STRATEGIC BRAND POSITIONING

Launch: Strategic Brand Positioning is Part 1 of a series of branding intellectual property from MicroArts Creative Agency.

The required reading for: Chairmen, CEOs, Entrepreneurs, CMOs, VPs, VCs, Angel Investors, Merger & Acquisition teams, Brand Managers, Sales, Marketing Departments, Management Consultants, PR Agencies, Design Firms, Digital Studios, Copywriters, Art Directors and Account Managers.
Prologue

Brand Positioning Principles

5 Brand Positioning: An Introduction
6 It’s not about you. It’s about the customer.
7 Launch a brand, not a product.
9 Launch a brand and get paid more as an entrepreneur.
10 A brand is an idea. Define yours.
11 Understand how your consumer perceives your brand.
12 Look everywhere for the big idea.
13 Be a storyteller.
15 Launch one idea. Not two. Not three.
16 Focus. Damn it!
17 Know where your brand position starts and ends.
18 Simplify your brand to a single idea.
19 Understand that your brand idea is not your idea.
20 Define your brand position with a name that can be spoken as a verb.
21 Say it with less.
22 Reposition your competition.
24 Apply the differentiation litmus test.
25 Consumers are emotional. So resonate with their emotions.
26 A brand can resonate with multiple consumer emotions. Pick one.
27 Ask and answer the “No Nonsense 9” brand foundation questions.
28 Own a market category with nine no-nonsense steps.
30 If you invent it, claim it.
31 Be a fast follower.
32 Do not confuse product quality with brand positioning.
33 Follow the critical attributes of a strong brand name.
34 Anticipate that a brand name will be simplified.
35 Incorporate a single reason for buying in the brand name.
37 Kill killer creative that doesn’t exude your brand position.
38 Don’t chase your competition’s tail, or your own.
39 Guarantee absolute consumer satisfaction.
40 Position your brand to live. Not simply exist.
41 Socially exude your brand position strategy.
42 Repurpose your media marketing mix.
43 Your brand position’s success is a CEO decision.
44 Find and hire your internal brand rock star.
45 Enlist Navy SEAL Team 6.
46 Hire the agency stuffed with your target consumers.
47 Know if your big idea has stopping power.
48 Never stop positioning.
49 Never blow off step one of your branding process.
50 A/B test to validate your brand position strategy.
51 Think different, as Steve Jobs would say.
To create *LAUNCH*, I have assembled every principle I recall leveraging during my 25 years in the branding business. If you learn something from it, I am honored. Please do share it with me at launch@microarts.com.

I have had only one professional job at one branding agency. Branding has been 100% of my focus and passion since I entered the business. I have never been a marketing scientist, creative director, copywriter, designer, digital specialist, CRM or analytics professional. The people who hold these positions are my teammates.

I am a brand launch guy—a frugal one. I consider myself a street smart branding professional stuffed with creative thinking. My credentials are defined by the success of my clients. I have been a key player, leading a team or being a part of a team, for more than 300 new brand launches. During my career, nearly 50 brands have been successfully acquired and my clients have done the money dance.

My first launch team experience was with my best buddies and partners, Mike DesRochers and Barrett McDevitt, during our college years. We became specialists at start-up marketing. We admired and appreciated small companies that had potential and were on the rise. We committed. I recall buying one of the first tricked out Macs in New Hampshire. It was the IICi and, at the time, we paid $12,000. Exciting times!

Our first two clients were landed when I was 19 years old. We earned their loyalty and respect based on the successful implementation of our recommendations. They were both technology businesses that got consumed by global giant, Computer Associates, now called CA, for some impressive dollar figures.

After 13 years of passionate work, we sold our agency for something like 48 million dollars. It’s an amount that my mom never did believe. Three years later we bought it back, for a much, much different number. At that time, my partners decided to pursue new life dreams. I stayed in the business because branding lives inside of me. I think it always will. I will forever love seeing someone’s shopping carriage carrying a brand MicroArts launched.

Few of America’s major brands and top branding agencies have even heard of my 25-year old agency. It makes sense. They have large budgets and are considered big clients. Agencies associated with these major brands win national awards and awards aren’t my thing. They have multiple offices filled with different branding teams. We have one kick-ass team. Believe me, I have tremendous respect for the top large branding agencies and have learned from them over the years. They have surely learned a few of their tricks from the best small branding firms as well. If you have the budget to invest, they will deliver the ROI.

Although their world of big city lights versus our world of the tasty ocean waves of the East Coast is as different as the New England seasons, I suspect our strategic branding principles and creative thinking are in close alignment.

Most of the ideas shared in this book come from my experience and the experience of my 20-plus mentors. I believe all of them are true and sound principles. Our brand launch team leverages these principles in some way, every day, in their strategic and creative thinking. This book is a reflection of what we do on a daily basis.

So let’s help each other out. Read the book and take all you can from it. Then feel free to connect with us and offer ways to make the next one better.
Brand Positioning Principles
Brand Positioning: An Introduction

Every successful brand launch must go through positioning exercises to develop a sound brand positioning strategy.

Al Ries and Jack Trout wrote about this necessity in the early 1980s marketing classic Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind.

Trout and Ries define positioning as “an organized system for finding a window in the mind. It is based on the concept that communication can only take place at the right time and under the right circumstances.”

A window to your customers’ minds is a view into your brand’s potential fortune. And identifying the right time and circumstances has a lot to do with focusing on what’s important, not to you, but to your customer.

Dale Carnegie’s most notable work How to Win Friends and Influence People drives one main point throughout: to successfully move people to your position, you must first see things clearly from their point of view and do so sincerely. Whether they are consumers or business prospects, you must find a way to communicate with them on a large scale and win over their minds to buy your products or do business with your firm. To successfully move people to your position, you must first see things clearly from their point of view and do so sincerely. What if they’re consumers or business prospects? How do you communicate on a large scale to win over their minds to buy your products or do business with your firm?

