

# Benefits to problems

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**I**n 1961, at his inaugural address, President John F Kennedy famously said: ‘Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.’ This sentiment could be used to describe what marketing should be delivering today: ‘Ask not what your marketing can do for you, but what your marketing can do for your customer.’

Becoming ‘sticky’ and adopting the customer engagement model of marketing, ie turning the funnel upside down, requires a change in approach from other traditional marketing conventions. Among these is the way in which messages are produced. Marketers have routinely focused on conveying the benefits of their product or service to potential buyers. This type of messaging is, by definition, transactional in nature.

Benefits are benefits only when you are ready to buy. For example, a human resources consultancy may communicate an array of benefits in using its service. It may emphasize the protection it can provide for your business against litigation, therefore keeping your business safe. It could stress its ability to make sure your company is compliant with current rules and regulations, mitigating the chances of receiving fines or facing other difficulties. Finally, it could articulate the work it undertakes in establishing efficient practices, saving both time and money. However, if you are not currently in the market for any HR service, or already have a supplier, these benefits are likely to be of little interest. In order to become ‘sticky’ and engage prospects and customers, you have to stop focusing on transactions and find value around the product or service you deliver.

Your product or service itself will only be of interest at the point someone is looking to buy. Moreover, once they have bought, information about what you do will have little relevance until such time as they are looking to make another purchase. In order to have dialogue both before a purchase

is considered and after it has been made, the focus must be on the value surrounding your offering, rather than the offering itself. On this, benefit messaging completely fails.

## **An example of transactional marketing**

For example, an owner of a car dealership offers to host a Chamber of Commerce event as a gesture of goodwill to the local business community. This, in itself, is a good example of engagement marketing. The owner provides great value for provincial companies by facilitating the hosting of an exciting event in their area. This action assists in beginning to establish a degree of credibility and trust. Meanwhile, an offshoot is that more people will have the opportunity to become familiar with the existence and location of the showroom as well as to see some of the products close up.

The head of the Chamber of Commerce asks the dealer, as the host, to welcome everybody and at the same time take the opportunity to say a few words about the showroom. Unfortunately, at this juncture, our dealer resorts to more traditional marketing conventions by introducing the audience to an attractive PowerPoint slide of the latest family saloon. During the welcome, the dealer spends just a few minutes speaking about the benefits of the car.

Our dealer presents the fact that it is the most fuel-efficient car in its class, which means that it is inexpensive to run and leaves more money in your pocket, and that it has the lowest emissions of any car currently on the market, which means that you can have a beautiful new saloon and still be adhering to environmental recommendations. The dealer proudly states that it has been voted the safest saloon in all the European tests, which means that it is the best car available to keep your family safe.

By concentrating on the benefits of the new car, the presentation is customer focused in that it relates to why the car will improve a customer's driving situation. However, it is also a transactionally focused presentation. It is all about why the car would make a good purchase. Benefits are benefits only when I am ready to buy. If I am sitting in the audience and am currently not looking for a new car, the presentation is irrelevant and, therefore, boring. As, statistically, most people will not currently be in the market for a new car, then isn't the welcome a waste of time?

It is highly likely that most of the audience will go home and simply forget about the presentation. This is a missed opportunity in a world where

customer attention is so precious. It is possible, though, that the presentation may actually have had a detrimental effect. Forcing visitors to listen to irrelevant sales messages may result in the loss of some of the goodwill obtained by providing the car showroom to the Chamber in the first place.

The success of our dealer's speech relies solely on timing: ie someone in the room currently looking for a new car. Unless an individual makes an enquiry, very little will have been gained from the event. Knowing this, our dealer, a really good transactional marketer, also decides to hold a prize draw. On entering the venue, patrons are encouraged to place their business cards in a hat for the chance to win a bottle of champagne, thus allowing the car showroom to collect personal details of the attendees. This enables the dealer to follow up an unsuccessful presentation with a variety of spam e-mails. Anyone who left the showroom either apathetic or even with some goodwill is likely to be left disgruntled on receipt of repetitive, unwanted e-mails. This campaign is an example of transactional marketing. That is, shout at people about the benefits of your products and hope that someone buys. If a purchase was made as a result of this campaign, it would probably be deemed a success. Little consideration would be given to everybody else who is likely to have been left with a slightly sour taste in their mouths.

