

ASSUME THE POSITION!

How to Use Positioning to Make “Your Brand” Irresistible

**By Brenda S. Bence – Speaker, Trainer, Consultant
International Marketing & Branding**

Before we begin... What is “Your Brand?” For the purposes of this article, a ‘brand’ can be **your business, your company, your product, or the service you provide.** And while we’re defining terms...the word ‘consumer’ means a member of your target audience, such as an existing client, a new customer... or even a competitor’s client!

The global reach of online communication has turned the business world on its ear, with enterprising marketers struggling to keep pace with this whole new world. With all the changes, however, one principal of ‘making the sale’ has remained constant. It’s a concept that remains at the forefront of the marketing world because it’s at the very foundation of business success.

Everybody’s doing it. Coke does it. So does Nike. Banks do it... health clubs do it... so do successful wedding photography studios, private bus companies, and even cupcake shops. What is it? **Positioning.**

For all companies, no matter what size, well-focused and consistent attention to branding and to creating a favorable, memorable brand position in the minds of prospects is **the most effective way to compete,** to rise above the static, to become the go-to solution in any market.

It’s Fundamental

The idea of creating a ‘**brand position**’ was first explored in business journals in the late 1960s. Many considered it a passing fad. They were wrong. Unlike other ‘fads’ of the time such as Nehru jackets and flower power, positioning has withstood the ravages of time. This marketing idea has gone from fad to fashion to become an **established principle for creating business growth** that has endured for nearly 40 years... and shows no sign of losing strength anytime in the future.

To understand why positioning is so fundamentally important, it’s critical to first understand exactly what positioning is all about. It’s quite simple really. Here is the definition I like to use:

**The way you want customers to *perceive, think, and feel*
about your brand vs. competition.**

Notice how the above definition of Positioning relates not what you do to a product, but more, what you do to the mind of the consumer. Positioning is creating a ‘one-on-one’ relationship with your consumer, that brings your brand to life, tells a story, gives it a personality.

Positioning presses a consumer’s intellectual *and* emotional hot buttons for buying. It **clearly defines the reason your brand is in the marketplace.** Well-crafted positioning creates a picture in the mind of your consumers, the picture you want him or her to visualize of your brand... **what you offer in relation to all the other choices** that your consumer has.

Positioning is the marketing fundamental that you use so that your brand will stand **head and shoulders above the rest** instead of getting lost in the crowd. Positioning defines who you are, what you offer, and why they should forget about your competition.

The Hub of your “Brand Wheel”

When you think of your brand, imagine a wheel with spokes. The spokes are all the aspects of your business or brand you use to communicate to customers exactly what your brand is all about. This exhaustive list includes, but isn’t limited, to...

- **Advertising, Promotion, Public Relations**
- **R&D, Product Design, Packaging**
- **Distribution Channel Choice, Service Delivery System**
- **Merchandising, Pricing**

Each of these **defining aspects of who you are and what you offer** are critically linked to – and based upon - the brand position at the center of the wheel. For your brand ‘wheel’ to whirl at top profit-generating speed, you must first develop a powerful **hub** for that wheel. The hub is your brand position. It is the source of your power and drives every one of the spokes in your wheel.

Stand Out In A Cookie-Cutter World

In almost any market niche today, consumers have a staggering number of choices. Frequently, there is little or no functional difference between products themselves, so consumers **make their choice based on brand positioning**. They’re looking for added value...something that appeals to either their intelligence OR their emotions.

Developing a brand position forces you to think clearly about *what makes you uniquely different in the market place*. When you understand this key concept, you’ll be able to explain to your consumers why they should choose *your brand* over the competition.

Accept No Substitute

Indeed, the ultimate objective of a brand position is to get your target to feel that there is **no completely satisfactory substitute for your brand**. “I only drink Coke.” “I only buy Honda.” “Whenever I have an ice cream craving, I reach for a Dove bar.” You undoubtedly have your own favorite brands that you use everyday that you wouldn’t dream of substituting with “Brand X:” a favorite toothpaste, a trusted brand of razor, “your” perfume....

*Training Exercise: There’s no better subject for a positioning research test than YOU. Think about items that you purchase regularly and use daily. What products have left their mark...their brand...on you? Why have you chosen them? Is it strictly based on the way they perform? Probably not. You’ve likely **developed a relationship with your chosen brands** and think of them like good friends...trustworthy, dependable, or maybe even ‘cool’ or ‘hip.’*

Effective positioning (and a good product) creates **brand loyalty and brand longevity**. Unless the manufacturer of a brand you like alters the product or its image dramatically, you’ll probably be using that brand for years to come. *That’s* brand loyalty, driven by strong brand positioning.