The original positioning principles conceived in 1969 and further developed by Trout and Ries in the 70s and 80s have been tested and proven since their discovery. My clients and I demonstrated these principles to be sound 20 years ago and we just proved them amazingly successful a week ago.

Principles by definition do not change. Times change, attitudes change, technology changes, but brand positioning principles can always be counted on to work for us.

This book offers proven brand strategy and insight for applying principles in a way that will draw an audience, keep them engaged and move them to act or buy.

So let’s start your thinking here.

Your next big idea for a brand launch is waiting.
It’s not about you. It’s about the customer.

No one likes people who only talk about themselves, yet brands do it all the time.

It’s easy for companies to gravitate toward: “Listen to how great we are.” After all, they are very proud of their new product or service. And the result is positioning, messaging and sales pitches focused solely on the brand itself. This tendency can lead to brands that are unwittingly introverted. They are talking to themselves rather than the consumers they seek to engage.

Here’s how your consumer thinks—in a nutshell:

» It’s not all about YOU [THE BRAND]
» It’s all about ME [YOUR CONSUMER]
» I am the one with all the money you want

So what?

Companies that are marketing and selling new products often do so by highlighting the product features and functionality. In most cases, the primary communications strategy is to highlight how their innovations outperform their competitors’ products. The problem lies in the fact that this messaging completely ignores how that performance helps the consumer. It’s lots of features and no benefits, which doesn’t resonate with those who make the final purchasing decision.

Swiffer positions its brand on “Great Clean in Less Time” and utilized advertising that closes with the soccer mom stating, “I think I’ll have my coffee over on the porch.” This approach is effective in focusing the reason to buy not just on product performance, but also on the emotional benefit of the brand’s promise of more time. It’s a position that centers around the consumer.

Successful brands always put themselves in the shoes of their consumers and talk about what is important to them.
Launch a brand, not a product.

A product is not a brand. Many companies launch products—a new innovation or new way replacing the old way, assuming there is an old way. These companies only sell products. They do not sell their brand. They fail to create brand equity and ubiquity for their product.

Companies that launch “original” products, not brands, eventually realize their rocket-science innovation is quickly replicated, ripped off, commoditized, duplicated, copied (call it what you want) by a competitor with a better-faster-cheaper version of their original product. And so the blood bath begins.

When companies launch products, their success rests entirely on the shoulders of the sales team. A head-to-head, never-ending battle of feature-function-benefit commences and margins crumble - at best.

Over time, product patents expire, features hit diminishing returns and competitors move into the marketplace. Companies that launch products have little, if anything, to stand on when this happens. Companies that launched a differentiated brand have a sustainable value that cannot be replicated. They also have a springboard of brand awareness to launch new products within that same market category, thus further differentiating their brand from the competition.
The point-of-view (POV) video camera category is a good example of the perils of launching a product rather than a brand. Both Contour and GoPro launched their companies in 2004, and a new market category for POV cameras was born. However, one company launched an amazing product and the other had the foresight to launch a brand that now defines the category. Contour launched a sexy first-of-its-kind POV camera for action sports. It launched a product. GoPro launched an aspiration for athletes to “Go Pro” and capture their limelight moment with their brand (with “their” POV video camera).

GoPro launched a brand rather than just a product. It did so by laser focusing their brand value on providing a “single” aspirational emotion of feeling like a “pro.” Everyone knows when a camera is rolling, an athlete’s courage is juiced with adrenaline. And—in the athlete’s mind—a legendary moment and a great story are about to be captured. This is their chance to feel like a professional and they have the footage to prove it.

The GoPro brand first became an emotion athletes sought after and aspired to feel. Today, the GoPro brand name is a verb. “GoPro It” is synonymous with adventure and capturing POV footage of great moments. What athlete doesn’t want to be a pro?

The GoPro brand dominates the market despite its visually clunky design compared to the Contour product line.

Launch a brand, not a product.
So how much money do these brilliant innovators leave on the table when they are acquired?

A. In most cases, when the acquiring company ditches the product’s brand name, the acquired company left millions on the table. They simply got paid for the value of the technology itself, with no paid financial regard to the value of the brand.

B. When the acquiring company keeps the brand name, but does not integrate it with existing established brands, then they paid for both the product innovation and the brand itself. The acquired company was paid a big number for the value of the brand.

C. When the acquiring company incorporates the brand name as well as the product innovation into their overarching brand, the acquired company is usually paid a big, big number for the value of the brand they successfully established.

In sum:

- Acquired products get paid what they are worth
- Acquired brands get paid multiples more than the product value itself
- Launch a brand, not a product
A brand is an idea. Define yours.

The concept of “what a brand is” has been defined in many different ways and supported with as many rationales.

I like my definition. It is the basis for all brand positioning. It works. In its simplest form:

A brand is an idea inside your consumer’s mind

» It’s what they think
» It happens in an instant, subconsciously
» And they are certain of it

It’s what comes to mind **every time** they see, hear, smell, taste, touch or experience a brand. This idea that comes to mind is associated with one brand, creating one idea of value to the consumer. A brand is singular.

Ideally, it evokes:

» a specific idea of your brand’s value
» a differentiating idea of value
» a superior idea of value, that is believable enough to move the masses
Understand how your consumer perceives your brand.

Over time, your brand’s idea of value is formed in the consumer’s mind via three ways.

1. A consumer’s actual experiences with the product, service, solution and/or company itself. Does the product performance and consumer experience live up to and pay off the promise of the marketing communications? Does it exceed the promise of value?

