

# DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

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## MULTIPLE MESSAGING IS NOT POSITIONING (LET'S BE HONEST)

As most brand-builders know, creating and implementing a differentiated, competitive brand positioning is about *everything the brand does*, not merely about what the brand says (for example, in its advertising or other forms of communication with consumers and customers). The main reason that Volvo continues to own the global positioning of “family safety” more than other car brands (even if it is technically no longer the world’s safest family sedan) ties first and foremost to all the pioneering things the brand *did* in surrounding Volvo drivers with air bags. The main reason that Harley-Davidson continues to own the global positioning of “rebellious freedom” links directly to the rugged cross-country driving events the brand *does* each year. And the reason that Gatorade continues to own the positioning of “ultimate athletic equipment for winners” relates a large measure to what it *does* at so many professional sporting events—placing its distinctive coolers on the sidelines, covering the alpha-athletes’ chairs with Gatorade-logos, and sponsoring Gatorade scoreboards.

Of course, in addition to these actions, brands like Volvo, Harley-Davidson, and Gatorade have also consistently reminded their target audiences of their distinctive positioning across their advertising and other communications efforts, such as their websites. This combined effect is what makes the positioning of each of their brands so rock-solid (and so enduring): the focus on what it is they do better than anyone else; bringing that focus to life with reinforcing *actions* in the marketplace; and repeating the focus time and again in all of the brand communications.

But, imagine if you will, how diffuse, confused, and non-differentiated the brand positioning of Volvo, Harley, or Gatorade would be if instead of delivering a consistent, focused message of what the brand does better than other brands, each chose to offer different messages to different segments of the market. For example, if Volvo chose to speak about its luxurious comfort to Mercedes loyalists (in an attempt to win them over), how might that dilute their perceived-superior safety positioning? In addition, suppose Volvo decided to conduct a separate advertising campaign aimed at Hyundai drivers, touting Volvo’s everyday economy—how might that affect the brand’s safety platform? You can see at once in these absurd deviations how making more and unrelated (even conflicting) promises to more market segments undermines all other efforts to establish a focused brand positioning that the brand can own—and win with.

Who would attempt such a thing, you ask? Actually, there are many brands—particularly in the pharmaceutical marketplace—who are doing it day-in and day-out. They call it “multiple sales messaging.” And the way it works it pretty simple: Sales Reps call on virtually all of the physicians in a given geographic region with the intention of building prescriptions for their brand; assuming they are fortunate enough these days to actually speak with a physician for a few minutes, they then vary their message about the brand to make the sale. In fact, the

experienced Sales Reps will have already segmented their physician population, typically based upon their previous calls. So they will know in advance which doctors are motivated by efficacy, which by safety, which by tolerability, which by dosing convenience for their patients, and so on. The brand itself—the drug, that is—may have legitimate differentiation on only one of these benefits, and be no better than parity on the others. In fact, the benefit that the brand *does* have legitimate differentiation with may not be of interest to some of the physicians being called on. Said another way, the one thing the brand does and can own (what it could focus its brand positioning against) is not equally valued—or even valued at all—by every doctor in the market. Clearly, in varying benefit messages widely across a marketplace, perhaps even to all segments of the market, a brand cannot be consistent in everything it *does*.

In fairness to the pharmaceutical industry, their longstanding sales-infrastructure model is geared to cover a market, to call on virtually any and all potential customers. And it's a costly model that general managers would certainly be reluctant to curtail. But, on the other hand, it really isn't a model that lends itself to positioning brands. Multiple messaging is not brand positioning. As an action in the marketplace, multiple messaging runs counter to brand positioning in two key ways: (1) as already noted, it prevents the establishment of a focused, differentiated benefit platform that the brand can own (or have more ownership of than other in-class drugs); and (2) it prevents a focus of resources against the market segment that the brand has the best opportunity to win with, to capture as loyal prescribers. Every sales organization in the world knows this principle: not all customers are of equal value. And time invested with those who are highly unlikely to appreciate our brand's difference, let alone switch to our brand, is time lost against the brand's most likely prospects. Can you imagine a Harley Sales Rep calling on the home of a Vespa owner?

Many pharmaceutical companies these days earnestly want to build brands, rather than merely sell products. Some have been darn successful at it too. It is no coincidence that Pfizer built such strong, leadership brands in Viagra, Lipitor, Zithromax, and Zoloft—each with a focused, differentiated brand positioning aimed at their segmented physician targets. Nor that Astra-Zeneca so deftly transitioned from one purple pill (Prilosec) to another (Nexium) also with a focused, differentiated brand positioning. For the most part, these brands implemented their chosen brand positioning in everything they *did* and *said*, consistently. In other words, they did not let multiple messaging—standing for anything necessary to appeal to everyone—hijack their brand-building efforts.

### **BOATS & HELICOPTERS:**

1. Let's be honest...multiple messaging is not really a brand-building effort; it's a service-to-sales effort. By its very nature it is designed to allow any given Sales Rep to make the brand be anything necessary to make a sale at the time.
2. "Handling customer objections" is not multiple messaging. Every brand faces real and contrived roadblocks from its various customers, and so every brand's Sales people need to have the information and data to handle those—as they arise. But when it comes to building a distinctive brand positioning, the communication from advertising, internet, retail, and yes, Sales needs to be consistent.
3. Considering how much the Sales Rep world in Big Pharma has changed in recent years (mainly restricting access to the end customer physician to a minimum)...maybe it's time

for pharmaceutical companies to re-think how they deploy their Sales Force assets, more as a *brand positioning implementation investment* than as a market coverage investment. This would, of course, require that Sales people's time be concentrated against those one or maybe two target market segments where the brand has a legitimate chance to build a loyal prescribing franchise. It would absolutely require that everyone in the organization understand who **is** and who **is not** the brand's target customer.

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