## **The alternative approach: providing value around your product or service**

The customer engagement model of marketing would take a completely different approach. The focus would be on providing value for the customer rather than any short-term transaction. This cannot be done by concentrating on benefits, which by definition are about the product or service you sell.

Instead, this time our car dealer would think about the challenges and issues that all car drivers face. For example, they are confronted by increasingly high insurance premiums. They worry about road safety, especially those drivers who are transporting younger members of their family. Compliance and changing regulations, such as the laws regarding mobile phone use, provide other questions that need to be answered. Finally, the running of the vehicle and car maintenance matters; for example, how to achieve the best fuel consumption and minimize the wear on your tyres are perennial concerns.

All of these subjects could provide our car dealer with valuable material for a short presentation. He or she could talk about factors that will help reduce

your car insurance, or the five top tips, unknown to most drivers, that would make them safer on the road. Alternatively, the dealer could chat about new regulations and mistakes people inadvertently make that are actually against the law, or could decide instead to convey expert recommendations about obtaining the optimum performance from your car.

No matter what subject our car dealer chooses to cover during the two-or three-minute welcome, the nature of the presentation changes completely. By getting information that is useful to all drivers, the audience gains value and is therefore more likely to regard the car brand and showroom in a favourable light. The car dealer, by presenting this material, demonstrates the firm's knowledge in its field, which in turn helps to build trust. In so doing, it increases the likelihood that next time a member of this Chamber of Commerce requires advice about a car, they will visit this showroom.

Moreover, by providing the audience with value, our car dealer can offer as a follow-up something more substantial than a bottle of champagne and spam e-mails. By creating a tip sheet and announcing its availability on the firm's website, our dealer gives members of the audience a reason to engage further. In fact, our car dealer could produce other tip sheets on different subjects, which can also be downloaded from the site. Those attendees who provide their e-mail address in order to receive the download would have initiated the beginnings of customer engagement. Not only is it possible that some people may choose to share these tip sheets with others, but they can also be used as mini articles that can be placed on other websites and in magazines, with links back to the showroom's own website. The presentation could even be recorded and posted on a platform like YouTube, eg 'The best way to improve your vehicle's fuel consumption'. Dealing with universal problems that drivers face gives the material wide appeal, making it more likely that it will be watched and shared.

Thus, a short presentation can be the catalyst for starting valuable customer engagement with a number of members of the audience, as well as providing an array of other opportunities to use the material. By imparting good information and providing consistent value, our car dealer's content will be used and shared, and its base of engaged customers will grow. As this engagement develops, it will become a trusted source and filter of information about 'all things cars' for this particular group of people. Over time, some of these people will buy from the dealer, while others may refer this particular showroom to individuals in their network. A presentation with this result could never be created by concentrating on benefits.

## The shortcomings of benefit messaging

Benefits will not help you understand the value around what you do or provide an insight into the universal issues that your customer experiences. Benefits merely focus on the transaction, dispensing reasons as to why a customer should buy a particular product or service. Thinking in terms of benefits will not help you in looking at the wider concerns of a prospect and so being able to take a more holistic approach. A focus on benefits will not help a business establish a customer engagement approach to its marketing. Our car dealer's successful presentation was arrived at by understanding the challenges and problems that the audience faced. Benefits are benefits only when I am ready to buy. Challenges and problems are more universal. For example:

- I may not be in the market for a car right now, but I would like to achieve better fuel consumption with my current vehicle.
- I may not want to buy a brand new suit today, but I would like to know how to make the best of my existing wardrobe.
- I may not be looking to change my accountant, but I am interested in benchmarking their performance and seeing if I am paying too much tax.

Not only does a problem approach allow you to understand the value around your product or service, it more accurately reflects the way in which people search online.

In fact, in the main, people have two iterations when making a purchase. In the first instance, they will undertake research: that is, browse the web and ask friends and colleagues, in order to gather information and obtain a better understanding of the market. Once they have made a decision on the product or service they require, and the price they are willing to pay, a second iteration will be to look for a supplier that meets the purchasing criteria upon which they have decided.

