

Strategy Tip.

How Strategic Positioning Guides Profitable Messaging

What is the Difference Between Positioning and Messaging?

Crucial for the success of any brand, positioning and messaging must work together to create a strong **brand perception**. While the two activities are greatly interconnected, they still retain unique nuances in how they are developed and their purpose within marketing. Understanding the differences between positioning and messaging can help marketers define their brands and ensure valuable outcomes.

Positioning is the brand's "true north", acting as a guide to all key communications. It must encompass much more than just attributes and physical traits, rather it must capture the intangible emotion and experience a brand can deliver, deliberately **driving differentiation**. As the strategic guidance for the brand, positioning must be formed first. Positioning a brand is the process of developing and ultimately owning a competitively differentiated space in our customers' minds that clearly fulfills an unmet need or resolves a tension they have. Rather than being conveyed to an outward audience, positioning is 100% internal. It informs how

rather than what we will communicate in order to achieve clarity and direction for the brand. It distinctly defines where your product or service fits into the marketplace and how you want it to be known long-term. Once the positioning is solidified, it informs messaging, setting the stage for the outward dialogue with the customer.

Messaging describes the external communications directed towards the target, based on the positioning of the brand. It is the set of statements that distinctly captures what the product does and why others should care. Messaging is important as it is the aspect that is readily observed by the intended audience. The TV commercials, billboards, and social media advertisements that we interact with on a daily basis represent the informative messaging of the brand. While positioning sets the stage, messaging is how the story unfolds.

One of the key differences between positioning and messaging is how each evolves over time. Once the positioning strategy is established, it usually becomes the backbone of the brand and endures for much of the **brand's life cycle**, unless it undergoes a complete transformation due to unforeseen circumstances. Messaging

on the other hand, is constantly changing with new slogans and advertisements, but is still grounded by a common positioning that transcends generations. Take Coca-Cola for example – since its establishment from 1886 to present day, the brand has positioned itself as the refreshing carbonated beverage of choice, drawing on themes of happiness and the social experience of sharing a Coke. While this positioning has for the most part been unwavering, Coke has cycled through dozens of slogans over the years, from “Have a Coke and a Smile” (1979) to “Open Happiness” (2009), to their most recent slogan “Real Magic” (2021–present). Though the message appears different, the positioning remains uniform in its ability to guide the communication between brand and consumer.

Why Your Positioning Matters for Rx Messaging:

In **pharmaceutical marketing**, creating positioning that informs messaging can be the difference between a successful brand and one with stagnant growth. Take Novo Nordisk’s product Rybelsus, which is used to lower blood sugar and A1C for type 2 diabetes patients. The brand draws upon a distinct user position by targeting the “rebellious” patient who does not want to come to terms with their disease. This subset of patients may not be willing to modify their lifestyle for diabetes, and therefore heavily depend on medication. Because of this, they are willing to withstand greater side effects in order to achieve their desired level of freedom. This positioning trickles out into their external communications, by pulling the “rebel” theme through their brand name, advertisements, and messaging strategies. The alignment achieved between positioning and messaging tactics allows Rybelsus to occupy a unique space in the type 2 diabetes segment.

Identifying the differences between positioning and messaging is an essential step in marketing. Once the two concepts are distinguished, they can work synergistically to develop a compelling and competitive brand perception.

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