

Brand Positioning

Today's marketplace is no longer responsive to the advertising that worked in the past. There are just too many products, too many companies, and too much marketing noise. To succeed in our over-communicated society, a company must create a position in the prospect's mind. A position that considers not only its strength and weaknesses but also those of its competitors.

– Jack Trout and Al Ries, in their article, *The Positioning Era Cometh*, *The Advertising Age*, April 24, 1972

Jack Trout and Al Ries coined the word Positioning. They mentioned it for the first time in their 1969 article titled *Positioning is the game people play in today's me-too marketplace* in *Industrial Marketing*.

In 1971, David Ogilvy, one of the founding fathers of modern advertising, pointed out that our campaigns' results depend less on how we write our advertising than on how a product is positioned. Thus, the 1970s ushered in a new era in marketing— The Era of Positioning. Accurate Positioning has become the most important step in effective marketing.

Later, the positioning pioneers Jack Trout and Al Ries wrote a highly influential article highlighting the positioning concept, *The Positioning Era Cometh* in the *Advertising Age*, on April 24, 1972. They wrote:

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A few years later, in 1981, they published the first book on Positioning, *Positioning: The Battle for your mind*, which sold over three million copies worldwide.

Evolution of the Positioning Concept

1. **USP (Unique Selling Proposition)** concept popularized by Rosser Reeves originated in the '40s. However, USP did not consider the competition.
2. **The next big Idea:** David Ogilvy's Brand Image as opposed to the actual product difference (as in the USP), came later.
3. Jack Trout and Al Ries came up with the next big idea of **Brand Perception and Positioning**, taking marketing to the next level in the late '60s.

It's All About Perception!

Marco De Veglia wrote about an interview he had with Jack Trout recently in his book, *Brand Positioning Formula*. So, here is the latest

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take of Jack Trout on positioning according to that interview: *The world was getting more competitive, and in the world of competition, it is all about perception. You win or lose in the mind of your prospect, building perceptions. So, it is not a question of reality as much as perception. And that makes perception a reality that makes marketing more of a perception game. So, that is how the concept of positioning your brand in the customer's mind is born.*

So, Positioning is the process of establishing a product, person, event, company, or even an object in the minds of the members of a target market in such a way that it is perceived to answer the needs of that market better than the competition does. Positioning thus refers to the identification and communication of a differential advantage.

Profitable Positioning is a strategy for creating a unique product image, which increases total profits. Firms planning modifications of existing products or introducing new products will naturally, in keeping with their marketing objectives, strive to position their products' entry to produce maximum sales and profits.

Product positioning is a concept borrowed from military strategy. We can find the earliest known writings about positioning in military strategy in the writings of a Chinese general, Sun Tzu, a contemporary of Confucius, the famous Chinese philosopher. In his classic work, *The art of War*, Sun Tzu, the master strategist he was, discussed the importance of positioning in the military strategy context— *troop disposition, ground, terrain, relative strength of opposing forces, and the mental attitudes of the opposition. His primary target was the mind of the opposing commander.* These concepts are very much relevant in the present-day marketing context.

What is A Brand?

Before we get to how to position a brand in the minds of consumers, let us have a common definition of what a brand is, as there are many definitions of what a brand is. Four experts define brands as :

1. A brand is the intangible sum of a product's attributes. (David Ogilvy)

2. A brand is the set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds or subtracts from the value a product or service provides to a firm or that firm's customer. (David Aaker)
3. A brand is a set of expectations, memories, and relationships that are taken together to choose one product or service over another. (Seth Godin)
4. Your brand is what other people say about you when you are not in the room. (Jeff Bezos)

While all these are great definitions from experts in the field, they are not actionable. They do not tell you how to create a brand. So, here is a more actionable definition: *A brand is the sum of all associations consumers have about your offering. Those associations form the brand image, which, together with the brand's awareness (unaided) levels, form your brand's equity.*

Brand Associations

How do you know what associations consumers have with your brand? First, ask them what comes to mind when they think of your brand and you have your brand associations.

Brand associations are images and symbols associated with a brand or a brand benefit. At the same time, brand associations are not reasons-to-buy but can create a differentiation based on a brand's perceived qualities that are not replicable. Brand associations are the attributes that come to the consumer's mind when discussing the brand. They help consumers recognize the brand within its category because the consumer relates the brand's association to the explicit and implicit meanings. Here are some factors that help form brand associations:

- Customers coming into contact with the organization, its products, and employees
- Word-of-mouth publicity
- Quality of the product
- Advertisements
- Product class or category to which the brand belongs

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- Price at which the brand is sold
- Celebrity endorsements

Consumers develop positive brand associations if their experiences are positive with brand communication and the values that the brand stands for align with theirs.

Since brand associations are the thoughts that enter a consumer's mind when they think about a brand, marketers are continuously striving to create a mental connection a consumer makes between a brand and some other factor, such as a concept, person, interest, experience, emotion, activity, or image.

Consumers will automatically form associations with your brand, whether you want that association or not, and whether you manage them. Consumers will automatically put your brand into mental categories and associate specific meanings with it based on their experiences, knowledge, belief systems, values, and what they hear from others (word of mouth), including their friends, family, peers, or the media. Therefore, you must proactively create positive associations for your brand to differentiate it so it can stand out from the crowd.

How to create a favorable and memorable brand association? The three fundamental elements of building brand associations are visuals, language, and personification.

Brand Personification

Brand personification is a projective technique where you ask people to think about brands as if they were people and to describe how the brands would think and feel. You start this process by exploring your brand's personality traits. The key questions to ask and answer are:

- For example, if your *brand* were a person, not a product or service, would *it* be a man or woman?
- Street-smart or book-smart?
- Extrovert or introvert?

- What would be the age of that person (brand)? Young? Middle-aged or old?
- Would the person (brand) be caring and understanding or tough and authoritative?
- Also, you can think of your brand as a person, a celebrity, or a role model who best characterizes your brand's attributes and features.

Here is a case highlighting the importance of brand personification, where researchers surveyed physicians to understand the brand personality of a prescription drug.