By creating value around the purchase, it is more likely that a business will be able to engage clients when they are researching the market. In helping to educate a prospect, a company has a chance to influence that individual's criteria for purchase. In turn, this makes it more likely that the company will be a desirable supplier later down the line. Moreover, by being able to provide a prospect with value at the beginning of the purchasing journey, a business has a chance to build some credibility and trust with a potential customer.

Of course, this does not guarantee that a company receives the business. It does, however, make it much more likely that it will be considered when the prospect is ready to purchase. This is all anyone can ask of their marketing. If every time a potential customer is making a purchase, your company is one of the considered suppliers, then your marketing is working.

A website solely dedicated to the benefits of a product or service is far less likely to engage at the first iteration of search: that is, the information-gathering stage. Therefore, it makes it harder for the company to influence the purchasing criteria or elicit any credibility and trust. Even if the prospects revisit the site, or find the site at the second iteration when they are ready to purchase, at that juncture the supplier is engaged in much more of a commodity sale based on criteria such as price. The opportunity to add value and create differentiation is more likely to have dissipated.

It is also important to understand people's mindset when they search. Many will have particular preferences for websites they use to catch up on news or use for entertainment. However, when people search online, looking for something new, it is more often than not that they have a problem in mind. For example:

- I may search cinema listings: *Issue?* Where am I going on Friday night?
- I may search for the weather: *Issue?* What am I going to wear tomorrow?
- I may search on traffic reports: *Issue?* What time do I need to leave my house in order to arrive at my meeting on time?

So, for example, people could be searching the web for local accountants. There may be a variety of issues on their minds. It could be that they feel dissatisfied with the current service they are receiving and want to know what else is available. Alternatively, they may be unhappy with the level of tax they are paying. Of course, it could also be that they are looking for an accountant for the first time and are researching to learn about the possible options. Landing on a home page that details the benefits of a particular firm is unlikely to resonate with a potential client. For example, typical messages may focus on:

- the personal and friendly service this particular firm provides;
- its aim to save you money on your tax bill;
- the formidable range of expertise and experience it can provide.

These messages, however, are merely platitudes. No accountancy firm is likely to claim that it provides an unfriendly service, doesn't wish to save you any money or has no experience or expertise to offer its clients. Therefore, these messages are bland and meaningless. Moreover, it is unlikely that the primary aim of any search is to find the friendliest accountant or the one that makes the most outlandish claims with regard to how much money it may be able to save.

## Ask the right question

A far better approach, therefore, is to focus on the issues potential clients are likely to have when initiating their search. So, for example, a home page may ask three pertinent questions, with links the user can click to find the answers:

- Are you receiving a good service from your accountant? Click here for the 10 top deliverables that all accountants should provide.
- Are you paying too much tax? Answer our online questionnaire for an immediate idea as to whether you might be overpaying.
- Looking for a new accountant? Here are the five questions you should be asking every potential supplier.

It is far more likely that this approach will engage a new visitor to the site. It does not provide platitudes or meaningless promises in which a customer is not interested. Rather, the content aligns itself with the type of questions prospects are likely to be asking themselves. Of course, by talking with clients and using web analytics that will provide details of the links visitors click on and the ones they ignore, you can constantly strive to perfect the messaging on your website. The principle, however, is sound. By thinking about the problems that your customers face, it is far more likely that your communications, whether online or offline, will align with any potential buyer's thought processes. In so doing, it will be much easier to engage with that prospect.

It is only by thinking in terms of problems that you will understand the wider value you can provide for a customer, built around what you do, rather than focusing on the product or service itself. It is this added value, not based on transactions, that will engage potential customers and enable you to build an ever-widening group of people who regularly interact with your business. This will allow you to turn the funnel on its head, engaging

with a growing number of people, some of whom will share your content and refer you to others. Moreover, when they are ready to buy, it is more likely that, at the very least, you will receive an enquiry. The irony is that in a world where there is an abundance of choice, it is impossible to research all the options available. In this scenario, time pressure often means that, on many occasions, people do not exercise their choice at all. Therefore, if you have built up credibility and trust with a customer with whom you are regularly engaged, there is a very good chance that when they are ready to buy, you will receive the sale.

