

Selling Consulting Services Report

A RainToday.com Special Report

By Mike Schultz

The 10 Commandments for Building a Value Proposition that Sells



Selling Consulting Services
with RAIN Selling

The 10 Commandments for Building a Value Proposition that Sells

One of the biggest problems that consultants have is articulating the value of what they do, especially to prospects they've never met before. After all...

- Your services are complex and difficult to describe—it's impossible to pare down all that you do into a 60-second elevator pitch
- Your solutions are customized to each client's particular situation and needs
- You help your clients in a broad range of areas so it's difficult to know what will resonate with the person sitting across the table
- It's easy to talk about what you do, but it can be difficult to quantify the impact
- You view (or perceive that buyers view) your services as a commodity—it just is what it is

If you can't describe it, you'll always have trouble selling it.

Being able to position your value in a way that grabs attention and communicates the benefits of working with you is vital to your selling success.

So how do you craft a powerful value proposition that sells?

In this ebook, I will **reveal the 10 commandments** of how to build a value proposition that opens doors, wins you new clients, and helps you achieve premium pricing.

Commandment #1: Thou shall not crash and burn when asked, “What do you do?”

“**What do you do?**” It’s a simple question, yet its mere asking skips a lot of trains off the track.

Consultants stumble, don’t know how to describe their complex services, talk on and on, and make a host of other mistakes.

Simple as it may sound, the first step in succeeding with your answer is to not crash and burn from the get-go.

You can start by avoiding these six common derailers:

1. **The “I talked but I didn’t say anything” trap:** “We offer efficient and effective consulting solutions to Fortune 500 and emerging growth companies, helping them to uncover and capitalize on hidden opportunities to provide value to their customers and increase shareholder value. We’re unique because...”
2. **The “tell your entire life story” trap:** “It all started when I was 5 and my mom got me my first book on EPA compliance...by the time I was 13, I had capped my first brown field...then in the third year after starting the firm, we launched our emissions testing division...”
3. **The “ain’t that cute” trap:**
 - “We’re the smiley-faced law firm.”
 - “We make our clients’ financials sing.”
 - “We’re the leading-with-integrity company.”



4. **The “laundry list” trap:** “We are a law firm, and we focus on admiralty law, alternative dispute resolution, antitrust, bankruptcy, appellate litigation, complex litigation, debt financing, environmental law, foreign corrupt practices, government relations, ice cream patent and trademark, koala bear adoption, llama surrogate pregnancy litigation...”
5. **The “I have no idea how to explain it” trap:** “Well, um, you see in capital-intensive businesses there sometimes is a situation where the capitalization structure needs to be re-engineered because...well, there’s really a lot to it. OK, from a big picture perspective we tend to focus on smokestack businesses, but only where their capital structure...”

And the most common pitfall of all...

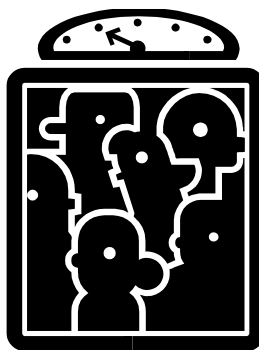


6. The “I have a scripted elevator pitch that I use every time someone asks me this question” trap

The elevator pitch is a hotly-debated topic. **Some argue that it’s an outdated and useless exercise.** The days of getting into an elevator with a prospect and only having 60-seconds to pitch are long gone. Others swear it’s a skill every business person should have.

The problem I have with the elevator pitch is not the concept of being able to describe what you do within specific timeframes. In fact I think everyone should be able to answer the “what do you do” question in 10-second, 60-second, 5-minute, and 30-minute versions.

The problem I have with it is how the elevator pitch is typically delivered.



Too many consultants write a tightly scripted elevator pitch that they practice over and over. When it comes time to actually use it, it **comes out like a canned monologue**, and it comes out the exact same to every person, regardless of their perspective.

If you can describe the key elements of what you do (read the rest of this ebook for tips on how to do just this), who you do it for, and what the outcomes tend to be and you can **avoid the 6 traps noted here, you’ll be on your way to “what do you do” question-answering stardom.**

A Far-Too-Common Mistake...

Companies often confuse the concept of a value proposition with their firm’s elevator pitch, a brand promise statement, or some other short sentence that describes the *essence* of the firm.

