

The background is a dark blue-tinted photograph of a person's hands writing on a laptop keyboard. Overlaid on this are two large, semi-transparent geometric shapes: a red triangle pointing downwards from the top left, and a red triangle pointing upwards from the bottom right. The text is positioned on the left side of the image.

Languaging –

Why the Words You Use Matter in Marketing

MARK DONNIGAN



There was a blind man begging on the streets whose bowl was always empty. On his sign were the words "I'm blind, please help". An Ad Man noticed people passing by but instead of giving him change, he wrote a few words on the sign. To the beggar's delight, his money cup was overflowing. What did the Ad Man write? "It's springtime and I cannot see it."

The words we use matter, and how you communicate can determine whether a market moves toward our company or to the competition. Whether they adopt our innovation or maintain the status quo.

For tech startups, this matters even more since the audience (today audience equals prospects and customers) you want to capture has a high likelihood of not understanding how your product can solve a problem that they may not have even realized they have yet. Technical startup founders have one thing in common – they are highly intelligent and are prone to use a different language from the market (their audience).

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"A major challenge in marketing is how to bridge the communication gap between the problem your product solves and what the market is expecting. This requires languaging."

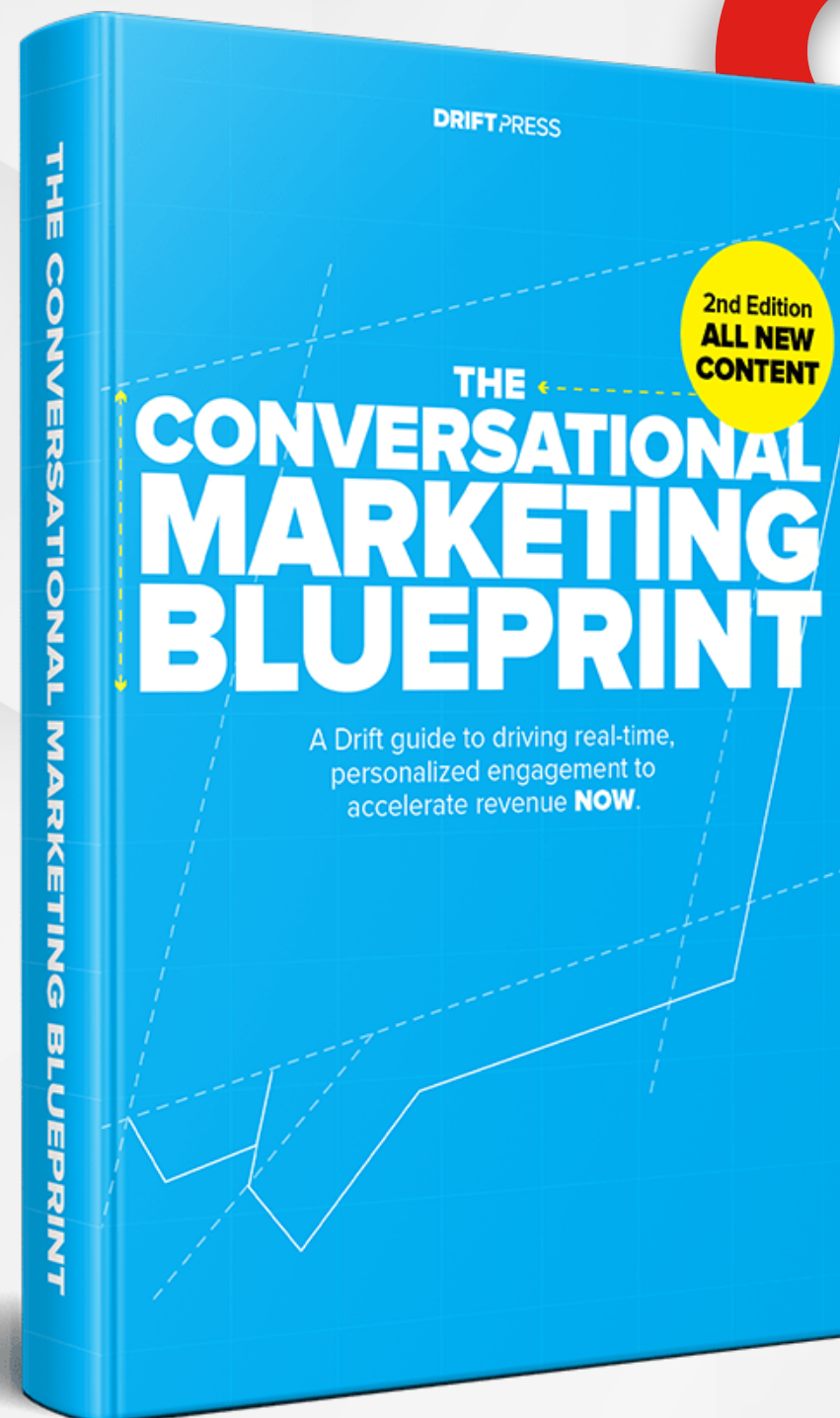
Finding a language that works with your target customers should be the first priority of every startup. Before making any interactions or improvements in your product, discovering whether your message resonates with your audience can bring more impact. And it is relatively easy to do with A/B testing and talking to customers.

