

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

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THE 10-MOST CRITICAL POSITIONING ERRORS

Dave Letterman, host of “The Late Show” with David Letterman, popularized the “top-10” list with his inimitable zany sense of humor. In fact, books have been published with Dave’s lists. What’s the appeal? Well, they’re outrageous takes on popular culture. Dave builds excitement throughout by starting with number “10” and counting down to number “1,” which is the most ludicrous item in the list.

We thought we’d share our list of “the 10-Most Critical Errors in Brand Positioning.” Like Letterman we’ll count down from number “10” to number “1.” However, we will reveal these errors over multiple DISPATCHES rather than tackle all of them in this issue. Each issue of DISPATCHES in this series will reveal three *critical errors*, their *causal factors* and the *resultant impact* on brand marketing. In the fourth issue of the series we will reveal number “1.” And, unlike David Letterman’s list, this one is not intended to tickle your funny bone (i.e., be humorous). Unfortunately, it’s somewhat sad that these errors exist and are so prevalent.

This article is the first in the series. Here we share critical errors number “10,” “9” and “8.” Drum roll please. (You have to play the drum role in your own head.)

Number “10” - Lack of *cohesion* throughout the Brand Positioning Strategy Statement.

In other words, the work just doesn’t “hang” together. The pieces of the Brand Positioning Strategy Statement do not work in harmony to create a unified whole. It may be that the proposed benefit does not link to the needs of the target group. Or the reason-why does not support the benefit. Or, perhaps, the perceptual competitive framework is inconsistent with the benefit promise.

There are many *causal factors* that lead to a lack of cohesion. Primary among them is “fuzzy” thinking. The resultant work mirrors the confusion present in the minds of its creators. Another causal factor is “management by consensus.” The “someone” who should be making decisions is abdicating responsibility in favor of reflecting the divergent viewpoints of participating managers in the same strategy statement. Another factor is CPA, which is Continuous Partial Attention. Appropriate attention is not being focused at the time of positioning strategy development to ensuring that the completed statement is cohesive.

The *resultant impact* of this critical error is a lack of clarity, which leads to poor execution. The Brand Positioning Strategy Statement serves as a blueprint for transforming a product into a “brand.” If the blueprint is not clear it is difficult, more like nearly impossible, to ensure

cohesiveness in execution of brand strategies and tactics among the various functional units (e.g., Product Research & Development, Promotions, etc.). So customers do not receive a unified, single-minded message through the myriad touch points to develop a clear understanding of what the brand should mean to them.

Number “9” - Use of Standard of Identity or Class (e.g., of drug) versus *Perceptual Competitive Framework* in the competitive framework of the strategy.

The competitive framework indicates the market for the brand. In our work we distinguish between “literal” and “perceptual” competitive framework. The literal competitive framework identifies where the brand will source volume – its competitive set. The perceptual competitive framework signifies how we desire customers perceive the brand. It is the more important of the two in that it guides activities in an attempt to affect how customers perceive the brand in relation to the competitors noted in the competitive set, or literal competitive framework.

Standard of Identity is the legal definition for what the product is. For example, the Standard of Identity for Disney World may be an “amusement park.” But Disney World is so much more than an amusement park in the minds of customers. Class of Drug identifies the type of compound. For example, Lipitor, which is prescribed by physicians to reduce their patients’ cholesterol, is a “statin.” Many of Lipitor’s primary competitors are statins too. But to those physicians and the patients who depend upon Lipitor, with its extensive clinical studies and track record of success, to prevent Coronary Arterial Disease and premature death Lipitor is much more than a statin.

Among the *causal factors* in choosing Standard of Identity or competitive set over perceptual competitive framework is a lack of appreciation regarding the importance of this element on shaping customer perceptions and guiding the management of meaningful differentiation. Marketers blindly repeat what their predecessors have done. It has become an automatic, thoughtless entry in the Brand Positioning Strategy Statement.

The *resultant impact* is two-fold. For one, when marketers use Standard of Identity or plug-in the competitive set to the competitive framework they are contributing to commoditizing the brand in the minds of prospective customers. They’re indicating that it is in the same class as every other offering. This communicates to customers that these products are all basically the same. Customers, in turn, will use this perception to make their selection decision simple. They will simply choose among alternative products on price (the lowest one), convenience or habit. It will not serve to compel preference for a brand.

For another, it fails to provide guidance for the development of the “brand.” The perceptual competitive framework informs the development of strategies and tactics for all marketing mix element – including product development. It serves as a “north star” to navigate the brand to a unique place in the minds of customers.

Number “8” – Use of *product claims* for the reason-why.

The “reason-why” provides necessary support to make the benefit promise believable. In other words, the reason-why is the substantiation for the benefit. Product claims are just what they imply – claims! A product benefit claim lacks substantiation. Instead, it begs for substantiation.

The reason-why can be intrinsic to the product and/or extrinsic in nature. Intrinsic reasons-why include elements such as design, ingredients or compounds, mode of action (i.e., how it works), among others. Extrinsic reasons-why fall outside of the product itself. Perhaps, the most notable extrinsic reason-why is an endorsement from a notable organization such as the (fill-in the country name) Dental Association. We need to ensure we are using bonafide intrinsic and/or extrinsic reasons-why to substantiate the benefit.

Among the *causal factors* for using product claims for the reason-why, perhaps, the single-most factor is lack of sales(wo)manship. This is a way of saying that the marketer does not know how to close the deal to finalize the sale with the target group. Or it could be that the marketer does not possess the discipline of sacrifice in choosing from among a perceived multitude of benefits. So, s/he stashes product benefits in the reason-why section naively believing that the benefit promise is now single-minded. Another factor may very well be that the marketer does not currently possess a reason-why that differentiates the product from competition. It could be that all products share the same reason-why support. Or it could be the marketer is quickly dialing-up to an emotional benefit that has not been earned through a meaningful set of experiences with the target group. In this case the marketer is attempting to support an emotional benefit with product claims that tell prospective customers what the product does. Whatever the factor it is just plain incorrect to use product benefits as reason-why support.

The *resultant impact* is a lack of credibility of the benefit. And, we all know that credibility is vitally important in creating brand loyalty. At the very least, customers will not distinguish a difference between the product offering from its competitors and, as such, fail to drive customer preference.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS:

We’ll share Boats & Helicopters for your consideration at the conclusion of this series.

In the meantime if you are interested in learning more regarding the subject matter of this article just click any of the titles from these past DISPATCHES articles:

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