Commandment #2: Thou shall not think of thy value proposition as a statement

While you might need to answer the question, “What do you do?” and you’ll undoubtedly need to state your value on your website, take note: **a value proposition is not a statement.**

A value proposition is the collection of reasons why a person or company buys something.

This, at least, is my definition, as co-author John Doerr and I put it in our book, [Professional Services Marketing](#). As with every debatable topic, however, not everyone agrees.

[From Investopedia](#):

What Does *Value Proposition* Mean?

*A business or **marketing statement that summarizes why a consumer should buy a product or use a service.** This statement should convince a potential consumer that one particular product or service will add more value or better solve a problem than other similar offerings.*

Companies use this statement to target customers who will benefit most from using the company’s products, and this helps maintain an economic moat. The ideal value proposition is concise and appeals to the customer’s strongest decision-making drivers. Companies pay a high price when customers lose sight of the company’s value proposition.

You’ll note the Investopedia definition references a value proposition as a statement.

Thinking of a value proposition as a statement does more harm than good for consulting firms.

With these definitions in mind, firms head down marketing messaging and communication paths that just aren’t helpful, leading to Quixotic and circuitous journeys by marketing and firm leaders to find a sentence or two that encapsulates value of the firm while at the same time is different from all competitors.

You invariably end up with some pap about how you’re an experienced, client-focused, results-focused, trusted partner, yadda yadda yadda.

If you think of a value proposition not as a statement, but as a concept about why people buy something, then you've got a lot more to work with.

It's from that concept—the collection of reasons why people buy from you—that you can put your marketing and sales to work much more effectively, communicating different components of that value in different ways for different situations.

One of these situations is, indeed, to **describe your value in broad strokes when you introduce yourself and your firm to new people.**

This is when you can use a value proposition positioning statement.

A value proposition positioning statement is a compelling, tangible statement of how a company or individual will benefit from buying from you.

You take parts of your overall value proposition – everything that's great about what you can do for your clients – and craft key points into a statement. This way a buyer can get the overall sense of how you can help and get that sense fairly quickly.

A Real-Life Value Proposition Positioning Statement

We at RAIN Group help companies that sell complex products and services to improve their sales performance. If you want your professionals, business developers, and sales people to sell more, we can help.

This is the umbrella under which we operate. The purpose is to help our clients and the market wrap their heads around the general area where we help, and to know when they might want to work with us.

Ultimately, this is why our clients buy from us; because we'll help them increase sales success. But there is always a set of underlying factors that swayed them to choose us versus a) doing something themselves, b) choosing someone else to help them, and c) choosing to do nothing at all.

They don't investigate the various underlying components of why clients buy from them. They stop at "we're trusted partners" or "we help you reduce your overhead costs" and it doesn't serve them well.

Too many professionals ***only craft and practice a statement!***

If you think of a value proposition only as a statement, you'll stop there, too.

If you follow Commandment #2 and think about value proposition as the reasons why someone buys from you, then you can have much richer and more persuasive conversations.

Commandment #3: Thou shalt focus on the outcomes, not the mechanics

Like the definition states, your value proposition is the collection of reasons why clients buy from you.

Think about this for a minute...

- **You buy an audit because you need to comply with laws**, you don't want to pay penalties, you don't want to be brought up on charges because you broke laws, you need 3rd party validation if you want another company to believe your statements before they buy you, and so on. Most don't buy an audit because they want the satisfaction of checking their own math.
- **You buy a marketing plan because you want to grow your firm**, not because you want to define your targets, hone your messaging, and implement a set of tactics.
- **You buy technology support because you need to have your systems up and running 24/7** so people can work when they want, not lose time if the servers go down, know where to go for help, work remotely without undue hassles, and so on. You don't buy because you need to have a meeting weekly with an MCSE.

Your clients aren't buying because of the service—the audit, the marketing plan, the tech support—they're buying because of the outcome—keeping the IRS happy, growing their business, allowing their workforce to stay productive.

Think in terms of what client needs you can fill, not what services you offer.

Prospects may not always understand the details about your services, but they certainly will understand how relieving their afflictions or reaching their desired future will help.

In order to create a powerful value proposition, you must stop thinking in terms of your services and start thinking in terms of outcomes.

A Consulting Parable

A man is walking by a construction site, and he comes upon somebody laying bricks and he asks the person, "What are you doing?" The worker looks to him and says, "I'm laying bricks."

