

Packaging Your Services

By Katie Tolin, marketing director, Rea & Associates, Inc.

If I say Big Mac, what comes to mind? You probably have an image in your head of two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions on a sesame seed bun. It's easy to picture since the Big Mac is a tangible item that you can touch, feel, see and even taste.

Now, if I say tax return, what do you think of? Is it a corporate return or a personal return? How long is it? How many schedules are attached? It's a little more challenging to picture. And you sure don't want to taste it.

However, clients and prospective clients need to picture the "product" they get from you. They want to be able to walk into your store, pick a service off a shelf and take it to the checkout. That's how purchases happen in our minds. So how do you take a service and make it appear as if it's a product? Well, Progressive Insurance made a series of commercials doing just that.

Unless you channel surf through commercials or DVR everything so you can skip them, you have probably seen the Progressive commercials. If you haven't seen them, they can be viewed on the [Progressive website](#).

In most of them, though, there are people walking through a store when a friendly associate, Flo, (her real name is Stephanie Courtney, by the way) asks to help. She then directs the buyer to a custom "product" (i.e., insurance policy) and together they pull the box off the shelf. In one commercial, she even helps customer Dave find the Dave aisle – he has an aisle of options just for him.

The last time you bought an insurance policy, did you walk into a store and walk out with a box? No, you didn't. But Progressive has used its commercials to show customers and prospects that you get a "tangible" item when you buy a car policy. While productization of services is a difficult concept for many people to get their arms around, Progressive has found an innovative and visual way to illustrate it.

So, how do you take this same concept and apply it to what you do? First and foremost, work with your industry and service line leaders to identify the specific services they offer. Specific is the key word, too. Those services are then explained in a way that allows potential buyers to understand what they are getting.

You should then group those products together on a sell sheets targeted to specific buyers. For example, a healthcare sell sheet should list a series of products that healthcare professionals can select from based on their particular needs. The words used on that page should relate to the intended audience – it must speak to doctors specifically.

Finally, put the end products into a tangible format. If you issue a report, make sure you call it what you do on your sales collateral. The idea is to give clients a customized "box" that can be pulled off the shelf and used. While accountants provide an intangible service, they should consciously try to make it tangible. Customize the product and deliver it as a complete package tied up with a bow.

And then take on the role of Flo and help your current and prospective clients find the "box" that's just right for them.