

DISPATCHESTM

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

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PRINCIPLES OF POSITIONING NAVIGATION

As some of our longtime readers of *Dispatches* know, in addition to conducting training workshops on the subject of brand positioning, we also regularly lead “live” Brand Team-Events for clients who are trying to craft a positioning for their brand. Sometimes the objective of these events is to better understand a brand’s *current* positioning (that is, understanding how the brand’s target customers or consumers currently perceive, think, and feel about the brand relative to competition). And sometimes the objective is to search for evolutionary, “go-forward” positioning moves for their brand. But always the objective is to facilitate a dialogue among the Brand Team—including its outside agencies—and to arrive at the best consensus brand positioning statement possible in whatever time the team can afford for the event.

This objective of facilitating a dialogue is so very important to achieve because, let’s face it, most Brand Teams rarely take the time out to have a focused consideration of the brand’s positioning. Worse yet, many Brand Team members find themselves working to build the brand, but have no written or “memorialized” version of the brand’s positioning in their possession. At best, they have what they *think* is the brand’s positioning in their heads. That’s why we urge our clients to gather their teams and work through what we call a *Brand Positioning Navigator* at least once every year or two (whether they choose us to lead the process or not).

If you and your team have done something like this in recent times, you are ahead of the pack. But, assuming you have not actually “navigated” through a brand positioning articulation process for awhile, we thought it would be helpful to outline a few of the key parameters such a process entails...if nothing else to spark your curiosity and, just maybe, to incite to do some positioning navigation soon.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS: Positioning Navigation

navigation, noun 1. The science of getting ships, aircraft, or spacecraft from place to place; esp. the method of determining position, course, and distance traveled.

Accordingly, a Brand Positioning Navigator aims to determine the optimum--as in the most competitive and compelling—positioning & course-setting for the brand(s) being worked.

1. **Navigator Operating Principles:** Some basic assumptions and principles that have proven to work toward achieving Navigator Objectives are as follows:
 - Make the most of the “collective wisdom” of the full brand-building team...use hard market data, product use testing, competitive and company intelligence, and

individual expertise to leverage this collective wisdom;

- Engage (and encourage!) everyone's full-brain--left and right sides—throughout;
- Diverge, diverge, diverge (for maximum creativity and options to consider) and then converge;
- Look outside the familiar category boundaries as much as possible; steal greedily from other positioning success models.

2. **Navigator “Dialogue”:** One of the biggest reasons for taking the time to work on a Brand's Positioning as a full Team (rather than have one or a few individuals articulate and “download” the BP to everyone) is for improved *language management*.

The truth is that, all too often in business, we elevate our language (a little like State Departments do when using diplomatic language) to give it stature and breadth. But we end up with a lot of *Fat Words*...words that have multiple meanings and that therefore lack real precision of meaning.

These fat words beg the question, “What, specifically, are you talking about—especially relative to your competition?” Some very common fat words that we all see in brand positioning statements are things like, “*effective,*” “*performance,*” “*quality,*” and “*trusted.*” But what are we saying—HOW or in WHAT SPECIFIC WAY effective? Did we mean BETTER quality (or just cost-of- entry quality)? Is our brand MORE trusted than others?

So, one of the major goals in any Positioning Navigator is to get as much “consensus precision” of meaning as possible. This is real value-added!

3. **Navigator “Attitude”:** The most successful positioning navigation occurs when, as stated already, there is full, Brand Team participation. But there is something else, something much less tangible, that can make or break an effective Navigator outcome: having the right attitude. What's the “right” attitude? It's simply this—a determination by each participant to meet the main objective, to articulate the best possible brand positioning (or brand positioning options) in time available.

This attitude of determination requires the setting aside of various hidden agendas; for example, if the team's Ad Agency participants have as their hidden agenda to make sure that whatever brand positioning is articulated is supportive of their current advertising effort, the team dialogue will resist open-minded options. Similarly, if some of the Brand Marketing Team members have as their hidden agenda to raise issue after issue (even in the face of relatively convincing, directional marketplace research), then arriving at a consensus “best positioning” articulation will be stymied. As we often hear regarding the achievement of success in any endeavor, “a wanting attitude is everything.”

4. **Navigator Outcomes:** Clearly, the overall outcome of any Brand Positioning Navigator is that one page or PowerPoint slide that contains the Team's consensus brand positioning statement. And, assuming there was some form of a brand positioning statement to start with, another very helpful outcome is the side-by-side articulation of the original BP and the team consensus BP. Most important of all, though, is the Team's

assessment of what must be done with the evolved BP next: what questions need further answers; what positioning planks need more competitiveness or completion; what specific tasks will various team members pursue to take the evolved BP to a point where it can be “signed off” as The Official Brand Positioning?

If any of these brief guidelines about positioning navigation piques your interest further, give us a call! As former pilots, in the Navy and Air Force respectively, we know a little something about the importance of navigation.

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