A key component to discovering the right words (language) to use in your marketing frameworks is to uncover the unmet needs in your market. In reality, unmet need always goes back to uncovering a problem that your product, technology, or solution is uniquely equipped to solve.

Once you discover the unmet need (customers primary problem), you will craft your messages around your customers' struggles, focusing on the end result your product or service will bring. To start, you should avoid overused, vague buzzwords such as "innovative", "cutting-edge", or "all-in-one solution".

Words such as these can elicit cynicism and do not clearly define what you want to communicate. Be more specific. Let's look at the example below.





Drift is a chatbot technology company. Though, even simple things can be complex under the hood. Let's face it, chatbots are pretty standard fare on all tech platforms. So, let's look at how Drift "language" their product.

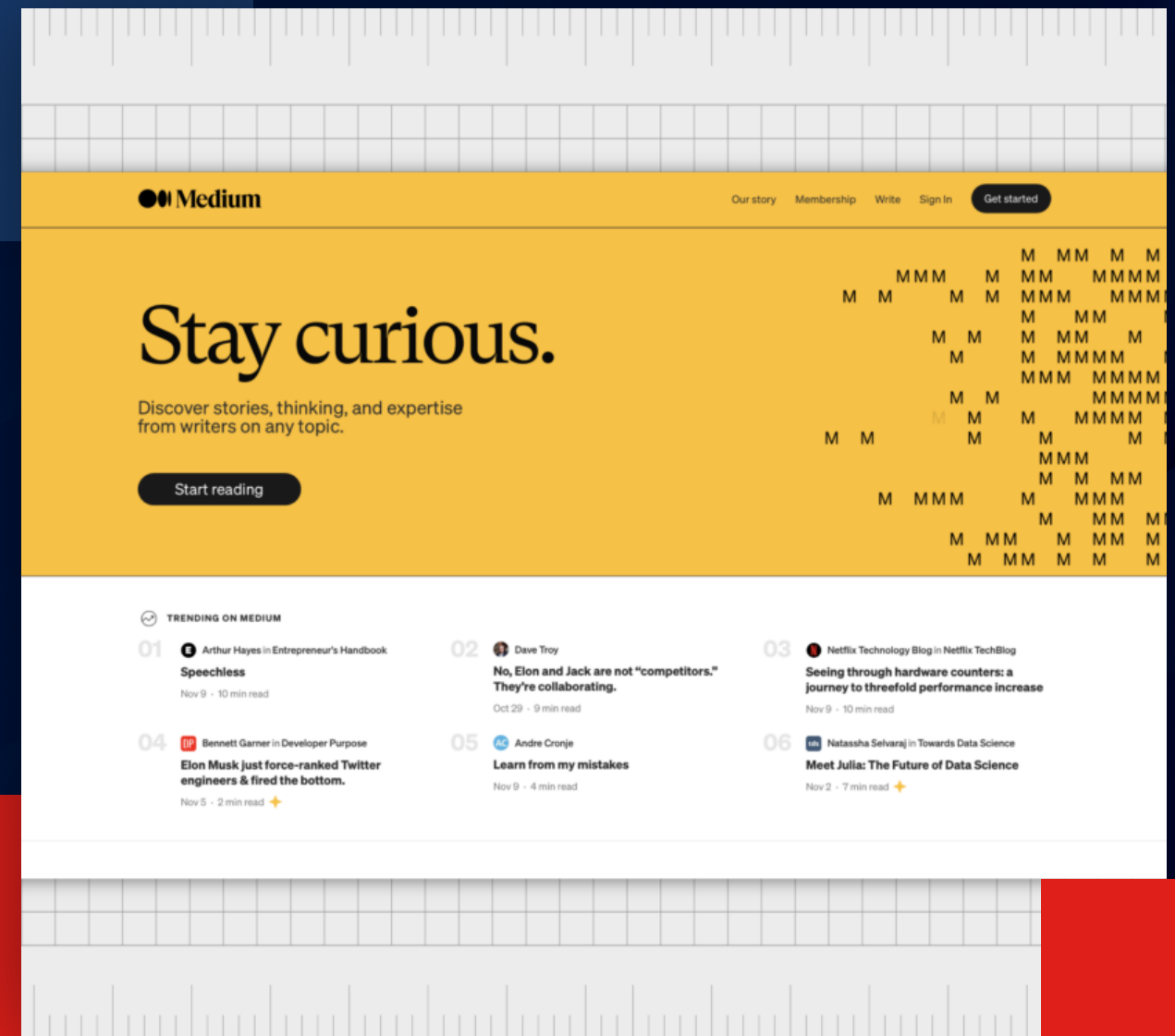
Starting with the tagline, "Conversational Marketing." Aren't we all ultimately looking for connection, and through conversation (talking) it's the surest way to make that happen. With this slogan, Drift was able to describe what their company does and its strengths.

