

# Stop the Advertising Bleed

## Building Your Brand Through Positioning

By *CHRISTINE L. PILCH*

If you're struggling with sales, do you know how to address the problem from a marketing standpoint?

It is reasonable to think that a new brochure may be in order, or a radio or TV campaign, or a fresh Web site, or some print ads, or a billboard. While those may all be good tactics, they aren't very effective unless preceded by a critical first step. The smarter way to really ramp up your sales is to *position* your company as your customers' best resource to fulfill their particular desires or needs. Knowing who your customers are, what they want, what they get from you and how you can supply it better than your competition can provide a remarkable roadmap of how to market to them.

You can start the process by examining your customer base and identifying the specific demographics of your ideal customers. You should also determine what is most unique about your product or service that makes your customers choose you over the competition. Claiming something as common as 'quality' or 'service' is not valid unless you can be specific about how that benefits your customers. These overused clichés are meaningless and mind numbing.

People buy from you out of desire or need, so which does your product satisfy? Drill down until you fully understand the emotional impact of your product, identify the specific wants, likes, or needs that you can satisfy and determine why you are your customers' best resource. Once you nail all that down, make it the heart of your message. For example, consider how Federal Express' positioning made it an 'overnight' success by stating, "When it absolutely, positively

has to be there overnight."

Your positioning tells you who your message targets, what they get, and how you can provide it better than anybody else. It is the bedrock of building a brand that your customers will be attracted to, yet most businesses appear to be unaware of it. In addition to your customers' likes, wants, and needs, positioning may also iden-

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tify specifics such as where they live and work, household financial information, and family dynamics. How can you possibly promote your product as the best solution to your customers' problems or desires if you haven't defined what those are? How can your advertising work effectively if it simply boasts how wonderful you are and lists what you are selling?

Effective advertising stands out in a crowded market with the only message your customers care about... 'What's in it for me?' Think about McDonalds' famous slogan, "You deserve a break today." What does that mean to millions of harried moms and dads?

People are so over-saturated with marketing messages in their daily lives that they have become extremely adept at tuning out anything that doesn't instantly interest them. The only way you can craft a message that your customers will be attracted to is by understanding them and creating materials that appeal specifically to them.

Take a moment to study your Web site and past advertisements. Is your logo and/or company name the most prominent element? Are they full of words like we, ours and us? Do you fill your precious time and space talking about what you have to sell rather than showing how well you understand your customers' problems and how they can be allevi-

ated with your product? Are your ads built around a price point that is easily matched or beaten by the competition? Do your Web site and ads act as a resume of your company's accolades, or do they speak directly to the people most likely to buy your product, drawing them in instantly with a compelling offer and keeping their interest with something that they really care about?

Many business owners seem to think that advertising is simply throwing a bunch of stuff at the wall and hoping that something sticks. Positioning is a tool akin to aiming at a target. This might mean that people in a specific zip code could receive a customized mailer or regularly see your message on a billboard in their neighborhood. While it may be alluring to bring out the big guns of mass media, unless your customers are in a broad area, that is probably a waste of money. You must have a really solid handle on who your customers are and where to best reach them in order to select the right media.

Positioning not only directs the

method of delivering your message, it guides your entire copywriting methodology. Since positioning identifies unique specifics about your customers, it gives you the advantage of offering precisely what they want. It's so personal that it's almost like having the opportunity to look every one of your customers right in the eye and say, 'I understand you and what you need, and I can provide it to you.'

Positioning directs the development of advertising that lets people know you are talking directly to them. Consider Staples' *Easy* campaign. First it was, "That was easy," and that evolved into an 'Easy Button' campaign. That message nails the market identified in their positioning. The promise of 'easy' is a huge buying advantage.

So, look again at your past advertising. Did you jump right in and build a Web site or ads without considering what your customers care about? Does your advertising hold appeal to your specific customers, or is it full of self-promotion? Does it simply list your services while demonstrating no benefit to anyone in particular and offering no buying advantage that any competitor could not also easily offer? In our instant-gratification world, it is tempting to jump right into tactics, (building ads) but without the initial strategic planning, (positioning) you will probably be forever trying something new or copying someone else's failing strategy, hoping that something will work.

Positioning reveals the value that you offer to your customers. People only buy things that they want or need, so you must establish the value of your product as unique or better than the competition. Don't forget that your prod-

uct's value is not wrapped up in achievements and worthless commentary. Customers don't care about that because it provides no benefit to them. Your years in business, the organizations you belong to, a promise of quality and service, or any other generic message just causes your viewer, listener, or reader to tune you out. These statements don't present something interesting that grabs the attention of someone who is unmotivated to invest a second of their time into paying attention to you and what you have to sell.

Positioning can also establish

your market niche. While it is an enticing proposition to evaluate overall market potential, and determine that if you could only grab X% of it, you would be hugely successful, you must understand that your competition has the same goal. There are only a certain number of potential customers, and the competition will fight hard to hold onto its share. Your positioning will reveal those most likely to buy from you, which gives you the unique advantage of knowing who to ignore.

For example, a plumber may decide that new construction is

his most profitable business and position himself as a new home construction expert. A glance at the yellow pages list of local plumbers by someone building a new home will instantly identify the plumber who has properly positioned himself that way. While his company will not hold instant appeal to someone looking to fix a leaky pipe, his niche market will be attracted by the right message. In this way, he effectively changes the way his customers perceive him by separating himself from his competition.

Have you identified your niche

and crafted a specifically pinpointed message? Once you've done your positioning homework, you will find it much easier to create all of your marketing communications with the confidence that you are putting the right message in front of the right people, at the right time and for the right reasons. ❖

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