## Problem Maps<sup>®</sup>

This being the case, a mechanism is required for being able to identify the issues that you solve for a customer and the value that can be created around these challenges. This can then be used as the basis of your customer engagement model. So let me introduce you to Problem Maps.<sup>2</sup>

Problem Maps are exactly this: they are a way of being able to understand the issues that start to lead a customer towards a purchase. They will also enable you to understand the value around your product or service in order to then come up with ideas and messages that will work within the customer engagement model. So let me explain how a Problem Map works.

First, you need to draw a 16-box matrix as seen in Table 4.1. Alternatively, these can be downloaded from our website, [stickymarketing.com](http://stickymarketing.com).

You start filling out a Problem Map by considering four headline problems your potential customers may have and that you know you can solve. This is not about you; it is an exercise focused solely on your customer. It forces you to put yourself in your customer's shoes. These headline problems are issues that perennially challenge many typical prospects and customers. All four headline problems must be different.

Once you have entered these four headlines, you then need to identify three issues that result from each of the initial headlines. In every vertical column, the three resulting problems under each headline must also be different. In other words, once completed, each vertical column will contain four unique issues. However, resulting problems may be repeated under different headlines in other vertical columns. Therefore, although there are 16 boxes in your Problem Map grid, you will have fewer unique problems. As a guide, a typical Problem Map will contain 10–13 unique issues.

**TABLE 4.1** Problem Map® template

	Headline Problem #1	Headline Problem #2	Headline Problem #3	Headline Problem #4
Headline Problem				
Resulting Problem 'A'				
Resulting Problem 'B'				
Resulting Problem 'C'				

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Table 4.2 is an example of a Problem Map for a company we will name Jellybox Call Answering Service, a company providing call-answering services for businesses.

You can see that we have the four headline problems across the top, which are all different, and then underneath we have the three resulting problems. In every vertical column all four problems are different. However, in the horizontal ‘Resulting Problem’ columns, there is some overlap. So although, potentially, there could be 16 unique issues, in this case there are only 14.

When you are preparing a Problem Map it is important not to be lazy and merely repeat the same resulting issues in various columns, because the result will be only seven or eight unique issues. On the other hand, you should expect there to be some overlap. Inevitably these problems are going to be connected, and that should result in some repetition.

Looking at the Problem Map, there are certain key areas we can identify where Jellybox adds value:

- It is a solution for small businesses to maintain a professional image and to better manage their time.
- It is a solution for bigger companies to save money, manage their resources more effectively and, therefore, become more competitive.

**TABLE 4.2** Jellybox Problem Map®

	Headline Problem #1	Headline Problem #2	Headline Problem #3	Headline Problem #4
Headline Problem	I sometimes miss calls because we are a small company and not always available.	I am spending more money on receptionists than I would like.	I need my calls screened, but cannot afford a PA.	I struggle to deal with peaks and troughs in my business.
Resulting Problem 'A'	People get the answerphone, which makes us look amateur.	I end up wasting company resources on staff I don't need.	I end up wasting valuable time on calls I shouldn't take.	I end up wasting company resources on staff I don't need.
Resulting Problem 'B'	Opportunities go missing, because some people do not like leaving a message.	I have less money to divert into other areas of the business.	I miss important calls, which annoys my customers.	Sometimes we miss opportunities because we are unable to cope with the call volume.
Resulting Problem 'C'	I struggle to manage my time properly in the day as I am often distracted.	We carry a bigger overhead, so it is harder to be more competitive in the market.	I struggle to manage my time properly in the day as I am often distracted.	It affects other areas of the business, as members of staff are diverted away from important tasks.

- It is a way for any company to be able to manage the dynamics of their business cycle.

Competing with bigger companies, managing time better, saving money, becoming more competitive and managing the dynamics of the business cycle are perennial issues that many people are concerned about all the time, not just if they are in the market for call-answering services.

The Problem Map presents all sorts of opportunities for Jellybox to start engaging with companies within its target market areas. For example, it can produce a series of tip sheets, podcasts, videos and articles called 'How to present your small company in the right way'. By partnering with other providers of services it could produce some really engaging material that many small business websites, publications and associations would be happy to promote and distribute to their own members because it would add value. In turn, all of this may encourage people to engage with Jellybox and visit its website in order to receive other valuable material. It is even possible that some prospects will consider using a call-answering service, even though it had not previously occurred to them.

