

How Cheap Is This Breakfast?

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There's a small business I drive by on a pretty regular basis along the shortcut I take to my bank. I'll protect its anonymity, but this business is one of those restaurant-tavern hybrid institutions commonly referred to as a "townie bar:" the first few times you walk through the door you're made to feel extremely awkward, but once you're in, you're in.

Usually I don't pay any mind to its log cabin-like exterior as I pass; it's essentially blended into the landscape as nothing much changes besides the license plates on the pickup trucks in the parking lot. A few days ago, however, a giant tag board sign on the edge of the road caught my eye: "Now Serving Breakfast at 6:00 a.m. CHEAP!"

I hate to say it, but my stomach turned for a quick second. Not because I dislike breakfast or am not interested in saving money (in fact, I like saving money more than I like breakfast), but because, unfortunately, cheap isn't just synonymous with "inexpensive" anymore.

For many, cheap holds connotations of poor quality or shoddy craftsmanship. In this case, the word "cheap" makes me think of low quality ingredients and an unskilled, underpaid short order cook, cranking out one plate after another of non-descript slop.

Yet I doubt this is the image this restaurant wanted to conjure – and I also doubt that my assumptions are fully correct. What I really want is an inexpensive, quality breakfast, but I was railroaded by the word cheap, and there was no going back.

I think businesses make this mistake more often than they'd like to. Most of the time, I think it comes down to the error of placing all of your target customers into the same group of wants and needs.

Even when pointing to the characteristics (or price) of your product, never assume that these "benefits" are a no brainer. Some plant personnel have told us in recent years that their biggest impediment to capital spending has to do with their current staff. One reader told us he would wait for his maintenance personnel to retire because they knew how to fix the current machinery and it wasn't worth it to re-train them in the golden years of their careers. Whether you agree with this approach or not, it does warrant review; in a case like this, high tech functionality might not be the biggest selling point. Here are some things I'd recommend considering before you pound the pavement:

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Know your customer: Not all features will be seen as benefits to all buyers. When you lead with “cheap” and they associate that with “junk,” you’re fighting an uphill battle right off the bat.

Choose your words wisely: Everybody wants a deal, but nobody wants to buy a product that’s going to need constant maintenance. If it’s inexpensive, lead with the WHY. Did your engineering team examine every option when it came to spec’ing? Did you iron out some overhead through Lean production or transportation changes? Did you reevaluate your supplier base? Much in the same way you would need to explain the WHY behind an expensive sticker price (high quality craftsmanship and materials, for example), the same can be said for the economical one.

Contextualize: Words like better and cheap can quickly lose their impact if there is no context to explain them. If your product is better – better than what? If it’s cheap, is it less expensive than the McDonald’s Dollar Menu or The 4 Seasons? They’re your words, but make them work for you by providing your customer with a clear understanding of what you actually mean.

Hopefully you have better access to existing and potential customers than a sign on the side of a busy roadway. But even if you are standing right in front of them, or speaking to them from a glossy magazine advertisement – ultimately, you don’t want to lose a sale based on a customer secretly wondering whether there might be a catch. Sure I want a cheap breakfast, but if I have to reinvest my savings into a bottle of Pepto-Bismol, what’s the point?

Has anybody gotten it really wrong when trying to sell you something? Email me at anna.wells@advantagemedia.com [2].

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