



CATALYST

A B2B BRAND CONSULTANCY

BrandMatters

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White Paper

Sharpen Your Focus. Recalibrate Your Brand.



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Ready, Aim, Fire

“The sun is the most powerful source of energy. Every hour the sun washes the earth with billions of kilowatts of energy. Yet with a hat and some sunscreen you can bathe in the light of the sun for hours at a time with few ill effects.

A laser is a weak source of energy. A laser can take a few watts of energy and focus them in a coherent stream of light. But with a laser you can drill a hole in a diamond.

When a company becomes unfocused, it loses its power. It becomes a sun that dissipates its energy over too many products or too many markets.

When you focus a company, you create a powerful, laser-like ability to dominate.”

—Al Ries, author of FOCUS – THE FUTURE OF YOUR COMPANY DEPENDS ON IT.

Does it sometimes feel like your communications campaigns have become more like “random acts of marketing” instead of a cohesive, integrated program? Perhaps it’s time to step back and refocus your efforts?

At the risk of sounding too simplistic, getting the proper focus requires a “ready, aim, fire” approach - proactive development of a phased program built on thoughtful analysis, in-depth evaluation, masterful planning, and intelligent implementation of cost-effective tactics at the right time and place.

Here are three steps to consider as you take a step back and evaluate what you need to do for your next campaign. And remember, the best programs always utilize nearly equal amounts of art and science to uncover the right answers – so don’t be a slave to the numbers.

The three essential elements of building a successful B2B marketing communications program are:

1. Situation Research and Analysis

Situation research and analysis allows you to re-examine and better understand current issues as well as the important perspectives of your target audiences before you advance to the next phase of program execution. Ideally, this should involve formal primary research as well as some less formal questioning of internal audiences:

The Internal Perspective

A conversation with various customer-facing, internal audiences (including executive management) permits a deep voyage into the heart and soul of the organization. You might think you know all of these answers, but you might be surprised by the answers of others. It’s not atypical to discover people have wildly differing views despite you’re best efforts to have them all in complete lockstep behind the vision, core values and brand.

Continued...

To ferret out your organization's internal viewpoint, consider asking the following types of questions:

- How would you describe our core competencies (areas of expertise)?
- In your mind, who are our most critical target audiences?
- What do you see as their wants and needs (from the point of view of our target individual)?
- What target audience problems do you believe we best solve?
- What are our target audiences really buying vs. what we are selling?
- Ultimately, what unique target audience value do we provide?
- In your opinion, what is our biggest internal organizational challenge?
- In your opinion, what is our biggest external challenge?
- Who are our top two primary competitors?
- How do they define their value to customers?
- What kind of company do we want to be in the future? (in terms of your ideals)
- What will our company be like for our target audiences when we reach this point?
- What do we want people to say about us as a result of our work?
- Aside from what might be published, what values do you believe are most important to us?
- How does this view of the future represent the interests of our target audiences?

Why is this important? Published research indicates that although 70% of employees know that their organization has a mission or vision statement, only 41% know what it is. When it comes to actually understanding their company's mission or vision, the numbers are far lower than that.

Ignorance of the corporate vision and mission can be costly to the bottom line. Watson Wyatt, a global consulting firm focused on human capital and financial management, discovered through a survey that companies whose employees understand the mission and goals enjoy a 29% greater return than other firms.

What about the brand? It's the brand that helps them tie it all together. How many of your employees really understand your brand's promise to customers and help deliver that promise daily? Employees may end up being one of your most critical target audiences for your next campaign. How well do employees understand your vision, values and brand? How engaged are they in it?

Getting A Customer / Prospect Perspective

“Voice-of-the-customer” information will help you better understand the existing mindset of external targeted audience segments and establish a meaningful positioning direction. What are your customers and prospects thinking today?

Research helps you establish what your current position is and, in many ways, guides what your positioning statement should say.

What’s the difference between your position and a positioning statement?

- A position (or statement of position) is a cold-hearted, no-nonsense statement of how you are currently perceived in the minds of customers and prospects. It is your position today.
- A positioning statement, by contrast, states how you wish to be perceived. It is the core message you want to deliver in every medium (including advertising, PR, direct-response, website, etc.) to influence the perception of your company and products.

The theory of positioning says that:

1. You must position yourself in your prospect’s mind.
2. Your position should be singular: ONE simple message.
3. Your position must set you apart from your competitors.
4. You must sacrifice. You cannot be all things to all people; you must focus on one thing.