Think for a moment, would you rather buy a chatbot for your website, or install a conversational marketing tool? I for one would much rather buy a tool to strengthen the ability to build relationships with my customers. The language of Conversational Marketing was so good by the way, Drift even published a book on how to use and apply conversational marketing. Do you think it helped them sell more of their product? You bet it did.

Another excellent example is [Medium.com](https://medium.com). As a reader, I know what I will get when I click on the “Start reading” button.

Finding the right words may take several rounds of tweaking before you finally find the right message. But you better believe it’s important. Think of you and your customer separated by a vast divide.

The only way to bridge that gap is to find the right message about you and how you will help your potential buyer overcome obstacles and achieve success.



STEP 0

Mindset – not yours, the customers!

Before you even attempt to craft an effective communications strategy, you must adopt the correct mindset in approaching your potential customers. The most important thing to remember is that the world does not revolve around your company or your product!

Sure, you may have developed the best ever cutting-edge solution using the latest technology, but that is not what matters to your audience.

When a potential buyer reads your website, he's not thinking "Wow, this is great!" He's thinking "how does this help me?" or "can this solve my problem?".

Even here however, we must be mindful that the customer may not actually know they have a problem, or have not identified and named it yet. Which is why having ecosystem and domain knowledge is more than knowing all of the most common three and four letter acronyms. It's being able to empathize with what your customer is doing on Monday morning at 9am and how your product relates.

Take Steve Jobs for example. When he launched the iPod in 2001, he never emphasized its features or how high-tech it is. Instead, he simply said "A thousand songs in your pocket."

And people went crazy for what was actually just another MP3 player in a somewhat crowded market, even then.



THIS BRINGS US TO ➔

STEP 1

The hero of the story is your customer – not your product

You know your product is good. You know it addresses a need the market has. But your customer does not know that right now. Your job as a marketer is to help your potential customers and clients discover how your product or service can help them solve their difficulties and guide them towards a decision to choose you.

Doing this involves walking in your customer's shoes. Know their difficulties. What are they trying to solve? Only if you know what they are struggling with can you craft a message that resonates with them. The goal in this stage is to make your customer say "wow, these guys understand me".