2. What a brand’s marketing communications say to the consumer before, during and after the purchase is made.

   **To name a few:**

   » A consumer’s interactions with and personal perceptions of a brand’s marketing communications
   » The public relations release and communications strategy
   » A consumer’s actual product purchase experience
   » The voice of brand ambassadors
   » The customer service and related product support messaging
   » What and how a brand’s partners, distributors, sales associates, retailers and vendors communicate the brand’s position and supporting messaging
   » The physical and cultural environment at a company’s headquarters
   » The on-hold messaging a consumer hears when they call
   » The packaging, point of purchase system and retail sales promotion
   » The tone and messaging for warranty rebate and return policies

3. What total strangers say about the brand across all of today’s media channels. This phenomenon can make or break a brand’s launch. Consumers are making purchase decisions based upon people’s opinions—many of whom they don’t know and will never meet. Today, each consumer carries a massive bullhorn and is able to voice their feelings about any brand whenever they want, across many online platforms. It’s a brand’s truth serum. The aggregate of their voice can drive or kill business. One consumer’s opinion may be the most relevant factor for another consumer’s purchase decision.
Look everywhere for the big idea.

Where does the **BIG IDEA** come from?

- Is it an eureka dreamt up in a moment of clairvoyance?
- Is it inspired from open-minded collaboration?
- Is it the genius created primarily from creatively bestowed savants?
- Is it the leap from the subconscious into conscious insight?
- Is it the sum of an array of cognitive skills processing a variety of options?
- Is it pieces of answers solved that aggregate over an extended span of time?
- Is it found at the bottom of a brown liquor bottle during the early morning hours?
- Is it the fresh look from an outsider’s first consideration?
- Is the insane concept that makes executives look perplexed and claim, ”this will never work?”
- Is it the conversation with the CEO, customer service, engineering and sales teams?
- Is it the consumer’s voice simply saying it in plain English?
- Is it specifically what all the research doesn’t indicate?
- Is it the answer to the only question that has not yet been asked?
- Is it simply found by looking in other industries that have similar situations?
- Is it sitting there clear as day when you debunk all preconceived notions?
- Is it the exact opposite idea of every other solution presented by the team?

For most dedicated thinkers, it comes from all of the above. And seldom does it come from the same place twice in a row. However, over time it does repeat and almost always comes from one of these spaces in the intellectual universe.

When I discovered this repetition, I found it to be super cool and liberating from the proverbial brain cramp. There are no roadblocks. There is just another approach to the way I’m thinking.

I was once asked, “Getty, how long did it take you to come up with that idea?” The answer is that it took a lifetime.

Every new big idea is the product of 25 years of training my mind to concentrate—to laser-focus for extended periods of time and simply think about one single brand opportunity.

It works. Anyone can do it.

We foster this culture in our agency. Try it. Free from life’s noise.

It’s true. My considerations have the benefit of being an active participant in some 500+ brand campaigns. They are sparked by the collective synapses culled from hundreds of books in my field. Yet it was the first big idea I was a part of that hooked me into believing in my creative ability.

Inspire yourself and go think. It’s an incredible gift to give your life.
Be a storyteller.

Stories are repeated. Stories are memorable. Stories make a brand’s position resonate in your target audience’s minds.

However, developing a great story means understanding the consumers you want to tell it to. Go be with them. Live like them. Hire the influencers in your target culture. Immerse your minds in the fabric of their culture. The cost of doing this is far less than launching the wrong brand position.

After all, your intention is for your brand to become a part of your audience’s culture, perhaps even a part of their personal identity. DC Shoes say, “I’m a skateboarder” while Mercedes says, “I’m successful.” Harley Davidson says, “I’m tough.”

In order for your brand position to emotionally resonate with your target audience, you must understand:

» How they think today without your brand in their lives?
» How they act today without your brand?
» How do they do it without you?
» What do they think about the way they do it today?
» How do they feel about it?

Be certain. Then ask yourselves, once you launch your brand into their lives, how do your want them to think in the future? How do you want them to act in the future?

Focus your brand’s voice in a way that juxtaposes the consumer’s life with and without your brand. This story can be formatted as a before and after, with and without or side-by-side comparison. Make this story easy to tell and easy to repeat.

First, narrow this story down to a single idea of differentiating value that moves the masses to try your new brand.

Once you have this focus and clarity, use their language, their vernacular and their tonality to communicate the value of your brand’s position to them in a story. Do this and your brand’s value will feel familiar, friendly and be more likely to resonate in a personal and relevant manner. This drastically increases the odds that your story will be believable and thus mindfully consumed.
Be a storyteller.

Here are some examples of different ways successful brands tell a story that simply and clearly explain to the consumer how a brand will change their life:

A BEFORE & AFTER STORY

The cheesy “before & after comparison stories” in weight loss ad campaigns are classic and ubiquitous. They are common because they make it easy for the consumer to digest the brand’s impact.

A WITH OR WITHOUT STORY

The “with or without story” of the 1984 “Hefty Cinch Sack” trash bag campaign told a story that clearly illustrated the perils of trash cleanup without a strong bag. They simply showed the trash breaking through the bottom of other bags thus suggesting the inferiority of other brands.

A SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON STORY

A classic side-by-side story, The Castrol Syntec motor oil comparison advertisement showed multiple engines mounted on pedestals in a laboratory. The lab-coated technicians drain the oil from all the running engines. In short order, all the engines seize except the one running Castrol Syntec.

It’s worth noting that comparison stories do not have to be so literal as the campaigns mentioned above. For example, The $300 million-plus Verizon “Can You Hear Me Now?” campaign was clear in showing the difference between their coverage and that of rival Sprint. This campaign resulted in a 10% increase in customers in 2002 and a 15% increase in 2003.

Effective stories also don’t have to focus exclusively on functionality-based illustrations. The “I’m A Mac, I’m A PC” comparison stories rarely touched on the computer giant’s technology, but rather told their comparison story through the lens of the personality of their target audience. Mac repositioned PC as being regimented, incompetent, old and nerdy. This story painted Mac users as younger and happier computer users. Creating an emotional resonance with the consumer can have a far greater impact than simply comparing features and functionality.
Launch one idea. Not two. Not three.