In other words, research will help you recalibrate on the one distinctive thing that will give you a competitive advantage. You can start to define the parameters around your positioning by answering the following questions:

- WHO? – Who are you?
- WHAT? – What business are you in?
- FOR WHOM? – What people do you serve?
- WHAT NEED? – What are the special needs of the people you serve?
- AGAINST WHOM? – With whom are you competing?
- WHAT’S DIFFERENT? – What makes you different from competitors?
- SO WHAT? – What’s the unique benefit that the prospect will derive from your products?

It might be beneficial to deal with your customers first - and especially new customers converted within the last year. From them you can learn the hurdles they recently overcame to become a customer and what in the sales strategy worked for them, what didn't, and what needs to be improved. Recently lost customers are also a valuable source of information to determine what went wrong and how it could be remedied in the future.

Prospects should be carefully chosen and qualified to ensure they are familiar with your brand or the product or service of interest. This type of audience generally provides a better understanding of the competitive environment and industry as a whole as well as "outside" impressions of the company sponsoring the research.

Some of the questions that would help guide the research decision-making process include the following:

- Who is your target audience (job titles) by product line?
- In what industries do they work?
- What is the total population of the target audience?
- What is their basic role or function?
- What do we believe to be their daily challenges?
- What do we believe are the motivations that drive the decision-making process of buyers?
- How aware are prospects of your solution(s)?
- How well known is your brand in this marketplace (with customers and with prospects)?
- What is your market share by product line?
- What do you believe is your current position with customers and prospects?
- What is the sales channel for each of your product lines?
- How many sales people do you have?
- Who (what) is your primary competition?
- What are their products?
- What are their distinctions? Current position?
- What are your biggest marketing and sales challenges?
- Specifically, what would you like to find out if you could get inside the mind of a customer or prospect?

Competitive Comparisons

Aside from hard core evaluations and deep scrutiny of competitive offerings and individual product value propositions, sometimes it's enough for marketers simply to understand "soft" comparative information relative to competitive positioning, brand messaging and marketing communications tactics. Examples of key information to look for:

- Positioning statements on the website
- Tagline
- Annual report strategy statements
- Boilerplate descriptions at the bottom of news releases
- Historic competitive ad spending
- Ad messages
- Collateral messages

Brand Audit

Can your programs pass the "table test?" After placing completed materials on the conference room table, do you see strict brand consistency? Not just look and feel, but also in messaging and language? Does it all help accomplish stated objectives? An audit of your brand in this way will help paint a picture of current strengths and weaknesses – plus guide the positioning and new brand expressions you need to develop. Key information to review:

- Employee communication materials
- A representative set of demand creation materials
- Relevant sales support materials
- Your website user-interface, content and messaging

Other External Audiences

Do you also stay aware of the perceptions of outside influencers such as analysts and shareholders? Call them. Learn how they process information and think about your brand.

2. (Re)Defining Your Brand Strategy and Positioning

Armed with a fresh set of intelligence from both inside and outside perspectives, you can now start exploring new ways to reposition your brand. The goal is to generate a relevant, overarching “promise” with associated value points for each audience. How might you get there?

1. With research in hand, you can develop a common organizational understanding of what your target audiences value and how you could potentially differentiate your brand. Differentiation demands that your brand be perceived as different and better to your target audience’s brand.
2. You might find it beneficial to get a small group together and brainstorm potential positioning directions.
3. Next, you need to identify the tangible and intangible benefits offered by your brand – ideally, you should define tangible and intangible value for each audience segment. Tangible value is quantifiable or “hard” benefits. Intangible value is less quantifiable or “soft” benefits.
4. It’s also critical to define proof of value offered. Why should your audiences believe your claims?

Brand Expression Development

The other element involved in the brand strategy is communication of your differentiation and value in ways that cut through the clutter and noise in the marketplace. It begins with your new, strategically-constructed positioning statement and carries through to appropriate messaging by market and a consistent theme and look for communications materials. The value offered to your audiences must be clear (e.g. you cannot simply select words that infer value - words without depth and measurement will make it difficult for your audiences to evaluate and compare).

3. Marketing Communications Plan Development

Now is the time to plan. Consider preparing a 12-18 month marketing communications plan identifying strategic goals and all of the tactics you believe will help accomplish them. This step helps ensure that programs are aligned with business goals and executed within timelines and budgets. Be sure to include measurement methodologies as well. Today’s results will help guide tomorrow’s activities.

Ask us about our Marketing Communications Plan Outline. It can help you organize your thoughts.

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