

## Points Of Difference

Many professionals struggle to identify what is really different about their service. We find this is a particular issue for professionals in mature markets such as law, accounting and banking.

A lot of focus is typically put onto finding or creating differences in the service on offer. But many of these approaches are misguided.

In reality it can be difficult for a client to differentiate between professionals when they are focussing purely on the services offered.

But - why is it important for you to be able to differentiate yourself from your competition?

Unless you can articulate how you are different in a way that resonates for a client or prospect, then you risk being seen as a "commodity" – that is, something with no tangible unique value.

Buyers of commodities go for the cheapest price. So if you aren't different in your client's mind, you will find yourself competing on price. And that is not sustainable.

Value added services are not differentiating unless the prospect has told you what they actually value. Many law firms in particular pile on value adds like training seminars, access to library resources and secondments in the hope of differentiating. But these are quickly copied, and often not really highly valued by the prospect. They are more of a "hygiene" factor.

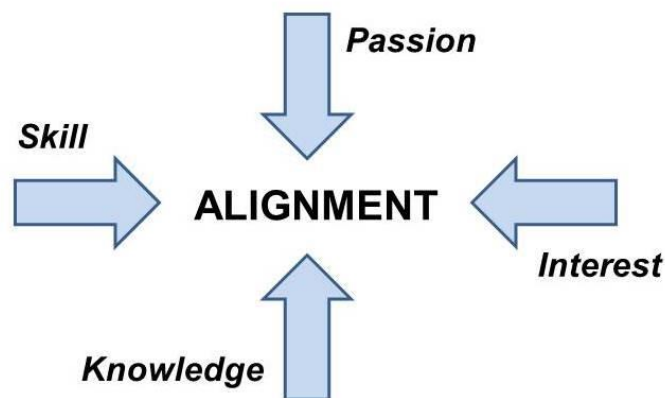
Another option is to simply tell prospects you are better and hope they believe you. All you need to do is look at a few websites or read a few proposals to see how often professionals revert to what I call "spruiking". You'll see lots of use of words like "agile", "innovative", "client centred", etc.

This is lazy and clients don't buy it for a second.

Simon Sinek proposed that "people don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it". (Go to [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com) and check Simon Sinek: How great leaders inspire action).

In a professional services context, this means that you are aligned better with your buyers than your competitors are. And you get aligned with your buyers by demonstrating that you are engaged and interested in the same things that they are. Much of business development is about the depth of your understanding of the client.

Typically, you will find alignment at the intersection of passion, interest, knowledge and skill.



Where all of these things collide is a place that you enjoy spending your time. So you will enjoy hanging out with others who also occupy that place. And importantly, they will enjoy hanging out with you.

Therefore, you need to think about your points of difference in two ways:

Firstly, as an aspect of your service that is truly unique, and the client finds that uniqueness valuable. If your service is truly unique and valuable then promote that difference.

But remember – it is the client's perception of what is unique, not yours. Don't be a “spruiker”.

Secondly, it could be in what you say, how you say it and how you behave.

If you can't differentiate yourself with your product or service then try to demonstrate that you have a better client understanding, or a better capability, or you are easier to work with in some way.

The really important thing here is that you can actually **demonstrate** it somehow – rather than just **say** it. This demonstration could be through testimonials from other clients, or a case study that reveals obstacles overcome and value delivered, or giving away a taste of your knowledge to show that you have deep and valuable expertise.

The key take-away's for you from this lesson should be:

1. Finding a point of difference is critical.
2. Being in better alignment with a client builds trust.
3. Find ways to demonstrate your unique value, rather than just tell people you are better.