The Bottom Line

A **clearly-defined and consistently reinforced** brand position leads to focused, consistent, powerful, and cost-effective marketing initiatives. These initiatives will deliver heightened visibility which translates into increased prospects.

From an ever-widening pool of potential consumers comes **increased market share, improved financial performance**, and a **exponential profit potential** In short...

Powerful positioning is fundamental to great brand building.

DEFINING YOUR POSITIONING - The 6 Elements of Your Brand

Brand positioning is a process and one that any business owner can master...if he or she has the right tools. The good news is that this toolkit is laid out below and doesn’t cost a penny. What you need is what follows, **the six core elements that define your brand**.

NEEDS

Satisfying the needs of the consumer is at the heart of a brand. Strong market positions that fail to respond to **a market need that is important to people** are a waste of both time and money. If your

brand focuses on some minor attribute that is unique to you but of little concern to customers, you're doomed. Consumers won't be interested in what you have to offer.

To satisfy consumers, you have to let them know what's in it for them. To truly build a relationship with your brand, it's important to give people what they want and satisfy them on two distinct levels. First...you must meet their **functional needs** that are addressed by focusing on the **physical, the tangible**.

Major brands do it like this:

- “Reduces plaque, tartar, gum disease” (Colgate Total toothpaste)
- “Helps promote brain development in children” (Enfamil Infant Formula) ...
- “Financial flexibility to purchase what you want, when you want” (American Express Card)

The second type of **Customer Need** you must meet has to do with something more touchy-feeling... **emotional needs**.

- “I feel confident I look great when I smile...” (Colgate Total toothpaste)
- “I know as a parent I'm doing the best for my child's future...” (Enfamil Infant Formula)
- “I want a credit card that is a status symbol and reflects my success in life.” (AMEX)

Using a product that works well is rational... but frankly rationality usually only sells “products.” It's **emotion that sells a brand**. Connecting with consumers emotionally is how good brands turn into profit over-achievers. Our favorite brands, like our favorite friends, bring out positive emotions. They make us safe, secure, good about ourselves. And because they make us feel so good, we want to hang out with them.

TARGET

Your target is a unique group of consumers that you want to ‘talk to’ because they're the people who will buy your product or service and keep you in business. When considering your target audience, you should think of **all potential users of your brand**. Don't limit yourself to just **demographic targets** (such as Adult males, 25-35 years of age). That's thinking *inside* the box, and there's only so much room in there...

Good marketers go further. They flesh out their Target Group definition to include much more detailed information: their target's **psychographics** (personality traits, the way they think), **purchasing behaviors** and **attitudes** towards the category in question, and what their current **usage** is in the category.

Within this group, you need to focus on the most likely targets that have **a similar set of needs and concerns**. By its very nature, a brand with a well-thought-out Positioning will **appeal to some people and not others**. Often, we want to be everything to everybody, but adopting a strong brand position requires bravery... and that means making tough choices. So don't just ask yourself who *is* in your target group, but remember to ask yourself the tougher question: **who isn't in your target group?**

It takes some “deep digging” to understand well who your target is. But, it's worth doing because if a target audience is articulated correctly, it will help get the consumers in that target to **perceive your brand as superior** in meeting their particular needs.

COMPETITIVE FRAMEWORK

Competitive Framework describes the playing field in which your product is viewed, the **consumer grouping of like products with which your product competes**. It includes **all the options available** to the consumer to satisfy a specific need. Got a headache? What are all the possible ways you could try to get rid of it? Take some aspirin, drink herbal tea, go to an acupuncturist, or listen to a relaxation tape. As a marketer, you must consider **all possible options**, because that is what your consumer is doing. And you must be prepared to make consumers realize **why your option is superior**.

Most of the time when people think about Competitive Framework, they think about **the Standard of Identity** (“SOI”). SOI is often category-driven. For example, Nokia is a “mobile phone,” and McDonald’s operates in the “fast food” category. But top brands actually think *beyond* their SOI and use a *perceptual* competitive framework to **expand the customer base** and **appeal beyond just functionality**.

So, Nokia doesn’t just sell cell phone technology, it markets its phones as **fashion accessories**. McDonalds doesn’t just compete in the fast-food industry, it competes in the “family fun & food entertainment” business. It’s a **whole new way of looking at competition**, and the best brands do this consistently.