Set the brand positioning on a grounded launch pad. Each product is a rocket fueled with a distinct, single value that is always ready to blast into a consumer’s mind space.

Make it one value that only your brand can offer, forever. This value is also the primary reason a consumer will buy your brand over a competitor’s offering.

This single value is strong enough and so credible to the consumer that it moves the required masses in one defined culture to buy the product. It is critical to launch this single value into one defined culture with a specific consumer profile. Know the consumer who wants, needs or should buy the single value your product delivers. Remain laser focused on communicating, selling and delivering this single value until the brand owns its intended market.

Then you can consider expanding into:

- New geographic regions
- New brand extensions
- New consumer profiles
- New cultures

There are dozens of brands that successfully leveraged a single promise of value before expanding into new cultures, markets and categories. Here are a few:

- **Google®** launched with just search
- **Amazon®** launched with just books
- **Zappos®** launched with just shoes
- **Kleenex®** launched with just a tissue
- **Reebok®** launched with just an aerobic sneaker
- **Arm & Hammer®** launched with just baking soda

Without the initial discipline to focus the brand’s position with a single value strategy, the brand could crash post-launch within a year or two.

Many executives without big brand experience believe this principle can be challenging. Many will fight you. Fight back. This intensely focused positioning is necessary to launch in today’s market.

Seize the required masses and targeted revenues. Then, and only then, expand and extend the brand.
Consumers trust a specialist over a generalist or “me-too” player.

Brands that launch a single innovation into a market, and remain 100% disciplined about owning that marketing space, have the best opportunity to succeed in growth. By remaining committed to promising one unique, single-minded value to the consumer, a new product or service can become a respected brand. Companies that also remain committed to perfecting this value to the consumer see greater success when they expand the product line or brand into new areas.

A BRAND THAT LEVERAGED A SINGLE VALUE TO EXPAND THEIR BRAND

Zappos launched a single product with a single value proposition. The “powered by service” brand only sold shoes for the first eight years until it dominated the category with $840 million in revenues. This happened before the brand extended into handbags, eyewear, clothing and watches. In 2011, Zappos gave flowers to a customer whose feet were compromised by a medical condition. It purchased shoes from a competitor to fulfill the last-minute need of a customer when they had run out of stock. The brand’s history of over-the-top service is seemingly endless. Zappos was rewarded for its focus when Amazon acquired it for approximately $1.2 billion in Amazon stock.
Know where your brand position starts and ends.

The brand extension urge can sometimes overwhelm executives who want to ride the success of brand names with a lot of equity. Their tendency follows this assumption: “Our household name carries so much pull in the market that consumers will equate our brand reputation with quality in other categories.” This is faulty reasoning and a misunderstanding of consumer motives.

The positioning of a brand can be likened to a country with clearly mapped borders. Crossing those borders without being granted entry or getting invited is trespassing. Attempts to penetrate new market categories based solely on a brand name in your native market are intrusions into space where you may not belong and won’t be welcomed.

Market share is earned. Peeling away market share is best done in your primary category where people anticipate hearing your unique selling proposition (USP). So stay there and resist the imperial urge to conquer new territory. Create an intensely devoted culture that strives towards becoming the best in the category where your brand belongs. Product line extension is another urge that corporate executives feel all the time. The impetus for staying fresh in the market drives marketers to extend product lines out from the true original. In too many cases, lines are extended due to the fallacy of more is better or for the sake of doing something new.

BRANDS THAT LOST BY PAINTING OUTSIDE THE LINES.

In 1978, the original 7-Up lemon-lime drink had about 6 percent of the soft drink market. After the brand’s product line extended to six flavors and diet varieties, all backed by an aggressive marketing campaign, all surviving varieties including original 7-Up had only 2.5 percent market share 15 years later.

In 1990 Coors Brewing Company released Coors Rocky Mountain Spring Water and it failed almost instantly. A beer company shifting its focus to spring water is an example of going too wide. Coors has always referenced the Rocky Mountains as a symbol for cold and freshness, but consumers could not make the mental leap of believing that a beer brand could offer them what they expect in spring water.

McDonald’s released the McLobster nationwide, but found no appetite for the offering. The brand’s reputation of serving up burgers and chicken fast and at a low price was confused by the introduction of a high priced seafood item. This sandwich is an example of McDonald’s stretching into a market they have no business being in.

So pick and stick to the brand idea.
Simplify your brand to a single idea.

Believe that a brand idea is subconsciously shortened and simplified in the consumer’s mind to a single concept. A concept so focused that the brand itself can be symbolized in a single word.

- eBay = marketplace
- Craigslist = classifieds
- Google = search
- FedEx = overnight
- Southwest Airlines = cheap
- IKEA = hip
- World’s Best Cat Litter = best
- Arm & Hammer = clean

If consumers are not able to shorten a brand’s purpose in an instant of consciousness, it gets filed in the “I don’t know” area until they have a quickly comprehensible concept to accept as potentially true. Until then, the product is just obstructing the purchase decision a consumer is ready to make right now.

The ability to deliver single-minded value propositions is a common denominator of brands that break through today’s noisy clutter.

Ideally, a brand has strategically determined the word they hope to “own” in the consumer’s mind; a single word or concept of value that differentiates it and defines what consumers value most. Volvo did this brilliantly throughout the 1990’s and owned the word “safety” among most automobile consumers. We believe the Volvo car brand is less well known for any one thing in recent years after straying from the safety positioning in its marketing communications.
Understand that your brand idea is not your idea.

We’ve determined a brand is an idea in a consumer’s mind.

It is the idea that always sparks the same feeling, same image in the consumer’s mind.