The man continues walking down the road, and he comes to another worker doing the same thing and he says, "What are you doing?" And this worker says, "I'm building a wall."

He continues one more step down that building site, and he comes to a third worker laying bricks and he says, "What are you doing?" And the worker turns to him and says, "I'm building a cathedral."

This is how you have to think when talking to prospects about your services...

It's not about the services (laying the bricks).

It's about the outcome (building the cathedral).



Commandment #4: Thou shalt stop thinking about and positioning thyself as a commodity

“Buyers view us as a commodity and say they can get the same service from the guy down the street cheaper.”

If you talk about yourself and your services as commodities, all prospects see is another service provider laying bricks.

To get yourself out of this commodity trap you need stop talking about and positioning yourself as just another brick layer. Help your clients to paint a picture of the cathedral.

If you think of yourself as a commodity, that’s how you’ll come across.

“One of the biggest problems that consultants have is articulating their value to new prospects. One of the challenges that we have as consultants is taking what we offer to clients and making it not seem like a commodity. The first step to getting away from selling services as a commodity is getting out of that mindset, so you don’t project yourself as a commodity.”

- John Doerr, Instructor
Selling Consulting
Services

Real-Life Challenge

I was working with a web consulting firm that had, believe it or not, sent out 25 proposals and won zero. Clearly they were doing something wrong. They were getting called to the table. They had a decent reputation, but they weren't closing the deal.

When I looked at their proposals and the way they talked about their solution, I found that they were talking all about the technicalities of their solution and the process they'd take the client through to develop the site.

They were positioning themselves as a commodity.

The buyer could leave the conversation, talk to two other providers, line them all up in a row and they'd all sound exactly the same. In fact, from the buyer's perspective, it was probably a bit overwhelming because there was a lot of technical jargon that isn't important to them.

So what did I suggest?



Solution

I worked with the firm and asked them to try a different strategy.

I started by asking them a series of questions:

- What's it like working with you?
- Forget the building blocks of how you get there, what are the deliverables?
- What is the value that your clients receive at the end of working with you?
- What frustrations have your clients had when working with other firms?

That's when the web consultants realized **they don't just build websites. They build all different types of company and marketing success.**

Lo and behold, they started to articulate this value to prospects in their conversations and in their proposals. They went 0 for 25 before, and then they went two for two.

If you don't want to be seen as a commodity stop positioning yourself as a commodity.

Stop talking about the mechanics of your services, and start talking about the value and outcomes.

What the client is buying and what they care about is alleviating an affliction or realizing an aspiration
– these are certainly not commodities.

The collection of reasons why people buy your services fall into three major buckets that make up commandments #5-7:

Commandment #5: Thy value proposition shalt resonate

1. Potential buyers have to want and need what you're selling.

You need to ask yourself:

- Is what I'm offering what people want?
- What are the business and personal benefits of engaging my services?

You have to *resonate*.

Commandment #6: Thy value proposition shalt differentiate

2. Potential buyers have to see why you stand out from the other available options.

Do you know why you're the best option available? Over the last year or so, the market has been crowded with people hanging shingles, saying they do the same things that you've been doing for decades. Now more than ever you have to ask yourself, "How can I stand out against other providers?" and, "How can I stand out against internal teams that try to do what I do?"

You have to *differentiate*.

Commandment #7: Thy value proposition shalt substantiate

3. Potential buyers have to believe that you can deliver on your promises.

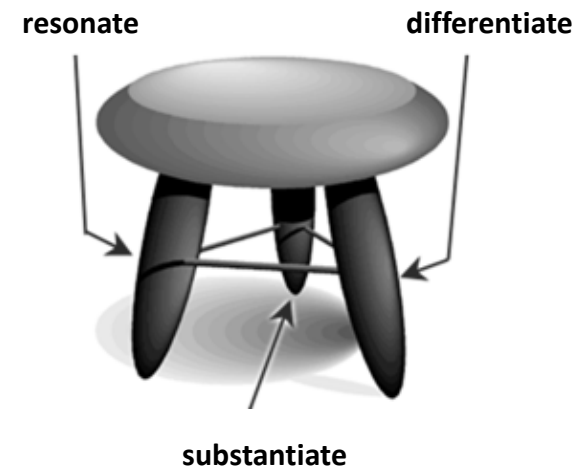
How can you prove that you can produce the outcomes you say you can produce?

How can you get buyers to think, “I believe you. I trust you.”