STEP 2

Our role in the story is a guide

When faced with a problem, business people are looking for partners who can help them overcome their obstacles and achieve their goals. Now that you know what they are struggling with, your role as a guide is to show them that you understand their problem and that you have a solution that can address that. The key qualities here are empathy and authority.

You understand what they are going through and what they are trying to do (empathy). You manifest your authority by showing your customer that you have the solution they are looking for. Your job is to present them an option, but ultimately, they will be the one to decide.

WHICH BRINGS US TO... ➔



STEP 3 Give them a call to action

Whether a customer is fully convinced or still a bit hesitant at this stage, your next step is to ask them to act following your conversation. You can do this in two ways. For fully convinced customers, use the direct call to action approach, such as “buy now” or “get started.” Once they sign an agreement you have basically done your job.

For those that need a little more time to make a decision, use transitional calls to action to continue the conversation – “sign up for our newsletter” “register for the webinar” or “download our product guide.”

Take the opportunity to engage potential clients so you can gain additional insights about their difficulties which will allow you to tailor your succeeding messages. Think of this as a courtship stage where you’re trying to woo your customer into choosing you as a partner.

STEP 4 Paint a picture of success

Once a potential customer is comfortable with you and is receptive to your messages, show them what it would be like once they have solved their problem using your solution. Enumerate the different benefits and how their business would go smoothly using your product or service.

Higher sales volumes, faster turnaround times, or an increased market share are some examples you can use, but if you have done your homework in Step 1, you know exactly what to say in order to convince your customer to go with you. At the same time, you can...



STEP 4

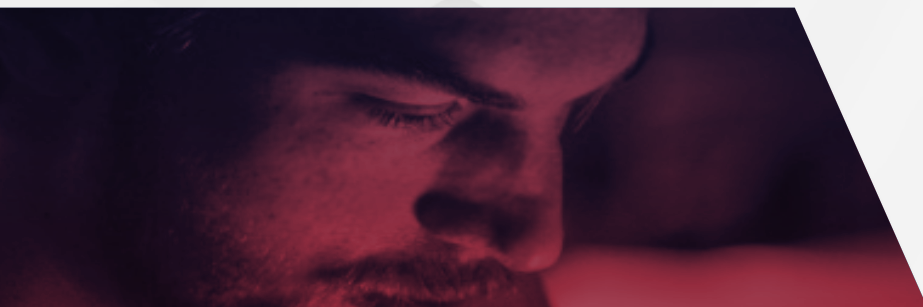
Present an alternative picture

This may sound like a bit of fear-mongering, but presenting realistic scenarios of what would happen if they did not use your solution should be part of your communications process. This is your chance to highlight your advantages over your competitors and to reinforce the success story you presented in Step 4. Remember, your role is to be an empathic guide that accompanies the hero on his quest.

And are you really being a good guide if you don't point out where the danger is lurking? In summary, people respond better to stories than information. Our brains are wired this way. It's why you may struggle to remember a string of numbers as a simple dataset, but when presented in a narrative context, you have much less difficulty. I have long said that there is no such thing as B2B or business to business marketing and sales, rather it's all H2H (human to human).

Business buyers are still human and they make decisions exactly like the rest of us – a combination of both rational and emotional. Communication, language, is the bridge that connects us to the buyer. How strong the bridge is depends on how you deliver your message, and how well you understand your audience's problem and the mindset that they are in at the point that you are interrupting their day with a sales or marketing message.





Every day we wake up to alarms from our smartphones, tell Alexa to start our playlist, and check our emails with our tablets and laptops. Yet, despite all these technological advances, the way we process messages and stimuli is rooted in our brain and how it works to help us acquire the things we need. Although our needs are different today from those of our early ancestors, the process by which we identify relevance remains the same. And that's why understanding the fine art of language is critical for capturing the attention of your market.

You have built a great product or solution, but customers are not flocking to get it. So what do you do? You get customer insights, and now you have an inkling of what your target market wants. But now what? You could add new features to your product and spend a lot of time and money, or you can iterate on your messaging.