Although it is obvious, it is important to realize consumers are not voodoo dolls.

Understand this about your consumer’s perception of your brand:

» It is not your idea
» It is an idea in your consumer’s mind
» It is a subconscious reaction sparking that initial idea, not a cognitive thought process from their analytical mindset

This visceral reaction generated by your consumer is what defines a brand. Many times, this is not the intent of the brand’s executive team. It is the goal of LAUNCH to ensure the consumer understands what the brand is.

Surprisingly, many executives believe they can control how their brand is perceived by the masses of consumers.

They cannot.

» Not what each individual consumer’s first impression is
» Not how they perceive it
» Not their overall opinion of it
» Not what they say about it
» Not how they emotionally feel about it
» Not what comes to mind when they see it

What is equally surprising is the blindness around the idea that a new advertising campaign can simply change their minds. We all know, once we get an idea in our minds, it is very difficult for anyone to get us to change our minds; never mind thinking advertising can do it overnight.
Define your brand position with a name that can be spoken as a verb.

For many brands that successfully own a word in the mind of the consumer, the name becomes a verb. When a brand name is not only a proper noun, but also used as a verb, it can rocket ship brand equity, awareness and value.

These companies launched their brand with one product or one service. It was a clear, concise and tangible offering of value that no other company had owned in consumers’ minds or the marketplace.

**Brand names as verbs:**

- Facebook Me
- Google It
- EBay It
- Skype Me
- FedEx It
- Xerox It
- TiVo It
- Priceline It
- GoPro It

**Their true meaning:**

- Connect with me
- Search for it
- Sell it  Buy it
- Call me
- Overnight it
- Make a copy
- Record it
- Get the best price
- Capture it

In these examples the brand name becomes the new verb or activity definition in the lexicon:

- **Photoshop**
  Edit photos on Adobe’s Photoshop program.

- **Jet Skiing**
  Riding a personal watercraft, pioneered by Kawasaki’s model name Jet Ski.

- **TiVo**
  Record regular scheduled tv shows for later viewing.

- **Rollerblading**
  Inline skating.

- **Hacky Sacking**
  Playing with a foot bag trademarked by Whamo.

Typically, it is the brand’s consumers that make the brand name a verb. While it is fortunate when a brand evolves into a verb, most brands wait for this phenomenon to occur.

Why wait? Seed your brand name as a verb. If not the name itself, do so in an ad’s headline or a subhead alongside provocative imagery proven to have some of the most effective stopping power in print media. Minimally, it can be featured in a call-to-action.
Say it with less.

It is not simplification for simplification sake.

It is simplification for a consumer’s faster comprehension.

Human brains are efficient. For a consumer to understand a concept, their mind simplifies it. It is the way the mind works. It makes things simple so they can be understood.

Consider giving a lost tourist directions. In three minutes, you deliver detailed directions. The thankful tourist, typically time challenged, recites back your verbal map in 15 seconds to confirm his or her understanding.

The goal of any brand is to be intellectually tangible, faster (almost immediately), in the consumer’s mind. This requires the brand to say it in a manner that is more concise, more believable and with more stopping power. One way to do this is to use everyday words to say it. Use the words they would use to describe its value. Fancy words are slow to read. Slow is bad.

If consumers have to think too hard to understand your message, they won’t try.

With the benefit of this street-smart science, the message here is simple. Simplify all aspects of your brand. Start with simplifying the tagline, slogan, why-to-buy statements and brand pillars.

When considering a specific product, people subconsciously narrow their purchase decision questions to:

- What is it?
- Does it do the #1 benefit I expected it to provide?
- How is it better than the brand I already trust?
- How do I feel about it?
- Is it worth it?

Once it is simplified to the extent deemed possible, then be certain of it. Send it to two or three qualified professionals to simplify it again, more and more. Test it with a few key internal people, some people within your targeted market segment and some outside it. Then test it again.

You will have distilled the brand’s meaning down to its singular essence and the consumer will buy it.
Repoding your competition.

Consumer trial is a massive feat.

Trying your brand for the first time is a consumer’s leap of faith because your brand is unproven to them and has yet to deliver value. Essentially they are choosing not to buy their preferred brand the brand that they are certain provides a known value.

So reposition the consumer’s known value as inferior to your brand’s value.

And do so in a single sentence.

A successful repositioning of your competition occurs when the consumer believes, just before the moment of their first purchase of a new-to-me product, that the brand is going to do exactly what it says it will do, better than your competitor’s brand.

Essentially, the value of the repositioning statement must be believable, tangible and relevant so the consumer is willing to take that risk of trial. It is the job of the brand position and its launch communications to entice the trial.

Launch a single idea of consumer value in this repositioning statement. This single idea must be a convincing reason for a consumer to purchase something new, unproven to them personally, instead of choosing your competitor’s known value.
Reposition Your Competition.

A BRAND THAT REPOSITIONED ITS COMPETITION

Cockadoodle Doo Lawn & Garden Fertilizer repositioned its competition by positioning its offering as “The Organic Alternative to Chemical Fertilizers.”

This brand position is deliberate in forming a question in the consumer’s mind as to the environmental and safety concerns of normal fertilizers. Today’s consumer knows chemical fertilizers work great, but are potentially hazardous and organics are more likely safe to use. Therefore, the “Organic Alternative” repositions all chemical-based fertilizers as potentially harmful. This brand position was rewarded via exceptional growth in the following season.

REPOSITIONING WITH EMOTIONAL BRANDING

The Avis car rental brand repositioned its competition with the iconic slogan, “We try harder.” This statement acknowledged their place in the market, but used it to their advantage by suggesting to consumers that they offer better service because they have to earn more business.

This approach could have been strengthened even more if Avis added a direct emotional element to this repositioning statement by saying: “Avis is only No. 2 in rent a cars. We try harder so your life is easier.”
Apply the differentiation litmus test.