You sell something intangible—they can’t see it or touch it. They won’t know how well it will come out until after you’re done. You have to be able to substantiate your claims and get them to *believe*.

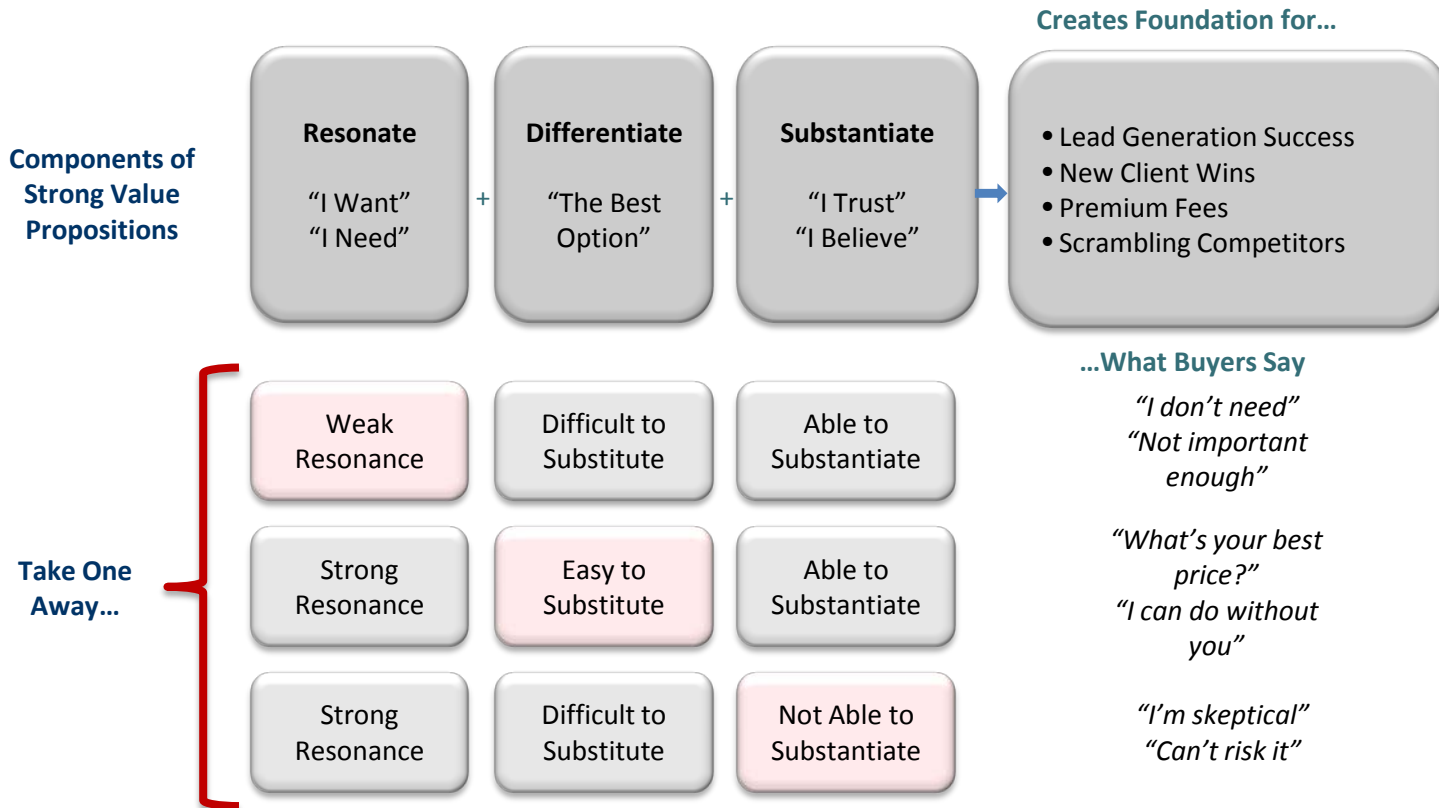
You have to *substantiate*.

Think of these commandments as the legs of a value proposition stool.



The 3 Legs of the Value Proposition Stool

So what happens if you don't attend to the holy trinity of value propositions? Just like a 3-legged stool, you can see how if you take one away the entire stool topples over:



So if you...

