefits to increase the consumers likelihood to buy. I think the most interesting finding was that at a high price, what really helped us sell the product or what increased the consumer's purchase intention was that benefit alone. The features really did not play a role in increasing purchase intention when the product was priced relatively high.

If you think about that it makes a lot of sense. When we see something that might be little bit on the high end of what we think is a reasonable price, the more benefits we see, the more value we might perceive that we're getting for our money.

One of the interesting things that I like to do in my classroom is to have students engage in a features and benefits exercise. I have them bring in a horticultural product and they work in groups of two, three or four, and then I ask them to come up with the features of the product. That's really easy to do. Again, they're professionals and that's what we teach them. We teach them the technical attributes of the products.

The real interesting part of this exercise is asking them to translate those features into benefits. It really opens their eyes to the fact that they're focused on features and technical information when they know and understand consumers are more interested and are more likely to buy a product when they understand the benefits

This is a great exercise that just about any company could engage in. Once a week, especially prior to the busy season, you could get your staff together and bring in three to five or so products that are going to be featured that week or maybe going to be featured the following week, and have them engage in the exercise of turning features into benefits. Ask them to come up with the list of product features and then challenge them to take every feature and turn it into a benefit.

What this does is it gives them a working vocabulary that when they're interacting with customers, they're not relying on the technical features but they already have practice in translating those into the benefits, helping customers be better prepared to make that purchase because they see greater perceived value.

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Announcer: Thank you for joining us on this week's *Marketing Munchies* podcast. For more information or to download a transcript of this podcast, please visit connect-2-consumer.org. That's C-O-N-N-E-C-T-the number 2-C-O-N-S-U-M-E-R. dot org.