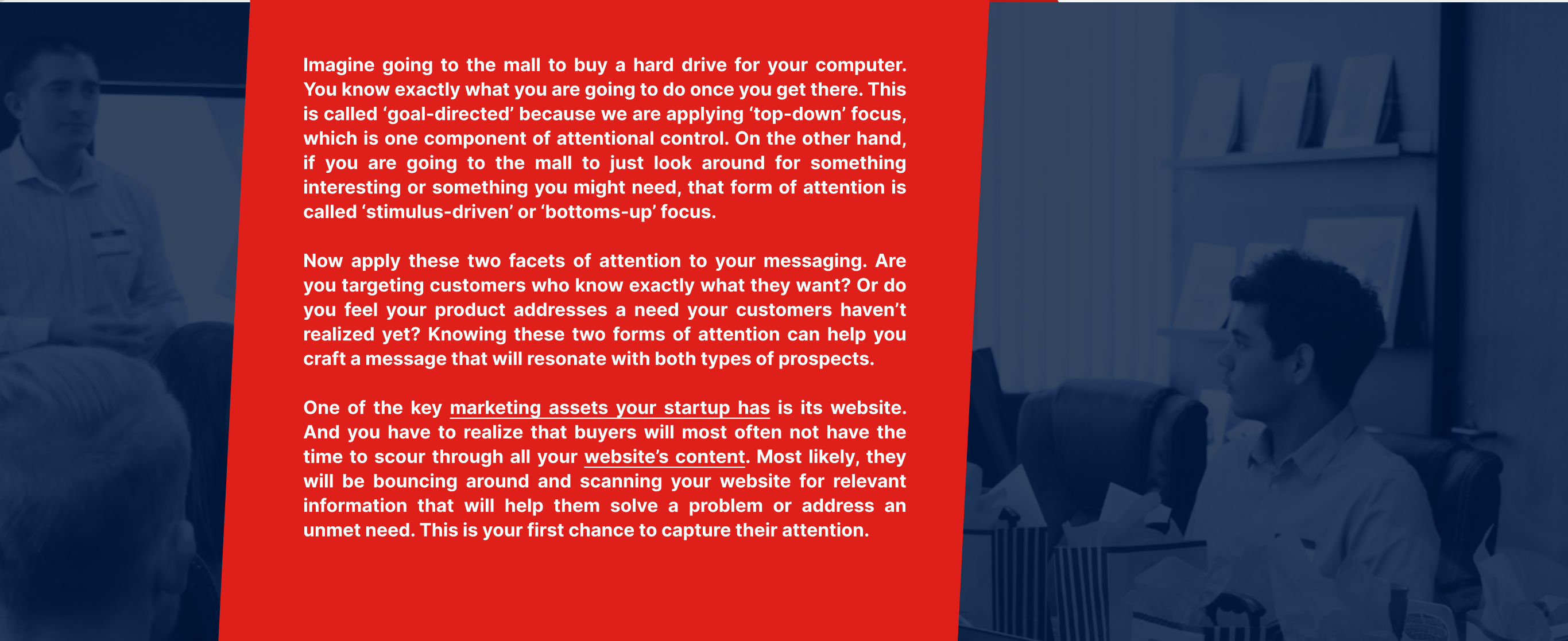
It's easy to argue that improving your product to make it more useful and relevant to the target market you are pursuing makes the most sense. I agree. But as a startup, you need customers right now to create revenue – you most likely do not have months or quarters to wait for these product improvements to ship.

By focusing on messaging, you can get the customers that see a need for your product right now. This brings us back to the topic of how we assess relevance.

Getting Your Audience's Attention

When we want to see if something is relevant or meaningful to us, first we need to pay attention by studying all available information. This is where we sift through all of it and choose what holds the most value for us. As a new company trying to introduce a product to potential customers, it is your job to catch and hold these prospects' attention. You cannot do that with vague messages, empty slogans, or words your audience does not understand!


Humans can choose what to pay attention to and what to ignore. Psychologists call this "attentional control." In my previous articles and interviews, I have always said that B2B is really – H2H or "human to human." We are all emotional beings. We are not machines, and this unique ability to filter incoming information through rational and emotional filters is the barrier we must cross to move our prospects and customers (the market) to our way of thinking.