- Remove **resonance**, people just won't want what you're selling
- Remove **differentiation**, buyers will pressure you on price or attempt to get the service someplace else
- Remove your ability to **substantiate** your claims, and while clients may want what you sell (you resonate), and may perceive you to be the only people on the planet that do what you do (you differentiate), they won't believe you can produce what you say you can and won't risk working with you

This is your **actual value proposition—the collection of reasons why people buy from you**—it is woven into the fabric of the firm and your relationships with clients.

Before you come up with your value proposition positioning statement, focus first on understanding all of the components that make up the three legs of your value proposition stool.

Then you can really get your value across in your marketing efforts and sales conversations. You can sum it all up in a short statement, too (and we'll talk about this next), but you'll be way ahead of your competitors that stop there and think they're done.

The Misconception of the “Unique Selling Proposition (USP)”

Notice how we don't say you have to be “unique.” You may have heard that you can't survive unless you have a USP.

The USP concept rarely applies in *meaningful ways* to consulting and other professional services firms. Think about it, do you want a unique dentist, or one that is just very good?

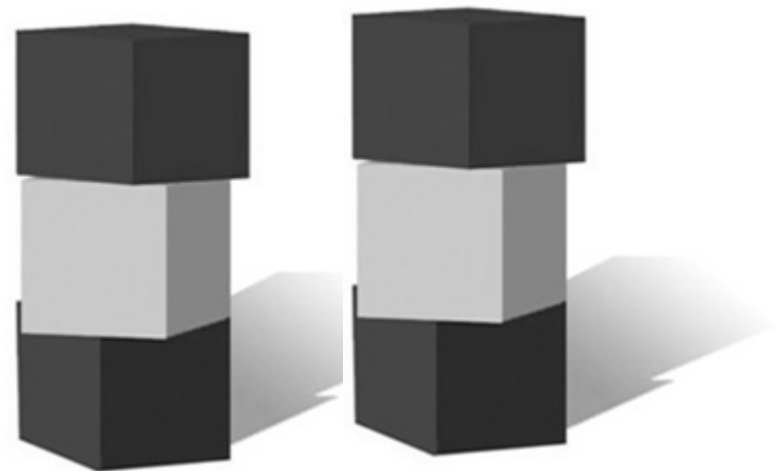
It is important to have points of distinction, but it doesn't have to be unique in the “only one on the planet” sense.

Commandment #8: Thou shalt use 6 building blocks to craft value proposition positioning statements

At this point you know you need to:

- **Focus on the outcomes** your services provide
- **Resonate with buyers** in the marketplace
- **Differentiate** yourself from competitors
- **Substantiate what you do** and get prospects to believe that you'll deliver on your promises

Now you have to take all of this information and turn it into a value proposition positioning statement that you can use in marketing and selling.



The 6 Building Blocks that Grab Attention and Get Prospects to Buy

There are six building blocks you want to consider in your value proposition positioning statement:

1. **Target Clients:** Whom do you serve? What makes for an ideal client regarding industry, location, size, type, and so on?

This allows the person on the receiving end to say, “Check. They work with companies like ours.” And it allows you to know whom to target and how to articulate the needs in the words of that particular target. This helps you stand out.

2. **Need/Business Problem:** What types of needs and business problems do you address? How do you help?

This helps prospects understand how and when they should use you.

3. **Value of Solving Need:** What are the financial and other benefits of solving the need? How do you provide value?

This helps people see why they should address the needs you can help them address.



4. **Your Offering:** What's your approach to delivering your services, running your company, solving problems, and working with clients?

Notice, company and services are 4th here. You are not leading with your services.

You're taking a client-centric approach and framing your services within the context of the needs you help solve.

5. **Proof of Concept:** How can you demonstrate that your approach has worked to solve similar problems for others? How do you substantiate your claims? How do they know that what you say will happen will actually happen?

You can use reference stories and case studies to provide evidentiary support for your clients to substantiate your claims.

6. **Genuine and Distinct:** Why is your offering preferable to other options for solving the need?

This creates desire and preference for your firm versus the others.

Remember, it's difficult to be unique, but you can be distinct.

You can see how these 6 building blocks work with the 3 keys – **resonate, differentiate, substantiate** – to develop messages you can articulate.

You can use these messages in many ways – in your sales conversations, on your website, in your marketing materials, in proposals, and so on.

Caveat: The idea here is **not to create one canned statement** that encapsulates each of these 6 positioning points that you use in every single conversation. Remember, these are building blocks. Just like the wooden blocks we all had as kids, you can use the same blocks to build all sorts of different shapes, towers, and objects.