Using other providers and partnering with them, it can organize a seminar or a webinar online, aimed at finance directors and procurement departments, providing many ways of cutting costs off the bottom line. It could also partner with relevant associations and industry bodies who would invite their members to participate in this webinar or seminar. Therefore, no shouting needs to take place in order to get attendees there and give value.

Jellybox could employ a market research firm to do some investigation into how businesses, in certain industries that are seasonal etc, cope with the peaks and troughs of the business cycle. It would uncover the challenges they have and the solutions they employ. Relevant research like this can often create a story that leads to successful PR and articles being written for various publications. This is because independent research such as this carries credibility. This research would then be available for download on the Jellybox website, another way of initiating customer engagement.

Once you have a Problem Map, you can really understand the value you can deliver around your product or service, and use this as the start of your customer engagement strategy. The key is always to put the customer first and make sure you are relevant and providing value.

## Using Problem Maps<sup>®</sup> as the basis for engagement

Using Problem Maps provides you with a mechanism for understanding your product or service through the eyes of a customer. This insight then enables a business to create value around its core offering, with which to engage prospects and customers alike. We can demonstrate this in the case of a neighbourhood burger bar, which we will call Benny's Burgers.

### **CASE STUDY** Example case study: Benny's Burgers



Let's set the scene; Benny's Burgers is an independent burger bar run by a husband and wife team. Their vision is to produce burgers and chips, offering fast food but in a very healthy way, using fresh organic meat, fresh salads etc, the idea being that parents can feel good about taking their children there. They open up in a local market and start their marketing by leafletting the area. Their messaging is entirely 'benefit' led:

- Fresh organic meat – you get a healthy meal that tastes great!
- Variety menus – three-course meals that don't break the bank!
- A large car park and easy access – so it is a stress-free experience!

Now of course, unless I am in the market for burger and chips at that very moment, this messaging – in my day-to-day life – is probably not that relevant. It is very transactionally based. Shouting about their new bar does not get them very far. People don't come, and the owners become disillusioned when customers fail to appear. It is time for Benny's Burgers to take a customer engagement approach by turning the funnel on its head. This process necessarily starts with a Problem Map.

### **Marketing solutions to the problems**

Looking at the Problem Map in Table 4.3, it becomes clear that Benny's Burgers is a children's brand. Most of the problems involve feeding, occupying or marking special occasions with the kids. However, Benny's Burgers is unknown. It is also not the only brand in its area that provides activity displacement for children or ways to mark special occasions for the family. So how can it give value and engage its customers? One possible way is by leveraging partnerships.

**TABLE 4.3** Benny's Burgers Problem Map®

	Headline Problem #1	Headline Problem #2	Headline Problem #3	Headline Problem #4
Headline Problem	I need to feed the family and I'm just too tired to cook today.	The weather is lousy and the kids are driving me nuts!	I'm pushed for time and the kids need feeding.	How do we mark a special occasion for the whole family?
Resulting Problem 'A'	I become even more irritable and tired as I have to cook the dinner.	I am becoming increasingly short tempered as I have run out of things that we can do together.	I end up running late for an activity or meeting.	I don't want a bad atmosphere because someone isn't having a good time.
Resulting Problem 'B'	I start to feel a bit depressed as the chores never seem to end.	I am scared that someone is going to get hurt soon because the kids are getting increasingly wild as they become more frustrated.	I end up cooking a microwave dinner, which I really want to avoid.	I need to find somewhere affordable. We can't keep spending loads of money when going out. It becomes prohibitive.
Resulting Problem 'C'	My mood is having a bad effect on the rest of the family.	I am sure we are going to have a family argument in a minute and there is going to be a bad atmosphere because everyone is just pent-up and stuck indoors.	I'm getting stressed out and this is leading to arguments in the house.	I don't want the occasion to pass by and do nothing.

It is springtime. Benny's Burgers draws a 20-mile radius from its restaurant and investigates all of the activity-displacement provision for children in its area. It approaches all of the providers and proposes to promote their activities to its own customers if the right special offers can be agreed. Having decided on promotions with 10 particular companies, Benny's Burgers produces an attractive flyer entitled '10 things to do with your kids this summer', which focuses on the particular area in which it is based. This flyer contains offers that can be redeemed by way of coupons. For example: visit the zoo and a second child gets in free, one free regular popcorn when you visit the cinema for a children's matinee, £10 off a family ticket for the theme park on Mondays and Tuesdays etc. This flyer is then posted on its website and optimized in order to be found by the online search engines. This is achieved by using key words based around children's activities in its local area.