Imagine going to the mall to buy a hard drive for your computer. You know exactly what you are going to do once you get there. This is called 'goal-directed' because we are applying 'top-down' focus, which is one component of attentional control. On the other hand, if you are going to the mall to just look around for something interesting or something you might need, that form of attention is called 'stimulus-driven' or 'bottoms-up' focus.

Now apply these two facets of attention to your messaging. Are you targeting customers who know exactly what they want? Or do you feel your product addresses a need your customers haven't realized yet? Knowing these two forms of attention can help you craft a message that will resonate with both types of prospects.

One of the key marketing assets your startup has is its website. And you have to realize that buyers will most often not have the time to scour through all your website's content. Most likely, they will be bouncing around and scanning your website for relevant information that will help them solve a problem or address an unmet need. This is your first chance to capture their attention.

The background of the slide features a dark blue hexagonal pattern on the left and a blurred image of a person's head and shoulders on the right. The person is looking at a wall covered with several sticky notes. One sticky note clearly shows 'Q3', another says 'Rights management', and others partially show 'Jendish integration' and 'Asian integration'.

As a marketer, you should tap into these basic human aspirations and use words that resonate with the emotion to capture their attention. They are looking for something valuable, and you have to let them know that you can provide what they are looking for, using words that they understand. One caveat, though, is always be truthful about what you can deliver. Yes, you want them to pay attention, but never do so at the expense of hype that could be found to be overblown. Here's a short guide to aid you in crafting your messages.

Whether you're solving an existing need better than what's in the market or introducing a new solution that no one has ever offered, your primary message must be the benefits your customers get when they sign up with you. Take them on a journey. Demonstrate where they are now (Point A) and show them that by using your product or solution, they will reach success (Point B).

For example, if you're offering a new video compression technology that's faster and uses a different approach far removed from today's defacto standards, a good hook would be to highlight how using your video technology, the customer can publish more videos or finish their workloads faster whereby delighting more of their end customers – you should not focus on the technology per se.

We want to get them excited about what it would mean for us to solve their problem so that they respond to your call to action and keep the conversation going. You can do three things: gain more insight about your customer, introduce your product further, and build trust. An ongoing dialogue with your prospects also helps make them more familiar with what you are offering and keeps you in their consciousness as a potential provider. And you can do all these by using words that matter to your audience and getting their attention.



But how do you choose the words? In my [previous article](#), I mentioned the value of empathy and how you should walk in your customer's shoes. You need to know what is going through their heads to get their attention. Likely, they are not thinking about product features or extravagant marketing buzzwords. Instead, you will probably find their hopes, anxieties, and unfulfilled dreams.

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3 STEPS TO CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE

1

Identify the pain points and unmet needs.

Consider: What are the major issues plaguing your potential customers? What do they complain about? What are they discussing at trade shows, conferences, or in online forums? For example, one of the areas of concern in the video streaming market is the increased complexity of video technology standards, which means even more computing power is needed to run the software to benefit from these new advanced algorithms. An example message could start: "If I were a startup founder in the video space, I would..."

2

Analyze how your product or solution addresses your customer needs.

Ask: How does my product address this need? What are its strengths concerning this problem? What possible drawbacks can customers face if they use my product? I would ask all these questions so I can draft a compelling argument for them to try out my solution. In my example, we might say, "Though the increased computing that is available through the cloud opens up excellent scaling opportunities, more advanced video algorithms seem to soak up these additional cycles beyond the rate of improvement the new standards deliver. Our product solves this issue, unlocking..."

3

Communicate clearly what you can do for them.

Be specific: Once you know the problem, draft a message that clearly states how you can solve it. State the benefits they get when they use your product. Be very specific. Note that the "how" is presented on a separate page or document.

When trying to capture your customer's attention, be direct and only state what you will do for them. In succeeding communications, you can expound on the "how" and present other information.

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I am a virtual CMO and go-to-market business consultant for startups wanting to build more effective marketing and revenue functions to reach their full business potential.