This equation is one of my favorite methods of determining whether a brand has created a position that truly differentiates itself from the competition. It shows a CEO that their brand may have a positioning problem.

It’s a simple process.

» Write your brand position and messaging on a white board and illustrate your logo above it

» Ask the CEO if the equation/statement is true

» Erase your brand’s logo and replace it with an illustration of the top three competitors in your category

» Ask if any or all of these three statements are also TRUE

» If so, prepare for some interesting facial expressions

If your brand’s position is truly unique, then this equation will be FALSE because your position does not match your competitor’s offerings.

If it is TRUE, then your brand is promoting the entire market category and not your brand within the new market category. If it is FALSE, then determine how long it will remain false and if it will remain so long enough for your brand to become the dominant one in the category. Is it long enough to become the spoken VERB where the brand name itself symbolizes and stands for the new market category? For example: “Google it” for search, not Yahoo.

Ideally, the equation is only true for your brand. And it can be defended and sustainable for a financially viable and lucrative period of time. In my experience, this period must be five years or more, but ideally it remains true for the life of the brand.
Consumers are emotional. So resonate with their emotions.

Brands must resonate with consumer emotions.

And they must be relevant to the needs and desires of these emotions.

All brands can create the perception that their consumer will have a positive emotional experience with their product.

An emotional benefit positioning statement intentionally aims to entice a desired emotional response. The goal is to resonate inside the consumer’s mind and viscerally within their body and soul.

Call it “emotional branding” for short.

For some brands, this is a hard-hitting opportunity, whereby the brand is laser-focused on triggering a specific emotion.

The make or break crux of emotional branding is the manner in which it is presented. People do not like to be told how to feel or even that they will feel a certain way. However, consumers can relate to feelings that are relevant to their own aspirations.

EXAMPLES OF BRANDS THAT COMMUNICATE FEELING OVER FUNCTION.

Brand’s that stir up an emotional joyfulness in their consumer’s lives have got it right. Hershey’s Chocolate Syrup employed this idea of aligning simple joys with a brand with its “Stir up a Smile” campaign. This brand position is paid off with great emotion. Advertising showed a child stirring Hershey’s Chocolate Syrup into his milk with an ear-to-ear grin. Then the camera pans to daddy smiling as he sees his son enjoying the moment and this expression instantly illustrates a shared moment—an emotion that was made possible by a brand experience.

While not widely used, the new Skippy Peanut Butter slogan is “Fuel the Fun”. It’s a great position because it ties the nutritional benefits of the product to an emotion end-result. The campaign could have been improved if the brand used its packaging to educate kids on why protein makes life even more fun.
A brand can resonate with multiple consumer emotions. Pick one.

Emotional brands must focus on the one specific emotion they want every consumer to feel.

The focus must be narrowed to a point where the brand is tugging on a single emotion.

It is only then that a brand has a chance at having the consumer feel it too.

It is a real feeling that is authentic and not contrived.

It is a feeling shared in a manner that demonstrates they believe it enough to try and buy it.

It is a feeling they hope to receive the first time they use the product.

Emotional branding is capturing a single feeling uttered in a single sentence.

This single concept is directly captured in a campaign of creative executions.

Upon great success this same emotional feeling is what they enthusiastically share with their friends.

This is the ultimate in word-of-mouth for a brand today.

We are not talking about infomercials here. While some of them are effectively leveraging this principle, many are not.

The emotional benefit position principle should be leveraged everywhere for every brand and at all touchpoints.
Ask and answer the “No Nonsense 9” brand foundation questions.

99% of all brand communications boil down to a single primary objective—drive new revenues.

Considering these 9 questions diligently will help you avoid launching a brand that provides something to everyone, and therefore nothing to anyone.

Every stakeholder surrounding your brand’s launch must be aligned with the answers to these questions. It is seldom that everyone within a company starts out in sync with answers to these questions. This process will highlight any discrepancies for leadership to address. They should not be ignored. These discrepancies are nearly always at the core of a brand that over promises and under delivers.

**Answer these 9 simple questions.**

1. What business is your brand in?
2. What is your brand’s difference?
3. Why should your consumer / customer care about this difference?
4. How do you ensure the consistent and flawless delivery of this superior value?
5. Is this superior value compelling enough to move the masses to buy your brand over the competitive brand?
6. Which brand will suffer the most market share loss as a result?
7. Is this superior value proposition sustainable over time?
8. Do any of the stakeholders of this brand disagree with these answers?
9. Are you certain of the answers to questions 5 and 8?

Now go! You’ve stripped away the noise surrounding the positioning of your brand. You’ve unified and / or identified the areas of disagreement surrounding the brand position strategy, the core of the new brand’s launch. A solid foundation is in place. Your team will feel a unified momentum and a focused creative energy around your brand opportunity.

But you’re not done. Once you develop and test your brand position strategy, vet it against these nine questions, again and again.

This self-analysis is vital to fending off intoxicating creative that may not move the masses.

Trust the 9. 100%.
Own a market category with nine no-nonsense steps.

Al Reis and Jack Trout have been credited with pioneering the strategy of creating a new market category. I successfully leveraged this strategy a decade ago and it continues to work to this day. And it will continue to stand the test of time.

Why? Because inventing a new market category creates a new revenue opportunity in an uncontested space in the consumer’s mind. It’s a means of delivering a brand experience that is high in demand and difficult (if not impossible) to replicate by your competition.

This concept is the emphasis of W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne’s book, Blue Ocean Strategy. They approach branding with the idea that brands should pick a fight they can win—a fight in a “blue ocean” market space where others aren’t swimming. Red oceans are a blood bath of clashing brands in a never-ending “faster”, “better”, “cheaper” war.

If your brand launch strategy fails to create a new market segment or an existing brand fails to chart its course out of the blood bath toward blue oceans, your brand will likely become generic as your perceived value is blurred in the mind of the consumer.

