

# DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

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## ADDED STUFF ≠ ADDED VALUE

A few weeks ago in our weekly *Dispatches*, we reported on a survey of ten different Creative Briefs (from a range of product categories and classes) that we had recently conducted. And a key finding of that survey was that, within those ten few briefs, there were as many as sixty different terminologies—some, merely different ways of expressing virtually the same thing; but many, additional items to what most experienced marketers would consider the essential elements of any sound Creative Brief. For example, along with that always-essential Creative Brief element that most refer to as the brand's *benefit*, a few briefs added something called the *single-minded takeaway*.

This tendency to add things is by no means limited to the designing of a sound Creative Brief. We regularly encounter marketers whose appetite for adding elements to Brand Positioning Statements seems almost insatiable. Rather than precisely and with maximum diligence articulate the longstanding, must-have positioning elements (Target, Needs, Competitive Framework, Benefits, Reasons Why, and Brand Character), many marketers instead “pile on” more: Competitive Set, Brand Role, Brand Idea, Brand Essence, Brand Values, Differentiated Core Benefit, Ultimate Promise and on and on. What is it that drives this hunger for added stuff? Where does the urge-to-add come from? Knowing, from so many years of our own experiences, how difficult it is to craft a competitive, winning Brand Positioning Statement focusing only on those six, classic, must-have elements, why would anyone want to make the task geometrically harder by adding more?

We absolutely hate to see anyone make a tough job tougher. That's why for so long now we have advocated getting down to those *limited* strategic concepts and components that (a) bring the most value to the strategic thinking, and that (b) are truly *strategic* in nature and not tactical. (We have seen a good many marketers and their agency partners insert into a Brand Positioning Statement something strategically disguised as a “Brand Idea” or an “Ultimate Promise” that is really nothing more than a tactical, communications slogan.) Because we sincerely wish to make brand-builder's jobs easier, we have tried to take a step back and reflect upon our observations about marketers and their teams who just cannot resist adding more, rather than focusing on less. And in taking this step back, we honestly did our best at trying to decipher what really goes on—not always, but most of the time—when stuff gets added.

**Stuff tends to get added to Brand Positioning Statements (or “Pyramids,” or “Lighthouses”) and other critical strategic formats because...**

- 1. Someone has an agenda for a particular (often tactical) element or idea.** In the example noted earlier, in which something labeled an “Ultimate Promise” actually houses

a communications campaign slogan, this is precisely the case. Communications agencies that have developed for their client what they are certain is a strong creative idea want more than anything to keep that idea alive. Getting the *language* of that idea formally memorialized into, say, the Brand Positioning Statement can be a most effective way of keeping the line alive longer.

2. **The company's marketing team lacks a common marketing language.** We have discussed this very common dilemma in some previous *Dispatches*. Because so many corporate cultures comprise marketers from a wide array of previous companies, getting to a succinct, common language for key brand-building concepts and terms remains one of the most elusive efforts they face. And what we have observed in many of these cultures is that, rather than the Chief Marketing Officer and his lieutenants formally forcing the issue to get to a common language, they agree to disagree. Even more troubling, they default to saying related concepts more than one way: "Since some of us believe the positioning should have a "Primary Benefit" (or, "Differentiated Core Benefit") and others believe it should have "Secondary Benefits," let's just leave it both ways...and hope for the best."
3. **A new "outsider" joins the brand team; and he or she begins selling the "way we did it at \_\_\_\_\_" aggressively.** This happens a lot more than you might think. Naturally, marketing organizations that have no common language for key concepts are typically the most vulnerable to a new hire's sale of new terms and formats. But we often observe new-hire, senior marketers trying to convince organizations—even ones that have invested significant funds developing their own positioning model—that they should abruptly give up that model in favor of the one that he or she brought along. What makes this particularly disturbing is that in so many cases the new-hire, senior marketer hasn't even taken the trouble of trying to learn or appreciate the model he wants to change or replace! He just knows that his way is better. Or, more probably, the only one he knows is his way. (Upon further thought, stepping all the way back to decipher what's *really* going on in situations like these, could it be that new-hire, senior marketers feel an inordinate pressure to add some kind of value almost instantly?)
4. **Many on the brand-building team, and sad to say, even on the senior marketing team, really do not grasp the essential strategic concepts.** It may be that some on the team just lack the experience. For example, in a good many pharmaceutical companies it is not uncommon for a senior Sales manager to be promoted into a key Marketing position. She may have a passing awareness of concepts such as "Competitive Set" and "Benefits." But it's often unlikely she has actually developed any Brand Positioning Statements. So, being unfamiliar with the classic positioning element, "Competitive Framework," the safest route for her is to include both "Competitive Set" and "Competitive Framework"—maybe even add one more just to be sure she doesn't miss something important, like "Market Definition."

On the other hand, it might also be that no one in the company's senior marketing management has demanded "precision of thinking" when it comes to understanding and articulating things like the "Brand Character." So other similar-sounding concepts get added: "Brand Essence," or "Brand Values." Let's face it, when we don't know how to be precise, to say exactly what we mean, the path of least resistance is to say more. As one of our university professors so aptly put it years ago, however, "The more you say in

the essay part of the test, the less I assume you know—I can tell that you’re trying to ‘snow’ me.”

We think these are some of the explanations for the all-too-common trend to “add stuff” where less is really more. And again, it’s a prevalent trend. We just recently saw a marketer’s new brand positioning format; it included almost twice the number of elements as that of the 6-element, classic, brand positioning format. When a brand is trying to stand for those One or Two things that will make it a better choice than its competition, how do you get *focus* on those One or Two with so many elements to manage? From our experiences, added stuff doesn’t bring added value—it brings added headaches.

### **BOATS & HELICOPTERS—Some Food for Thought**

1. Anyone with Sales experience can tell you first-hand that the more messages you heap on a customer during a call, the less the customer remembers. It is so critical that every function in the organization (the brand-builder’s internal customers) be able to internalize and readily recall the brand’s positioning: why would anyone inundate these internal customers with more messages, when fewer are needed?
2. In martial arts, there is a basic principle: “Minimize the Movements.” Why? The fewer the movements the more efficient, the faster, and most important, the stronger the results against the enemy.
3. Edwin Moses, a former U.S. Olympic Track Champion, was often quoted as saying that he would never stop trying to *reduce the number of steps* he took when engaging in a jump. He knew that fewer steps always resulted in better heights/distances, better results.

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