

# DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

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## TOTAL QUALITY POSITIONING - PART 2

*“If you want to be a first-rate company, don’t focus on second-rate companies who can’t handle TQM (Total Quality Management), look at world-class companies that have adopted it.”*

*“The most effective way to spend TQM introduction funds is by training top management, people involved in new product development, and people involved with customers.”* (“A Few Words About TQM” - John Stark Associates, [www.johnstark.com](http://www.johnstark.com))

A couple of weeks back, we considered the popular, strategic management concept of Total Quality Management, or TQM, but with a twist - applying it to the development and implementation of Brand Positioning (yet another popular, strategic management concept). And so we arrived at an adaptive term, Total Quality Positioning, or TQP. If you recall, in that *Dispatches* we correlated the most basic aspects of TQM—total organization participation, quality focus, and customer satisfaction - with TQP. But there are several other critical traits of effective TQM that should also be expected from an effort at Total Quality Positioning ... which we will explore in this week’s Boats & Helicopters.

Before taking a closer look at those, however, a word about the quotes from John Stark Associates above. As widespread as TQM’s success has been over the past forty years, there are still some management teams that are skeptical of its real effectiveness. That’s because post-mortem analyses that various consulting companies have run on TQM implementation over the years have not all shown equal results. What most **do** show, though, is that companies with cultures that are already customer-driven have a much higher likelihood of achieving desired results with TQM. In addition, companies that consciously train their senior management and involve their product development, sales, and marketing people tend to succeed. It stands to reason that companies with these same in-going characteristics would also do better with Total Quality Positioning.

### BOATS & HELICOPTERS - Essential Traits of Total Quality Positioning

1. **TQP Leadership from Top Management** - Simply said, there can be no TQP when top management neither understands nor appreciates the fundamentals of brand positioning. Top management teams that are successful instilling TQP throughout their organizations share in common a “positioning language” - they understand the essential elements of brand positioning (especially the brand’s Target, Competitive Framework, differentiating Benefits, and Reasons to Believe). But beyond this, the senior team insists upon a thorough review of each brand’s positioning annually *in*

*the context of their key competitor's inferred brand positioning.* More specifically, “top leadership” in TQP requires an in-depth SWOT analysis (most likely at Strategic Plan time) of these relative brand positionings ... with implications for the future evolution of the company's brands. There's one more thing: a TQP senior management always inspects a given “brand plan” to make sure each initiative investment is consistent with the intended, stated brand positioning.

2. **Continuous Improvement** - In Total Quality Management, this refers to the never-ending quest to sustain—even increase--customer satisfaction. For TQP, the goals of sustaining and even increasing consumer/customer satisfaction remain...by (a) continuously “bullet-proofing” the brand's positioning vis-a-vis competition for preference, and (b) evolving the positioning over time to *add* value to the base proposition. Note, the emphasis on *adding* value, as opposed to changing value. Brands that practice continuous improvement in their positioning always build upon the positioning values they have already established. When Nexium became the next-generation “purple pill” within the proton pump inhibitor drug class, it built upon the high value in GERD relief that the original purple pill (Prilosec) had delivered and then *added* a logical and sought-after benefit of esophageal healing.
3. **Fast Response** - As the TQM manuals state, “to achieve customer satisfaction, the company has to respond rapidly to customer needs.” And when it comes to achieving TQP, the same is true. But a company cannot typically respond rapidly to evolving or new customer needs if they have no mechanisms for continuously seeking out these needs. In other words, TQP requires that a company institute an on-going “discovery” process: a series of qualitative, quantitative, and even ad hoc methodologies that are designed to identify emerging needs in their early stages. It is insufficient to simply commission an “omnibus” multi-brand Usage & Attitude Study once every three years, and then hope for some shift in need-state findings. No, the senior management team serious about TQP will request regular (say, quarterly) updates on changes in the need-state landscape--to include data on how well each brand in the category or class is perceived to be delivering on needs that are important to consumers/customers.
4. **Actions Based on Facts** - Let's face it, one of the biggest reasons that organizations do **not** disseminate and operate against brand positioning statements is that many within the company are skeptical of their basis in fact. Too often members of the R&D or Sales Management teams hear their Marketing colleagues justify brand positioning planks with judgment based on experience or on creative intuition. For TQP to happen **all** elements of the brand positioning must have fact-based - as in consumer/customer research-based - underpinnings. For many years now, we have been recommending that our marketing clients make their brand positioning statements “official” by linking in a side-by-side format their individual positioning planks with the actual marketplace intelligence and data that supports them. For

example, if a brand positioning includes a “benefit bundle” (two or more benefits) there must be some research data that demonstrates this bundle not only matches the product well, but is also what the consumer/customer seeks most in this type of product. And it goes without saying that whenever a marketer seeks to evolve a given brand positioning, there had better be some hard, fact-based evidence for doing so.

These, then, are a few of the “must-have’s” for the successful implementation of Total Quality Positioning in an organization. In subsequent *Dispatches*, we’ll offer some practical means of getting a TQP process started. In the meantime, based upon some of the traits here and from a few weeks ago, how would you rate your company’s success at TQP?

Richard Czerniawski & Mike Maloney

**Richard Czerniawski**

.....  
430 Abbotsford Road  
Kenilworth, Illinois 60043  
tel 847.256.8820  
fax 847.256.8847  
.....

reply to Richard:  
[rdczerniawski@cs.com](mailto:rdczerniawski@cs.com) or  
[richardcz@bdn-intl.com](mailto:richardcz@bdn-intl.com)

**Mike Maloney**

.....  
1506 West 13th Street, #17  
Austin, Texas 78703  
tel 512.236.0971  
fax 512.236.0972  
.....

reply to Mike:  
[mikewmaloney@cs.com](mailto:mikewmaloney@cs.com) or  
[mikemaloney@bdn-intl.com](mailto:mikemaloney@bdn-intl.com)

*Please forward any comments regarding the newsletter to Lori Vandervoort at our Central Division Offices of BDN International, 800-255-9831 or 620-431-0780.  
[lorivan@bdn-intl.com](mailto:lorivan@bdn-intl.com)*



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