You can avoid this by finding your brand’s blue ocean.

Here are nine no-nonsense steps to owning a market category:

1. Aggressively laser-focus your brand to a point where there is NO OTHER PRODUCT on the market just like it.
2. Refine the product to provide the ONE UNIQUE BENEFIT strong enough to move the masses to buy it.
3. Continue to laser-focus this specific benefit to influence ONE CONSUMER CULTURE that wants/needs it most.
4. Laser-focus this product concept until your brand is creating an entirely NEW PRODUCT CATEGORY. This is a category of product that does not yet exist until you launch this new brand to establish it.
5. TEST this product concept to ensure that this is the “most important reason” this one consumer culture will purchase.
6. TEST this product concept to ensure it will move your identified consumer culture to buy it.
7. TEST this product concept to understand what the targeted consumer currently buys and determine if they will try/switch to buying your new product. In conjunction with the preceding step, this will confirm the likelihood your new product will receive the consumer trial required to move the masses toward your brand.
8. Once properly validated, introduce a comprehensive, multi-prong PR campaign across all media reaching the brand’s target culture. The product will resonate with public relations editors, bloggers, vendors, partners, early adopting influencers and retailers. It will be viewed as an opportunity for them to introduce this new market category aggressively within the market.
9. At the height of PR coverage, launch an aggressive advertising campaign that claims and confirms your brand as the leader within the new product category and your company as the inventor of this new product category. Exclusively highlight the one unique benefit it offers your consumer culture, staying away from all other messages that divert attention from this primary benefit. This aggressive investment in advertising is vital to confirm and defend your brand’s leadership against well funded, fast following brands that enter your market category with a viable product concept.
If your company decides not to follow these nine steps, be assured the competition will follow them and capture the value of being the innovator of this new product category. This loss in value, market share and potential revenues will be much greater than the cost of the investment to properly implement these nine steps.

These steps are critical in defining the potential to become the iconic brand for the market category you invented in the first place.

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A BRAND THAT INVENTED AND OWNED ITS MARKET CATEGORY

Red Bull laser-focused its promise to the point it essentially created an entirely new market category in the super-competitive beverage space. The energy drink category evolved because Red Bull aggressively narrowed its focus to the point where it was the one and only brand making this claim.

Red Bull positioned its product as a functional beverage that vitalizes body and mind. It was a single differentiating concept of value that no other brand offered and put them in a blue ocean. This position was strong enough to move Red Bull to the fourth most valuable brand in the soft drink market.

As a result, Red Bull can claim ownership and first-to-market status within the newly established market category. As one of the largest brands with a presence and product in the new market segment, Red Bull is the leader and innovator of the category. There is an opportunity to provide educational leadership to consumers, positioning the brand to define and guide the future of the market segment to align with Red Bull’s future innovations.
If you invent it, claim it.

When a first-of-its-kind invention is launched into the market, there is a huge opportunity to name the product and claim ownership from the beginning. Many brands miss this opening as they are trying to create a catchy name, when the simplest option is right there.

It is extremely risky to launch a new innovation without a brand strategy, brand position or go-to-market plan that claims ownership of the breakthrough idea. Without a brand, your innovation creates a breeding ground for fast-following competitors to steal the idea and gain majority market share. Because they were not the original inventor, their success at this is strictly through branding.

In other cases, a successful innovation that doesn’t carry the obvious name becomes a generic market category or a commodity seemingly overnight. The original pioneering inventor of an entirely new product category delivering incredible value to their consumer is never branded. Therefore it evolves into common language or product concepts within the overall market category.

INNOVATIONS THAT WERE NEVER OWNED BY BRAND

Consider the Facsimile. Who first said “FAX it?” If Brother is the leading fax machine brand, what if people said, “Send me a brother” when requesting a telephonically transmitted document? The company that had first claimed “FAX” in its branding would have been synonymous with the facsimile or FAX machine and rode that wave to category domination.

What brand owns the idea of the Stand Up Paddle Board? This is now simply called a “SUP”. It is a SUP regardless of shape, quality, brand or location. As a recently evolved market category, it carries no value to the inventor. What is the size of this industry today and typically what does the inventor of a new product category actually own in market share if they have branded it correctly?

Incorporating an innovation in the name allows a brand to showcase the new (and better) method or product in a way that is symbolic of the value the innovation provides. The brand name can become synonymous, and an iconic symbol for that new value, product or service.
Be a fast follower.

In the last principle both SUP and FAX inventors missed big opportunities. The new market category simply became instantly generic and was quickly commoditized.

This happens often, but what happens most often is that enterprising entrepreneurs become fast followers. The inventing company or individual launches a product and not a brand. This essentially educates competitors via a bullhorn that there is a great opportunity. It allows the second and third fast following brands to market to still have the ability to stake its claim and position its brand to symbolize an entire market category.

Look for these opportunities.

WHEN YOU HAVE A VIRUS, YOU DON’T BERNT FIX YOUR COMPUTER.

A man named Bernt Fix innovated the first anti-virus software back in 1987 to eradicate the Vienna virus. Fix didn’t claim it or brand it. In a little less than three years, 19 different products were introduced to market within this category with a very low barrier to entry. The second and third fast following brands cleaned up and became household names. We were the agency of record for McAfee for years during this time and went head-to-head with Norton AntiVirus for the number one position in the category.
Do not confuse product quality with brand positioning.

When a consumer purchases any item, they expect a certain level of quality.

Quality is believed to be inherent to what they are purchasing, often based on price value—unless the consumer doesn’t have a need for a quality product or pays for additional quality they do not need.

Alternatively, if a product claims to offer high quality at a low price, and it misses the consumer’s expectation, the brand will soon diminish its reputation.

Quality is the result of a product’s features. However, consumers buy benefits, not features.

