

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

Sunday, May 2, 2010

10 REASONS WHY POSITIONING BENEFITS FAIL

Each week we probably review at least 4-5 brand positioning statements, which works out to, what, about 200+ per year? When you see and assess this number of statements, you not only learn how to make a positioning statement more compelling, but you also pick up familiar patterns in the way many marketers articulate their statements.

And since the Benefit portion of the brand positioning statement is thought by many to be the most crucial one, we thought this might be a good time to share one of our “Top 10” lists: the one that identifies the most common reasons why the Benefit portion of the brand positioning statement fails (or, at least, why it falls short of its full potential). Maybe you can use this list as a kind of checklist against the Benefit portion of your brand’s positioning statement.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS:

The Top 10 Reasons Why Benefit Statements Fail

- 1. The Benefit is not expressed as a point-of-difference.** This is absolutely the single most common shortcoming among all the benefits we see week-to-week. In some cases, of course, a brand truly lacks any real differentiation among its key competitors. But this should not prevent the inclusion of a benefit that could offer a *perceived* difference versus key competitors. The functional benefits of Gatorade’s liquid are hard to distinguish from those of other thirst quenchers; but the emotional Gatorade of feeling more like a winner is something the brand has carefully cultivated and taken some ownership of...for a perceived difference.
- 2. The Benefit articulation does not match the Needs articulation.** Either one of two things shows up in nearly every brand positioning statement we review: there are needs expressed as important to the target but they are missing in the benefit portion; or, the marketer changes the wording of the needs when writing the benefit portion (not intending to change meaning, but often doing so). We frequently talk about the principle of “conscious redundancy” in writing a brand positioning statement—which means, that unlike in school where we were all taught not to repeat our words, it is perfectly all right to do so in writing the needs and benefits within the positioning statement.
- 3. The Emotional Benefit is generic.** The good news is that most marketers recognize the value of including an emotional benefit in their brand’s positioning. The bad news is that, because exploring for compelling emotional benefits is usually time-consuming and

challenging, many marketers simply grab a “popular” emotional benefit (such as “empowerment” or “getting back to life”) and then hope for the best. Actually, we would recommend no emotional benefit at all rather than settle for something generic or well-worn by other categories.

4. **There are too many Benefits.** Of course, who’s to say what “too many” means? We know, for example, that Colgate Total has successfully taken the top spot in toothpaste by a “benefit bundle” that includes 8-9, if you read the bullet points on their package. And yet, many of these “bullet point benefits” are actually common to the category; the one benefit that truly differentiates Total from other toothpastes is that it keeps on cleaning up to 12 hours. So, while it may seem this brand has too many benefits, it is more likely that the brand’s true positioning benefit reads something like this: “Only Colgate Total provides complete oral care that last for 12 hours.” What’s a good rule of thumb? No more than 2-3 benefits in the brand positioning.
5. **The Benefits are cost-of-entry ones.** This reason on our list could have been part of the first one because with only cost-of-entry benefits the brand cannot express differentiation. But this shortcoming deserves its own slot on the list—if for no other reason than to remind us that consumers and customers do not select our brand over another because it performs as the category.
6. **Multiple Benefits are poorly linked to one another.** What makes two benefits “sing well” together for the target is that they somehow, logically go together—with a kind of equal weight in importance. One of our longstanding favorite examples is Pantene, which has joined beautiful hair and healthy hair in such a logical (and usually memorable) way. But note the brand does not also add extraneous benefits that would not link so well (such as “exciting fragrance”).
7. **A Benefit gets misplaced as a Reason-to-Believe.** This usually happens because a marketer wants to include a support point for an emotional benefit and therefore employs a functional benefit to do so. For example, to support the emotional benefit of “assurance of safety on the road for your family” the marketer might include something like “holds and handles the road better.” Our preference is to make the brand positioning as crystal clear as possible, and that has a better chance of occurring by keeping the “apples” benefits separate from the “oranges” reasons-to-believe.
8. **The language used to express the Benefit is not specific enough.** How often do we see something like, “provides more complete pain relief”...but cannot specify what is meant by “more complete”? Much better in this case to include a brief parenthetical statement right after “more complete” that spells out the precise dimensions of complete relief intended (for instance, total medicine deliver yat the pain site and longer lasting effects).
9. **The language includes extraneous qualifiers.** We call this the inclusion of the “bogus benefit.” The way it typically shows up is in the addition of what is actually Competitive Framework language to the Benefit: “X is the only brand of contemporary wellness provider that gives complete and balanced nutrition and enhances the spirit.” The 5

words right after the word “only” are extraneous and not true benefits; they are more like a re-cap of the Perceptual Framework.

10. The Benefit is not expressed strategically but executionally. This is a less common shortcoming than the others, but we still see some marketers struggling (often with their Ad Agencies) in trying to come up with the benefit in almost an advertising slogan format. Slogans change. Better to stick with strategic language and let the creative teams translate them in various ways when it comes to developing communications.

We hope sharing these shortcomings that we’ve seen time and again help you as you bolster your own brand positioning statements. We know articulating the perfect benefit statement within the brand positioning statement is far from easy; but if you aim to avoid most of these things, you will be well ahead of your peers!

Richard Czerniawski & Mike Maloney

Richard Czerniawski

.....
430 Abbotsford Road
Kenilworth, Illinois 60043
tel 847.256.8820
fax 847.256.8847
.....

reply to Richard:
richardcz@bdn-intl.com or
rdczerniawski@cs.com

Mike Maloney

.....
1506 West 13th Street, #17
Austin, Texas 78703
tel 512.236.0971
fax 512.236.0972
.....

reply to Mike:
mwm@bdn-intl.com or
mikewmaloney@gmail.com

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