



Gene Splicing for Fun and Profit

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What type are you, Gene?

Quit selling your technology to technologists! They don't matter as much as you think.

One of the most common mistakes technology companies make when devising their go-to-market strategy is to rely on their technology to make the sale. Marketing staffs litter collateral, web sites and salespeople's brains with endless recitations of the features, functions and internal maturations. And aside from satisfying a buyer's final technical sanity check, specifications matter very little – even to technologists.

Here is one of the great truths behind selling technology products in a B2B market:

You will have many buyers involved in each sale

When your salesperson walks in the front door of Transglobal Amalgamated Conglomerate Ltd., they will encounter several different people who influence the decision to buy your product. Most of these people will have either absolute or functional veto power. If you fail to sell to each influencer, then odds are you will not sell that customer.

For several years I have been inserting a borrowed biology term into the marketing lexicon. That word is “genotype” and in its biological sense is defined as:

gen·o·type n. The genetic makeup of an organism or a group of organisms.

The marketing definition for “genotype” is:

gen·o·type n. A category of person, often identified by job function or title, that contributes to the decision to buy your product.

The good news is that you can master every genotype that your company encounters. The bad news is that like insect species, there are a lot of different genotypes and most of them are a little creepy.

Why different species don't mate

Every market and every product will have a different set of genotypes. The number of genotypes expands geometrically as your product touches more people in an enterprise. I pity CRM and ERP vendors – their genotype lists appear endless.

Let's take a simple example. In the developer tools market, where you sell tools used by software developers and testers, you can encounter the following genotypes that influence the buying decision:

Programmers: The folks that have to use the product.

Systems admins: The folks that administer the product.

Development managers: The folks that rule the developers.

CTO: The ubergeek responsible for validating all implemented technologies.

This means that for something as simple as a program editor or source code management system, as many as four different genotypes can influence or veto a buying decision. And many technology firms make the cardinal sin of failing to sell to all the genotypes. Tool vendors often address only the bottom two job titles (developers and admins) and lose sales because they have not prepared positioning, messaging, arguments and emotive motivators for the other genotypes – the folks that sign the purchase orders.

Let's look at the other end of the spectrum – high-end enterprise software. Vendors in this space properly focus most of their efforts on the key decision makers (CIOs, various line-of-business VPs, etc.) but fail to adequately sell to the technical staff. Make no mistake – Hell hath no fury like a geek ignored. Technical teams have defacto veto power and are not afraid to wield it.

Herding cats would be simpler and more entertaining

You, the underpaid and under appreciated marketing professional, have the unsavory duty of assuring that your organization can sell to each genotype. In a perfect world the best approach would be to treat each genotype as the only buyer and prepare your campaigns appropriately. Since ours is a slightly less than perfect world, you will have to take the following modest steps at a minimum.

Identify and prioritize all genotypes

Grab everyone that in any way, shape or form might touch people in a prospect's organization, pre- or post-sale. Break out the marking pens and list on the whiteboard all the different job titles they have or might encounter. Condense the list based on their primary points of concern and involvement for implementing your product. Name your identified genotypes and list their job titles and functions under each heading.

Psychoanalyze each genotype

Start listing every thought, concern, objection and bewildered utterance from each genotype – interview them if possible. For each genotype, note their functional and emotive motivators and demotivators. This list will tell you what their hot and cold buttons are, and it becomes the foundation of your future campaign activity.

Create core market messages for each genotype

Each genotype wants to hear something different. Compose core marketing messages for each genotype that includes their primary functional and emotive motivators (and which clearly avoids any of their demotivators). Look for common threads between these messages for assembling product-wide marketing messages. Start logging these messages into your marketing message manual, a book that will become scripture for everyone in your organization that interacts with customers.

Answer the concerns and objections of each genotype

For each genotype, start listing their concerns, questions, objections and any other issue they voice or that your team can dream-up. “Sales” is the art of motivating a buyer and removing their objections. Use this exercise to build your field sales guide so that your inside sales, outside sales, and telemarketers can respond to any customer at any time.

Genetic mutations

Finally, start educating everyone in your organization about your genotypes, their messages and their issues. During these exercises tell your organization that nothing in this world is fixed or finite (heck, even the ground moves here in California). They will encounter job titles that don't fit your genotypes, and new genotypes peculiar to one customer or another. But when armed with their field guide to buyer genotypes, they will know their genetic code and what bait to use.

Guy Smith heads Silicon Strategies Marketing, a marketing consultancy devoted to helping high-technology vendors dominate their markets. He has consulted with technology firms in such diverse fields as high-availability software, interactive television, wireless messaging middleware, pure e-commerce plays, and Collaborative Software Development suites. Smith focuses on guiding his clients through the rigors of developing precise market strategies and educating his clients on both the theory and tactical necessities of their strategic implementations. His marketing expertise is matched by more than 20 years as a technologist specializing in high-availability IT processing.