

# Messages and Positioning That Support Your Brand

BY GAIL MCGREW

**Y**our company might not give much thought, time, or resources to its position in the market and corresponding marketing messages. You may still be coasting on messages and positioning you developed several years ago and have not found the time to update. In fact, what you may be coasting on is repeat business and word of mouth, not realizing how out of date your company messages are given new economic realities or new competitors in your market space.

It's possible you don't understand how powerful these messages are in creating your *position in the market* or *brand*, or maybe you've been fortunate enough to grow opportunistically or by word of mouth and have never really had to put stakes in the ground and define who you are to your target market.

However, as your business expands into new geographic markets or introduces new services or products, your target audience may not be familiar with your company or the range and reputation of your services. Oftentimes, you face much more competition, including offshore competition, where it is very difficult to compete on price. Additionally, a slowing economy puts pressure on all players and those with the most convincing unique selling proposition (USP) often win.

It must be clear to your target market what you do and why they should select your company or services over those of your many competitors.

## **Business-to-Consumer vs. Business-to-Business Marketing**

Although emotions play a major role in business-to-consumer (B2C) buying behavior, and thus message development, business-to-business (B2B) buying decisions have always been much more rational in nature. B2B decisions typically relate to business efficiency, productivity, cost-savings (at least in the long run), and keeping up with the competition. If your competitors have capabilities, services, or cost efficiencies that your com-

pany doesn't have, your company will eventually fall behind if it does not keep up.

In the B2B realm, you need to determine what messages about your company and its services will resonate with your target audiences most effectively. To do this you need to understand what issues they care about, or their "hot buttons," how your company and services are relevant to their concerns, and the direct and indirect competitors you face in the marketplace.

If you examine your current brochures, sales sheets, or Web site today, is it absolutely clear what your company's core strengths are and why customers should buy from you instead of one of your competitors? Do you talk about *your* company history or *their* business problems and how you can help *them*? All too often, companies provide a list of relatively mundane facts about their company and include a picture of their building, instead of strategic or compelling information that will help prospects understand how you can truly help them solve their business challenges.

Your audiences will filter your messages through their own business challenges, recent experiences, and existing level of knowledge, so you may need to educate your market about your products and services too. It is not uncommon that several people are involved in the buying decision, and they may have very different issues and concerns. For example, think about how different the day-to-day or strategic issues are for the average CIO versus CFO versus CEO.

To begin the process of developing and articulating your firm's messages, you need to address the following questions. It is important to include the experiences and input of several key company executives as well as managers and members of the sales team in this process. They typically have different perspectives.

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your company and its services?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your key competitors?
3. What is the dynamic and competitive structure of the marketplace in which you sell?

4. Where is the market headed and where are the market opportunities today and tomorrow?
5. What are the biggest issues dominating the industry right now, and how is the industry changing? How are your products and services changing to meet these needs?
6. How are you currently perceived by different target audiences, and how do you want to be perceived?

Once you have addressed these points, it will be much clearer how your firm's marketing messages should be developed to reflect the key benefits of your services or products, and how these benefits meet the needs of different audiences and decision-makers. Message development goes hand in hand with positioning, since it is marketing messages that communicate the company position in the marketplace.

It is also important to keep in mind that educating your prospects about the market and how your services fit into marketplace dynamics serves to communicate your expertise and builds trust and confidence. Help them make informed buying decisions and they will appreciate and remember your messages.

### Key Messaging Considerations

#### 1. Ideally, you should only have three to five core messages.

If you have too many messages it will not be clear to your audience what it is you do, and what makes you unique. Remember, a company that is all things to everyone is nothing specific to anyone. It's hard to make the argument that you

are the best in certain areas if your message communicates that you do a little bit of everything.

**2. Messaging should always precede graphic development, logos, print materials, and Web site development.** Why? To use a simple example, are you a "conservative" or "cutting-edge" company? Positioning such as this is strongly communicated through your look and feel, design, and colors, so you need to determine these messages before this process begins.

How do you get started developing new marketing messages to create or recreate your position in the market? You need to begin with a formal discussion with key company executives and an objective, external facilitator in marketing. Include members of your sales team—remember, they are on the front lines dealing with prospects every day.

Many marketing agencies specialize in this service, so bring in a few to discuss your needs and compare prices and experience. You'll soon be on your way. [m](#)

### About the Author



Gail McGrew is principal of McGrew Marketing ([www.mcgrewmarketing.com](http://www.mcgrewmarketing.com)), a full-service marketing and public relations agency that specializes in professional business services, technology, life sciences, healthcare, and other B2B markets in the Mid-Atlantic. She can be reached at 570.905.5373 or [gail@mcgrewmarketing.com](mailto:gail@mcgrewmarketing.com). This is her first contribution to *Marketer*.



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