

# DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

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Sunday, November 11, 2007

## THE 5 C'S

Whenever we are working with clients on brand positioning or communication strategy development, one of the coaching tools we always use is the 5 C's of Technical Competence. These "C's" include the following: Clear, Complete, Cohesive, Competitive, and Choice-full. In introducing these we explain that, just as Olympic sports like figure skating and gymnastics have two scores for a given performance—one for technical merit and one for creativity or artistry—so should positioning and strategy statements have two assessments, one for technical merit and one for strategic value.

Actually, most marketers we work with find this notion of a "technical merit" assessment to be something quite new; it isn't something we marketers are typically trained to do. If you think about it, when any type of proposed communication is technically sound, it is much easier to comprehend the intended message. And when it comes to crafting high-potential positioning statements or communication strategies, what's most often missing are things like *clarity* of meaning, *cohesiveness* of the elements, and an obvious *competitive* slant. Hence, the 5 C's. When we apply the disciplined thinking of the 5 C's to any strategic piece, we invariably end up with stronger strategic value—and potential for success!

In recent months many clients have mentioned to us that they find these 5 C's especially helpful. So, for this week's *Dispatches Boats & Helicopters*, we will review the C's and offer them as another "how think" tool for use on your brand strategies.

### BOATS & HELICOPTERS:

(Note: Most of us probably learned some of the 5 C's when we were in grade school—you know, like when we were taught to write effective paragraphs, we learned that they must have clear language and each one must be internally consistent or cohesive. When it comes to writing strategies, these two still apply, as well as some others that are essential for success—like competitiveness and choice-fullness.)

1. **Clear** - Of course, who doesn't know that good communication requires clarity of expression? But think about how often we use "fat" language (words and phrases that are so broad they can have many meanings) like "active people," or "category-involved consumers." And we just as easily fall into insider expressions and buzz-words that only those working closest on our business quickly recognize. What we really need is strategic language that is truly incapable of being misunderstood. In other words, communication that could be shared with any other marketer or brand-team member and convey the same meaning to each. You may say that this is a pretty "high bar" to attain,

and you would be right. But the effort to reach it is usually well worth it. Each of us can recall those rare but enlightening moments when someone on the brand team (often from one of our supplier-agencies) comes up with a “magic” turn of a phrase that makes us blurt out, “That’s it! That’s exactly what we’re trying to say or do.” A few years back, when Pepsi marketers were trying to express their unique promotion strategy for the brand All-Sport, someone simply said, “We are not doing point-of-purchase sampling; rather, we’re doing *point-of-sweat* sampling.” In that juxtaposition of expression, as well as in the coining of a new term for sampling, the intent was remarkably precise--and clear!

2. **Complete** - This C may be a little obvious...who’s to say, after all, how much information is needed for completion? But regarding the development of a technically sound brand positioning statement or communication strategy, there are some longstanding, generally accepted guidelines for determining completeness. These guidelines comprise things like the following:
  - a. Target definitions should include 7 elements: demographics, psychographics, driving attitudes and dissatisfactions, a condition or primary use occasion, current class/category usage, insightful behaviors, and needs—typically both rational and emotional.
  - b. Competitive Frameworks should include both a literal dimension (key competitors/ source-of-volume) and a perceptual dimension (a “label” that sets up the Benefits and captures how the brand wants to be perceived).
  - c. Reasons Why should include at least one for every Benefit.
  - d. Brand Character or Personality should go beyond simple adjectives—to the use of analogies or short narratives—in order to be truly complete.

When a brand’s strategic thinking captures all of these things, it’s truly complete.

3. **Cohesive** - Perhaps another C-word, “Consistent” works just as well here because the technical soundness we’re looking for has to do with linkages. Honestly, this is the one C that is most often lacking. And there are two places in positioning and strategy statements to check first: the identified Needs in the Target definition must link directly with the Benefits being promised (in fact, we urge clients to repeat the exact same language in both places); and each Reason Why selected does not tie to a Benefit. Without these basic consistencies the strategic intent is open-ended, is left up to the reader’s interpretation: “Should I make anything of this target’s need, even though it is not being “paid off” by a benefit?” And, “Do I need to communicate this additional Reason Why even though it doesn’t support the strategic message?”
4. **Competitive** - This one is pretty simple, really. Strategy itself is often defined—whether in war terms or business terms—as an intellectual means of being more competitive. Who wants to employ a strategy that isn’t? So why is it, then, that so many positioning statements and communication strategy statements do not “read” as being very competitive? For example, a typical benefit section will read something like, “X Brand provides strong efficacy with added safety.” And the reader is left to ask, “Is that it? Is that the best you can do to differentiate yourself from competitors?” On the other hand, you will occasionally see benefit sections, like the one for Bayer aspirin, that reads,

5. “Bayer is the only leading pain reliever that can also help save your life.” That’s competitive. Here’s a hint for increasing the likelihood of a more competitive benefit in your positioning or strategy: select Needs in the Target definition that your brand can win on (real or perceived basis), not Needs that are categoric, generic, cost-of-entry.
  
6. **Choice-Full** - Actually, we only recently added this 5<sup>th</sup> C to the list. But is probably the most important of all because it ensures that the brand’s strategy has focus, and focus invariably means better, more precise, more effective marketplace investment behind the brand. Because we make strategic choices (based upon both market/customer knowledge and sound judgment) we automatically avoid trying to be all things to all customers, which we cannot succeed at anyway. Making choices about the “bulls-eye” Target, the Needs our brand can win on, the Competitive Set we will position against, the number of Benefits we can reasonably communicate, and so on makes our strategic thinking ultimately work harder for us. One of the very best exercises a brand team can go through after completing a 5-C technically competent positioning or strategy is to list on a flip-chart or grease-board two columns: what we have chosen to include and what we have chosen to exclude!

We hope these 5 C’s will be useful for your strategy development. Maybe you will even think of some more C’s for technical merit that we have overlooked. If so, let us know.

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