

[Poor, Neglected “Positioning”]

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We feel bad for positioning. Considering it's the single most important component in a marketing endeavor, it gets a bad rap. Companies resist being pigeon holed by it. Marketing departments evade re-examining it because it's such a hard thing to get everyone to agree on. And changing it throws everyone in the company a little out of their comfort zone.

Yet, every communication a company makes is made or broken by its strategic strength and accuracy. It's simple — if a product or service hasn't been positioned properly, its failure rate goes up. At least until the problem is corrected. Strategy, tactics, messaging, and creative all depend on sound positioning to be effective. Weak positioning sabotages each endeavor.

Where does positioning go wrong?

1. A large percentage of positions are created as mimics to an established brand. The purpose of positioning is to find ways to differentiate from the competition and to identify a path that distinguishes a product or service from the pack. If its positioning is based on a response to another product or service's position or visioned to be like another, it has little chance to do its work successfully. The rule to follow: if you can substitute a competitor's name in place of your brand in your positioning

statement and it still works, then keep working, you're not there yet.

2. Is your positioning narrowly focused? Successful positioning focuses on a single attribute or benefit — a use, type of user or a description of the user experience. Your positioning statement should address directly the single most important, or differentiating aspect of your product or service. Trying to encapsulate more than one core difference waters down the entire process and sets the positioning strategy up for failure. Save the secondary benefits and attributes for your more extensive messaging opportunities in your brochures, ads, website, etc.

3. Positioning is not a “set it and forget it” endeavor — a product or service's position can go wrong if it fails to respond to change. Positioning statements are like well-engineered buildings built to move almost imperceptibly in the wind. Notice we said, “in” the wind, not “with” the wind. The difference: positioning should grow as the product or service grows but stay true to itself at its core, not be changed as a response to an external influence or strategy taken by a competing product or service.

4. If it rolls off your tongue, don't trust it. Good positioning, nine out of 10 times takes thought and careful

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research and consideration. Many brand positions are rushed through committee out of frustration with the long list of tasks to complete, and many are “settled on” due to hesitation to move out of a familiar comfort zone. Out-of-industry objectivity, qualitative and quantitative research, even informal research, contributes significantly to successful positioning.

5. Often, the amount of expenditure set aside for strategy and positioning is very, very low. We venture to say, in our experience, it’s less than a few percent of the annual marketing budget. Yet it drives the majority of what is spent and how. Even if you look at only the dollars and cents of it, the resources dedicated to positioning pay off with every other penny spent on marketing.

Honing positioning can even be helpful late in the game.

As long as there is still lifecycle left, a company can benefit from honing its positioning. The thinking is a little different with a mid- to end-of-lifecycle product, but revenue can be enhanced significantly even with a mature product or service.