

# DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

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Sunday, May 3, 2009

## SELLING THE BRAND POSITIONING

*“The Marie’s Difference: Is it the homemade flavor? Is it the ingredients? Is it that adding Marie’s to a recipe transforms something ordinary into something extraordinary? Or that our dips and dressings are found (only) in the refrigerated produce aisle?”* (Marie’s Brand website)

For many years now, the Marie’s Salad Dressing Brand has been well-known in the U.S. for its freshness positioning—a well-established perceived (if not real) advantage over “dry grocery” dressings. There is little doubt that its unique, refrigerated placement among fresh vegetables and away from the dry grocery dressing aisle has contributed a great deal to this differentiated, freshness positioning. And, as most marketers who sell through grocery accounts know, selling a unique placement in any chain, away from the account’s normal “category placement,” is no easy task—and typically involves having a Sales Force that calls on a different buyer.

While we have no inside knowledge of the Marie’s Brand history, it seems that the product, the packaging, the retail placement, and the Sales Force designed to deliver that unique retail placement were all coordinated in support of implementing Marie’s differentiated brand positioning. It may have been, at the time, that Marie’s actually had the capability to “cover” or call on other grocery account buyers (for example, the refrigerated dairy case buyer) for a secondary placement...but the choice was made to focus on that one, beautifully clever placement with the fresh salad fixings in order to completely implement the brand’s positioning. We might say that a choice was made to consciously limit the possible “selling coverage” in order to gain a win over competitors.

You can probably think of some other examples of brands that consciously limited their distribution and therefore sales coverage to better implement their brand positionings. Aveda hair (and now skin) care comes to mind: their website still proclaims that the brand is “available only in Aveda stores and professional salons and spas.” Even before Aveda there was the Paul Mitchell Brand, which still touts its exclusive distribution through salons. Both brands made the choice to limit and focus their sales coverage in order to build a differentiated positioning versus those “mass” department and drug store brands. Then there is Starbucks. It wasn’t too long ago that you could only find a barista and enjoy a cup of Starbucks in one of their stores; now their kiosks show up virtually anywhere, even at some U.S. truck stops (and who can forget the “off-positioning” uproar in the press when the brand first began selling its fresh-ground, Arabica beans in grocery stores?).

So what’s the point? It comes down to this: when implementing a brand positioning the goal, the ideal is to make it come alive in **everything** the brand does, **everything the brand invests Company resources in**, including its Sales Force and the customers they spend the Company’s

money calling on. It's a pretty simple idea, really, that aims at maximizing the Company's limited resources against the best opportunities, the optimal "target segments/accounts" for the brand. Said another way, while it is often tempting to think that a big brand (or a brand with a big Sales Force or distribution system) can effectively target or call on everyone, practically speaking, it almost never makes good sense to do so. Too much time gets wasted on target messages or calls that have very low odds of panning out; and, since there are still only twenty-four hours in a day, these lower odds messages or calls are always at some expense of higher odds ones.

As we said, this is the brand positioning goal, the Ideal. But then there is the reality. Not every implementation infrastructure came *after* determining the brand's differentiated positioning. In fact, most new brands enter the marketplace via companies with established infrastructures, like store-door delivery systems or geographically set Sales Forces. And, as you know, these established infrastructures are expensive, already a significant asset-investment for the company. So what then? If a new brand has consciously selected one or two market segments (from among four or five that comprise the entire market) for its brand positioning, does the Sales Force **only** cover or call on those two Target-Segments? Conversely, if the established Sales Force "asset" has the capacity to cover one or more of the other segments, why not go after them opportunistically? Why not go for maximum asset utilization?

These were some of the difficult questions we wrestled with during our sessions with a pharmaceutical marketing client this past week. If you are currently marketing a drug brand or have ever done so, you can well appreciate that many pharma companies have Sales Forces with calling capacities beyond the physician Target-Segments the brand has chosen to focus against. Such a capacity investment virtually guarantees that physicians outside the chosen Target-Segments of the brand's positioning will eventually be called on.

The dilemma for the brand marketer in this is that, since there were good reasons for **not** including these physicians in the brand's positioning-investment decision (most likely, such physicians are not particularly interested in the brand's Benefits, or they are rigidly loyal to a competitor they perceive as a better choice), Sales Managers have no option but to go "off message" in making the calls...as in talking about a feature or benefit that is not part of the brand's positioning. Of course, most checked out pharmaceutical Sales people will never admit to going "off message"; rather, they prefer to call it "tailoring" the emphasis of the message for that particular doctor's bent.

Because we have had the privilege of working with many professional marketers—both in pharmaceuticals and in surgical devices—for a long time now, we have a lot of empathy for the professional marketer **and** the professional Salesperson in these real-life situations. Added to this is our dual perspective on these kinds of things: we have both served as Chief Marketers and as General Managers. For this week's Boats & Helicopters we have outlined our conclusions, calling them "Things We Believe" about the Ideal and the Reality of brand positioning. As always, we welcome your point-of-view.

### **BOATS & HELICOPTERS: Things We Believe In...about the Ideal and the Reality of Positioning**

1. Standing for something (ideally, Needs-Benefits the brand can win with) beats trying to stand for everything.

2. Building over time on what the brand stands for is a more efficient way to grow (maximizing the total investment to date, so to speak).
3. For most brands in most categories & classes, segmenting the market and choosing some segments to target fosters a “concentration of force” better than not segmenting and simply targeting the entire market (and usually gives the brand a better chance of winning—at least with someone).
4. Ideally, a brand would not make any resource investments against Target-Segments or against Needs-Benefits *outside* the Brand Positioning.
5. As with any principles, however, there are times and good reasons for making some exceptions:
  - a. *Adding* a new Target-Segment in the follow-on stages of the brand’s life (e.g., “migrating” later adopters who, most likely, share some traits in common with the chosen Positioning Target-Segments, but are slower to act);
  - b. Increasing market coverage against a Target-Segment outside the Positioning Target-Segment to (in professional marketing) capture a *consumer-patient* Segment that **is** inside the Brand Positioning;
  - c. *Adding to* or shifting emphasis of the Positioning Needs-Benefits message (the what-we-stand-for) to overcome significant objections a customer has.
6. Ultimately, the brand-builder must act as the “pilot-in-command” and balance the desire for a pure, focused Brand Positioning that can last with the realities of the Company’s already-operating asset investments, the Company’s true competencies, and the competitive environment.

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