BENEFIT

Benefit is what most people think about when they’re working on their brand position. Your brand’s benefit answers **the consumer’s ultimate question**, “What’s in it for me?” There are two key types of benefits, functional and emotional... exactly the same as with needs. Smart brands respect and acknowledge consumer’s emotions and create benefits that **connect on a psychological level** with feelings such as

- **Wanting to belong**
- **The need to feel connected**
- **The desire for peace of mind.**

Think about fire insurance. You may have a policy for years and years and never realize a tangible or functional benefit (goods replacement when a loss occurs). But, you pay your premium regularly because that’s the price to pay to sleep well at night, knowing you have the emotional benefit of *peace of mind*.

So, the big winners in the marketplace are the brands that carefully consider - and then address - both functional *and* emotional benefits.

The Volvo brand’s benefit of safety addresses a functional need, but there is an emotional side to the benefit of safety, too: “I know I’m buying the safest car to protect my family, and that means I’m a good parent and spouse.” That powerful **combination** of both a functional and an emotional benefit is what helps Volvo stand out in the midst of a plethora of other car brands.

You can say Starbucks is all about getting a great-tasting cup of caffeine, but it’s also about creating a **coffee-drinking experience**. Viagra solves the physical (literally - functional) problem of erectile dysfunction, but its emotional benefit of **restoring healthy relationships** is just as – if not more - important.

REASON WHY

This branding element basically answers the question: “Why should I believe *your* brand can deliver the benefit it says it can?” It basically **adds critical credibility** to your sales and marketing message. Your ‘reasons why’ may be *product-, experience-, or people-related*.

Let’s say I’m in the market to buy a new tennis racquet. I’m considering the Yonex brand because I’ve been told Yonex delivers more power to meet the needs of the sports-world. That sounds great, but ...why should I believe it? Yonex advertises that its racquet is the only ultra-light isometric-designed tennis racket created with a nickel-titanium alloy in its shaft (to allow transfer of full power from the racquet to the ball). That’s a **product-related Reason Why**.

Then, Yonex says it’s the first and only brand of tennis racquet to be used to win both the French Open and Wimbledon. That’s an **experience-related Reason Why**. It’s based on *clinical tests or results in the market*. Lastly, Yonex benefits from expert endorsements of famous professional tennis players, like Monica Seles, Lleyton Hewitt, and Martina Hingis. That’s a **people-related Reason Why**.

All “Reasons Why” are **linked directly to a brand’s key benefit(s)**. Yonex brand’s reasons work together to convince the consumer that Yonex *can* and *will* deliver the benefit it promises: more power to meet the needs of sports-world professionals than any other tennis racquet.

BRAND CHARACTER

Brand Character is **the personality of your brand**. Used properly, it can powerfully differentiate brands that have common features and benefits. Probably the most obvious example of this is in the soft drink business. Although die-hards will argue that Coke and Pepsi are completely different, let’s face it: both products are primarily made up of a little bit of sweetened syrup and lots of carbonated water. But, ask someone which brand they prefer, and you will most often get a strong answer one way or the other.

What helps to drive this differentiation? A lot of it rests on Brand Character. How do you articulate a brand character? Use **personality characteristics** – as though the brand were a person.... Descriptive words like ‘street-smart,’ ‘classic,’ ‘ornery,’ ‘wise,’ ‘reflective.’ The more unique your description, the more ownable it is.

Think of it this way: if Pepsi were a person standing in the doorway, what would that person look like? Male or female? Young or old? How would that person be dressed? In a suit and tie or in blue jeans? What kind of attitude would that person have? What activity would that person be doing? Now, do the same visualization exercise for the Coke. Did you come up with two different images? Most of us do, and *that’s* what brand character is all about.

Remember: your brand character is about the nature of your brand, not the nature of your product. This is an important distinction to understand. Duracell batteries may be *long-lasting* themselves but “long-lasting” would not be the brand’s *character*. If Duracell were a person, you would most likely turn its long-lasting nature into a personality characteristic such as **reliable...** the same way you would describe an individual.

Well-Positioned

Finding a brand position that is unique, clear, consistent, competitive, and cohesive can be hard work. It’s a multi-faceted, multi-layered process and discipline. But with the right approach and knowledge, you can achieve a strong brand position that will separate you from the competition and put you exactly where you want to be – occupying a special ‘piece of real estate’ in the minds of your customers that is yours and yours alone.

Interested in learning more about Brand Positioning? Visit our website at www.bda-intl.com or contact info@bda-intl.com.



*Brenda S. Bence – Speaker, Trainer, Consultant
International Marketing & Branding
E-mail: Brenda@BrendaBence.com
Visit: www.BrendaBence.com & www.bda-intl.com*

*Office Phone - Thailand: +662-711-9215 or +662-627-9327
Fax – Thailand: +662-711-9210*