



# The Don Hutson Report

Global Expert on Sales & Negotiations

Volume 2018, No. 9

May 1, 2018

## Winning Sales Battles with Product Differentiation!

*(This is the final part of an 8-part series on Don Hutson's 7 Types of Differentiation.)*

**Product differentiation** represents both *opportunities* and *challenges*.

**One challenge** is how to overcome a defeatist mindset when you are selling anything...especially a commodity. Many in this area subscribe to the philosophy that a commodity is what it is and we (and our competitors) are selling the *same* thing to the *same* market. So, we had better be the cheapest or we are not going to get any orders!

**One opportunity** is to get creative and figure a way to go to market with offers that outshine those of your competitors.

**So how can we go to market** selling a commodity without a directly comparable offer? The "Offer" encompasses more than the commoditized product itself, so get your smartest folks together to brainstorm how you can make your offer different.

**Here are some ideas:**

1. **Six Months Same as Cash** – If you can fine-tune your offer to include a more favorable payment plan, you will have a market advantage;
2. **Buy One Ton or More and get 20 Widgets Free!** – This is the "Comp Add-on". Buy your add-on (that they want!) at a modest price and gain a market advantage.

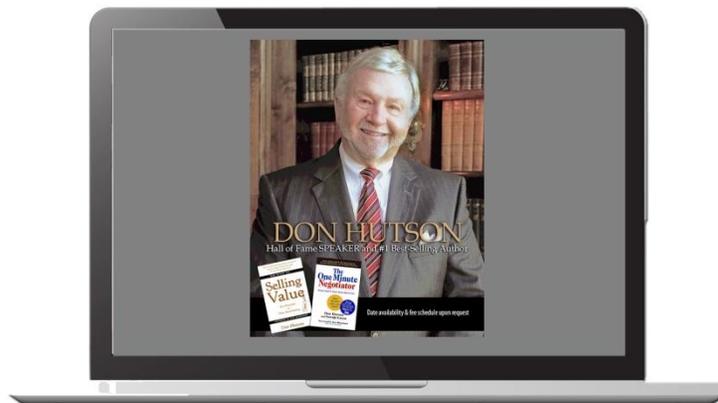
3. **Appropriate Gifting** - Come up with a series of promotional products your buyers like and need that features your company logo. Then, make certain that they get these utilitarian sales support items on at least a quarterly basis. Be innovative! Discover things no one else has thought of. This can help cement awareness of you and your company in the minds of your customers. Years ago I bought 500 small but heavy pop-up note holders with my name and contact info on it. It was handy and useful, and I actually had a few clients tell me they think of me daily! ...Still used them after 15 or 20 years!
4. **Usurp the Commodity Label** – Is there a way your company can tweak or improve your product in a manner that de-commoditizes it? For example, producing it with one unique component that weighs less than the normal one, thus decreasing shipping costs. I have clients whose “thought pioneers” have made things like this happen! *This is true product differentiation*. Hopefully you have some “hot brains” in your company who can create such unique products and market them aggressively. But, time is of the essence because, when your competitors see how well your unique product approaches are working, they may very well try to reverse engineer them to enhance their position before you know it!
5. **Special Events** – Invite the top 20% of your customers (who are probably responsible for 80% of your business) to a special fund raising event your company has staged to raise money for a worthwhile charity. Events of this type are often attended by VIPs who everyone wants to associate with. When your company makes this kind of an event part of an ongoing effort, your offer can be better received by the marketplace.

**Will all of these work in your case?** Maybe. Maybe not. That's where your creativity comes into play. Take these examples to your marketing team and use them as "thought starters" as you implement outstanding ways to stay relevant in the minds of the decision-makers in your universe.

**In conclusion**, be prepared to step up to the *challenges* that confront professionals in commodity sales. Be resourceful! Seize the *opportunities* you discover that can be the key to making product differentiation work well for you!

*This is the final part of an 8-part series on Don Hutson's 7 Types of Differentiation. For your copy of previous issues, [click here](#) to access them on our website.*

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