You pick and choose which blocks to use in your conversations based on the particular situation.

For example, say you're a marketing and brand consultant talking to your cousin Rocco, who happens to be a private school teacher, and asks you to explain what you do. You might say something like this:

In private schools, how do you think they get students to enroll? Generally families might look at and evaluate 2, 3, 5 schools before choosing one. But what do you think causes some schools to have thriving enrollment and wait lists while others struggle to get new students?

Large organizations have to ask themselves these same questions—except rather than talking about student enrollment, they are talking about consumers buying their products.

Why do you choose Colgate over Crest? I help large organizations answer these types of questions for their business. I just helped a company that sells dog toys to reposition a product line and get it into a major department store chain that they've been trying to get into for 4 years. Sales tripled.

However, if you were talking to a prospect you met at a networking event, the answer to the question might sound something like this:

I help large packaged goods companies understand why consumers decide to buy one brand over another. For example just last week I presented findings to a client where we uncovered X, Y, Z. It's really interesting stuff that will likely to lead to \$200 million in new sales over the next three years if they implement our recommended changes.

Same building blocks, but tailored for the audience you are speaking to and the particular situation.

Here are a couple real-world examples putting these building blocks to practice:

Genuine

We're accountants. **Distinct** **Target Clients** **Offering**

We **make sure our family-owned business clients understand their finances and reach their financial goals.** Most people view accounting functions at a business as a cost center. We help our clients make money and save money through the work we do.

Target Need

Here is a good example. **Just last week we showed a client that she was using two different vendors to buy the same product for their 22 locations.** We brought it to their attention, called the vendors in to compete for all the business. And compete they did!

Proof of Concept

The new vendor agreement **will save our client \$100,000** during next quarter alone.

Business Value

I work with some of the world's best-known companies **to help them protect** their brands.

Offering

Target Need

Using **our experience in** intellectual property law, we help companies like Nike and even organizations like the NBA **protect the value** of their brands.

Target Clients

We have 9 industry specialties in IP law as well. **Just last week we helped** a client protect their newest music releases from counterfeiting overseas. They benefited because we had the contacts in that country to make sure their products were protected.

Business Value

Proof of Concept

That one bit of help will **safeguard millions of dollars in revenue** for them that would otherwise have gone to unauthorized vendors and costly lawsuits in a foreign country.

Once you have the proper building blocks on reserve, you'll be ready in any selling situation to properly position the value of your firm.

Commandment #9: Thou shalt remain true to thyself

Too many firms research the market and find out what they think buyers want in a particular situation. Then they take those bullet points and put them in their positioning statements without asking themselves the question, **“Is this really us?”**

If it's not, two things happen:

1. **People that work in your company won't embrace the messages.** They'll know it's not true, and they just won't use them.
2. **Decision makers will engage you based on a set of promises you make.** Then you'll deliver, and there will be disconnects. This doesn't do you or them any good.

Reflect to the marketplace who you actually are and the value you actually bring to the table. It'll be better for you and your clients in the long run.

In researching our book *Professional Services Marketing* we interviewed, Mike Sheehan, CEO of Hill Holiday. He said:

“Professionals go along with creative and messaging processes and nitpick, but they don't really focus where they need to: asking themselves, ‘Is this really us?’

“Have the discipline and honesty – the kind of intellectual and emotional honesty you need – to say up front who you are and who you want to be, and then be consistent about it. If it's not reflective of who you are, it will be rejected.”

Commandment #10: Thou shalt get thy value proposition on the agendas of decision makers

The business landscape is littered with consulting firms that know they could make a huge difference for so many companies, yet they never seem to grow.

They say to themselves, **“When people hear about the huge benefits we produce for our clients, repeat business and referrals will flood in.”**

Unfortunately, it doesn't happen like this. Maybe it used to, but that ship sailed a long time ago.

Too many consulting firms spend 10 times the effort coming up with their messages than they do on getting the messages out to the market.

It should be the other way around.

If you want your value proposition to make a difference for you and your clients, the first step is this: you have to create conversations with people who need you.

They might not know they need you...until you speak with them and they see how much more success they could be having if they worked with you.

They might be using someone else right now...but once they speak with you, they see that they should be getting so much more that they're currently not getting.

You can't make any of this happen if you don't get discussions about you and your value on to decision makers' agendas.