Benny's Burgers also successfully obtains coverage in the local paper. Each week of the summer holidays, the paper prints one coupon with a small feature related to the particular activity. At the bottom of each article it mentions that more offers like this can be downloaded from Benny's Burgers' website. Also, some of the companies with whom Benny's Burgers partners are happy to carry links on their website to Benny's Burgers' website, as are some local interest and community sites.

In order for parents to be able to cut out the coupons and use them at the appropriate destinations, they are requested simply to provide a name and e-mail address, and then the flyer is sent to them via e-mail. While the 10 offers have nothing to do with Benny's Burgers, there is a bonus, offer Number 11, which provides special discounts at Benny's Burgers' restaurant. This promotion leads to numerous downloads of the flyer. Word of mouth is also generated as parents start to tell others about the availability of the coupons. The owners of Benny's Burgers start to see new customers visiting their restaurant and redeeming some of the vouchers.

This campaign benefits Benny's Burgers in a number of ways. It starts to position itself as a leading children's brand in its local area, generating a lot of goodwill with customers because of the enormous value it is imparting. By being associated with more established brands in its locality, it starts to gain credibility and trust, far exceeding what a new restaurant in its area would expect. The campaign attracts customers and engages many people. However, this is not about burgers and chips. This is about understanding the problems that its customers face and engaging customers by providing them with value associated with these issues.


## Creating value

This example sees the funnel model being turned upside down. Benny's Burgers shouted at no one. Instead it has become attractive by creating value within a niche market and being discovered through search engines, the local paper and by word of mouth. As more people download the offers, thereby engaging with Benny's Burgers, its funnel becomes wider and wider.

By the end of the summer, Benny's Burgers has developed a large permission-based e-mail list. At this juncture, many companies would be tempted to send out regular special offers for the burger bar. This, however, would be a step back into the old world of transactional marketing. Messages relaying special offers are of no value unless you want to purchase a burger and chips at that moment. Moreover, however attractive the offers, regular receipt could become tiresome to even the most loyal of customers. Instead, Benny's Burgers continues with the customer engagement model. It commissions a designer to put together a series of mini activity booklets containing puzzles, quizzes, colouring, word searches and other exercises for children. During the winter, when the weekend weather report is bad, Benny's Burgers e-mails its booklet for parents to print off and be able to spend some time with their children. Although each activity booklet does contain a coupon with an offer for Benny's Burgers, that is not the focus of the communication. It is not about promoting burgers and chips, but providing value for the client.

These booklets are not just found on Benny's Burgers' website, but are also placed on some local community sites. As parents mention these booklets to others in conversation, and as children see them at friends' houses, some word of mouth is also created. The upside-down funnel continues to get wider. Benny's Burgers keeps its customers engaged and attracts new ones by focusing on providing value.

It is establishing itself as a major children's brand in its area, and its restaurant is becoming busier. Its marketing, however, is not a means to an end, a way of just selling more product. By creating value, it engages customers, but the special coupons and activity booklets can be used without any purchase ever taking place. In other words, the marketing is an end in itself. It creates its own value. It is no longer about burgers and chips, or alternatively, as Steve Jones of the Sex Pistols said in 1978, 'It's got nothing to do with music, you silly cow!'



## Key point summary

- ‘Ask not what your marketing can do for you but what your marketing can do for your customer.’ Marketing is now an end in itself. It must create value in its own right.
- Benefits merely focus on transactions, dispensing reasons as to why a customer should buy a particular product or service. They will not help in creating value around what you do because they do not provide an insight into the universal issues that your customer experiences.
- When people search for information online, they normally have an issue in mind. For example, they may enter cinema listings into the Google search bar, but their concern is what they will be doing at the weekend.
- When you think in terms of problems that your customers face, it is far more likely that your communication will resonate with them. In so doing, it will become much easier to engage.
- Problem Maps® provide a mechanism for understanding your product or service through the eyes of a potential customer. This insight then enables a business to create value around its core offering, and so to engage customers and prospects alike.
- The key to engagement is always to put the customer first, by making sure that all communication is relevant and provides value.