



A quick guide to Features, Benefits, Discriminators and Proof Points

Introduction

Deep understanding of your commissioner's needs, competitors' offers and discriminators, and your own capabilities (features) and unique characteristics (discriminators) allows you to communicate compelling, substantiated benefits to buyers. Commissioners buy benefits, not features.

Here is a simplified way to think of features, benefits, and discriminators:

- Features = What
- Benefits = So What?
- Discriminators = Why Us (and why it matters to you)

Understand commissioner's needs

When you have identified an opportunity, you assume that your capabilities can potentially fit the commissioner's needs. The opportunity process explores that fit by finding out what benefits the buyer values and expects to obtain through the contract. If features of your offer meet needs, then this gives you an advantage that you present as a benefit in your written offer.

Develop and evaluate competitive intelligence

To develop features, benefits and discriminators, you must gather and analyse data about customer needs, likely competitor approaches, and your own solution. Then, you turn that data into intelligence about key features, corresponding benefits, and true discriminators.

Competitive intelligence is a key element of developing effective features, benefits and discriminators. The trick is to process the information in a way that drives positive discriminators and highlights features and benefits of your offer in comparison to your competitors.

When you have completed your analysis, take the intelligence you have developed and complete a bidder comparison matrix that scores the capabilities of all significant bidders against the 'what' and 'why' of the requirements. Try to reflect the commissioner's perception of both your organisation and your competition in your scores. If you do not consider the buyer's point of view, you will likely have the highest scores. Full honesty in this exercise is difficult, but important for success.

The next step is to document the strengths and weaknesses of each organisation using a SWOT analysis. Many strengths and weaknesses will surface during the bidder comparison exercise to justify the scores selected for each team. Competitor weaknesses provide an opportunity for you. Strengths are considered threats. When completed, this SWOT analysis will drive your win strategy.

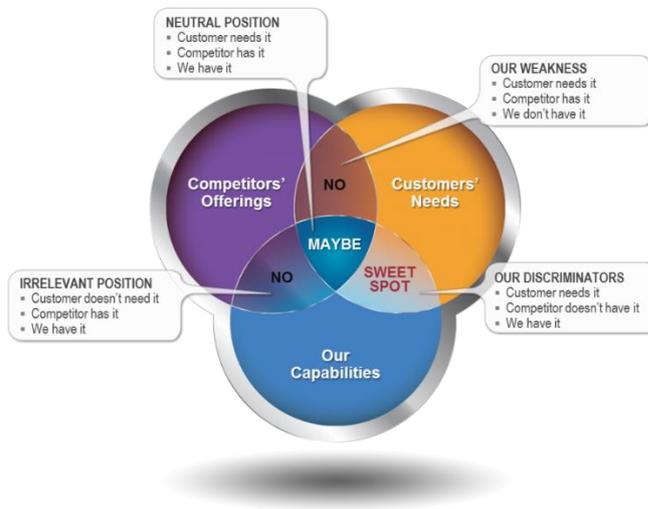
Determine your discriminators

Maintain a clear focus on the commissioner's perceptions when determining your discriminators. For example, you may think that your 'brand' is a discriminator; this does not constitute a benefit.

Your past performance may support your claim, but it is the people, processes and tools applied within your service delivery that are the discriminators.

The diagram below shows the intersection of customer needs, competitor capabilities, and your own capabilities. Discriminators lie in the single segment where you offer something that no one else does – and it matters to the buyer. No other set of conditions fully qualifies as a discriminator.

However, you can convert a feature that both you and competitor have to a discriminator by offering a unique benefit around it.



Use feature/benefit tables

This sample feature/benefits table is organised to reflect what the commissioner wants to buy before what the bidder is selling (benefits before features). If possible, include tables like this in your bid.

BENEFITS THAT MATTER TO YOU	FEATURES OF OUR OFFER
Reduced agency staff costs of 30% per year	240 hours per week of spare capacity within our existing staff team (i.e. sufficient to reduce agency staff use by 70%)

Quantify the potential value of benefits

Would you rather buy a car large enough for a family, or one that seats five adults comfortably? It is entirely possible that these are descriptions of the same vehicle. However, the second seller has made a measurable value proposition to the buyer, while the first seller raises additional questions in the buyer's mind. (How big is a "family"? Are these children or adults?).

If it is not possible to quantify benefits, try to tie them to the buyer's goals or mission, as this will strengthen their value.

Proof Points

Provide evidence to support the soundness of your solution. You can describe performance on similar services, using service data, case studies, customer quotes or testimonials, awards or recognition earned, and more.

Apply the "So What?" litmus test

To make sure your benefits are not just reworded feature statements, ask yourself, "So what?" after you read them. A feature statement will not answer the question, while a benefit statement will provide a clear answer. Benefits result from features and are responses to commissioner problems.