How Do I Get My Message Out to a Crowded Marketplace?

You might not think it, but the majority of the largest, most prestigious consulting firms drive business with the simple cold call.

It's not the only tactic they use, but they use it. Yes, that's right, they give all their **hustle, passion, and intensity** to the process of grabbing people's attention using the phone so they can share their value.

Grabbing Attention and Getting Prospects Interested is Only the First Step

Being able to position your value in a way that grabs attention and communicates the benefits of working with you is vital to your selling success. But this is only the first step.

Once you've got their attention, how do you build trust and rapport? Uncover the full set of your prospect's needs? Craft the best solution to meet those needs? Communicate the value and ROI of your solution?

To help you answer these questions and more, we've developed an online training program:

SellingConsultingServices
with RAIN Selling

In this report we've barely scratched the surface. The Selling Consulting Services with RAIN Selling program is an intensive online training program designed to walk you step-by-step through all facets of selling consulting—from building a value proposition that sells to generating initial discussions, to leading masterful sales conversations, to nurturing leads in the pipeline, to closing the deal.

We'll share learnings from mistakes we've seen thousands of consultants make, our decades of experience, and all of our hard work.

In the program, you'll have the opportunity to network with other professionals who are working to make the transition from consultant to rainmaker. You'll have access to myself and the other program instructors in the forums and on monthly Q&A coaching calls to get direct feedback on your value proposition, your sales conversations, your proposals, and what challenges you face in selling your services.

"I've done many online training programs over the past 10 years, and this is, by far, the most well thought-out and best presented program I've seen."

-Ghennipher Weeks
Applied Connectioneering

Over the course of the program, we'll give you all the pieces of the puzzle you need to:

1. **Develop a winning value proposition** and describe complex services in a way that gets prospects excited about you and your services
2. **Keep the front end of the pipeline full** with qualified prospects while maintaining your practice with active clients
3. Position yourself as a trusted advisor during the sales process, building strong, trusting relationships from the get go, **making the sale smoother and faster**
4. **Lead masterful sales conversation** in any situation
5. **Overcome objections** and get closer to the close
6. **Follow up with prospects** in a way that deepens your relationship over time
7. **Get premium fees for your services** even when clients pressure you for lower fees
8. Make the business impact of your services clear so you can **sell more with less buyer resistance**
9. **Increase profits** by charging (and getting) premium fees for your services
10. **Create winning proposals** just like the web consultant I told you about earlier in this report

In the program, we'll equip you with the practical, how-to information and tools you need to fill the pipeline, command higher fees for your services, and bring in a predictable flow of profitable new clients.

This report provides you with some core knowledge and ways to think in order for you to be successful in bringing in new business.

Over the coming weeks, I'll be sending you additional free content with tips and strategies you can use to not only hone your value proposition, but to be more successful with your selling efforts overall.

While this report provides you with tips and ideas on how to develop your value proposition to grab prospects' attention, participants in the Selling Consulting Services program are given tools, a step-by-step process, and direct feedback on their value propositions and how to get new clients in the door.

What's Next?

Over the coming weeks, I'll be sending you additional free content with tips and strategies you can use to not only hone your value proposition, but to be more successful with your selling efforts overall. Plus we'll give you a complete run-down of what's included in the Selling Consulting Services with RAIN Selling program.

We've got a lot more free content coming your way, so stay tuned. In the meantime, you can learn more about the 6 core modules in Selling Consulting Services with RAIN Selling and what you can look forward to learning in each one [here](#).

Best regards,



Mike Schultz
President, RAIN Group
Founder and Publisher, RainToday.com
Co-author, *Rainmaking Conversations* (coming soon)
Adjunct Professor, Marketing Division, Babson College
Instructor, Selling Consulting Services with RAIN Selling

P.S. Stay tuned over the coming weeks and look for emails from me. You don't want to miss the valuable tips I'm about to share with you. To be sure you receive these emails, please add mschultz@raintoday.com to your safe sender list.

“Selling Consulting Services with RAIN Selling has given me greater confidence and comfort with selling my services. The program structure and tools are logical and practical, and have helped me learn how selling can be a natural extension of who I am and what I have to offer. Additionally, it allows me to go at my own pace, which, given an already busy schedule, is a huge plus. The program is enjoyable and valuable.”

-Jeremy Bromberg
Bromberg LLC