This is not news to most of you.

Consider this scenario. There are three new products selling side-by-side on the retail shelf and all are priced within 10% of one another.

- **Brand A** is “Voted best quality product”
- **Brand B** is “Unsurpassed quality components”
- **Brand C** is “Innovators of no stress, long lasting performance—guaranteed”

Which one would you buy?

Brands that position on quality alone tend to get in a price/value war that typically doesn’t end well.

Mercedes manufactures some of the most well-built automobiles in the world. However, the brand isn’t positioned on quality. Mercedes uses the latest technologies, incorporates numerous comfort features and builds their automobiles with high-performance components. Those collective features offer the benefit of high-end quality. The high quality of a Mercedes Benz is the reason the brand position is prestige. Prestige translates to an emotional benefit for consumers who aspire to it. It triggers an emotional benefit so powerful it carries a super-premium price tag.

A good product is something people will shop for, at least in part on price. A strong brand is something, for which people will wait longer for, travel farther to get and pay more to possess. Ask any Harley-Davidson owner.
Follow the critical attributes of a strong brand name.

Most brand names do not carry the attributes necessary to resonate.

Here are some critical characteristics of strong brand names that should be considered when vetting your list. Be mindful as to which attributes are not being satisfied and assign a risk or reward as you assess your choices.

» **Concise**
  Ideally the name is three syllables or less, three words or less and 13 characters or less. If not, the consumer will shorten it to either an acronym or simply an abbreviated version.

» **Clear**
  A name should convey a main point that is understandable in an instant or at a glance.

» **Memorable**
  Make it downright catchy. This can be tested before going to market. Do not guess.

» **Easy to read, phonetically appealing and easily pronounced**
  Without all three, the mind passes over it.

» **Easy to spell**
  If it is a made-up word, ensure it is intuitive to spell.

» **Unique**
  A name should differentiate you from the competition. This seems easy enough, but we see many CEOs who gravitate toward names that are nearly identical to their competition.

» **Ownable**
  It should be easily protected, able to be trademarked and associated with its own URL.

» **Global**
  Keep growth in mind and plan for expansion into international markets to avoid foreign language snafus.

» **Timeless**
  Will it work as well 50 years from now as it does today?

» **Intrinsically you**
  The name should fit your brand personality.

» **Likeable**
  This is subjectivity and intuition at its best, but can be tested through surveys and research with your target demographic.
Anticipate that a brand name will be simplified.

A brand name with the potential to be shortened will ultimately be abbreviated and simplified subconsciously in the consumer’s mind. Keep in mind the ideal name is:

- No more than three syllables
- No more than thirteen characters
- No more than three words

Names that exceed any of the above often get shortened when a consumer refers it. This may be okay, provided the abridged version doesn’t lose its meaning.

Federal Express had its brand name shortened by its customers to “FedEx” for years. The abbreviation was universal enough that the brand officially changed its name to FedEx in 1994. The condensed name still says “overnight it to me” because the brand has a position that is firmly established in the minds of most consumers.

Until true brand awareness is achieved, the name is meaningless to most new consumers introduced to the brand.

What does NASDAQ stand for? The 60th largest company in global revenues is CVS, what does it mean? What is the value intrinsic to the CVS name?

The 73rd, 79th, 87th, 103rd and 142nd largest companies, according to the Inc. 500 in 2011, are BASF, ICBC, HSBC, ING Group and EADS respectively. What are the inherent values in these acronyms to the consumer? What do these letters mean?

IBM, AMEX, UBS and CA are four global companies that legally changed their name to be in sync with what consumers already called them and knew them to be. The second largest restaurant chain in the world shortened its name to KFC.

General Electric was ultimately shortened to GE for the same reason, America Online to AOL, and Hewlett Packard to HP. Each brand name started with more than three syllables and/or more than thirteen characters.

If you break this principle, understand how your brand name may be shortened and create a specific plan to communicate how the shortened name exudes the value original intended by your brand name.
Incorporate a single reason for buying in the brand name.

Powerful brand names communicate the single overarching value a consumer chooses to buy.

Ideally, it exudes the single best reason the market majority will buy a brand over the competitor’s brand. It is the single idea of value the product intends to form inside the consumer’s mind.

And incorporating this single value in the name makes it easier for your target demographic to select your brand over others.

In each of these brand name examples, the single promise of value is clearly and concisely conveyed by the name itself.

- Goo Gone
- DieHard Battery
- Juicy Fruit
- Bubble Yum Gum
- Post It
- Duracell Batteries
- Match.com
- LinkedIn
- Miracle Gro

Brand names start the positioning process in the consumer’s mind. Consumers can read it, see it, say it and hear it.

Identify the single reason and use it in the name. Simple right? Just be sure you do not name the brand the fourth most popular reason people buy your product.

When crafting a name that highlights a single reason to buy, it should accomplish at least one of the following values:

- It states the precise promise of value
- It differentiates itself from other competitive brands
- It relays what it is in simple but uncommon language
- It pairs flawlessly with the tagline

If the product or service being launched is the first within a startup company, using this naming principle is the strongest way to enter the market.
Incorporate a single reason for buying in the brand name

A BRAND THAT INCORPORATED ITS SINGLE VALUE IN THE NAME

When a consumer first hears of the product Bubble Yum bubble gum, what comes to mind? Can they imagine the burst of bubble gum flavor? Or picture blowing a huge bubble? The image that comes to mind is likely very close to the one their marketers hoped would be in the minds of their targeted young consumers.
Kill killer creative that doesn’t exude your brand position.

Creative executions that are off brand, off brand strategy and off brand position are often presented and it makes sense why this happens.

New killer creative that is off brand strategy is almost always brought into the agency’s internal review. Often, it truly is a truly creative execution.

This is where the mistakes are made.

It is easy to get excited about new creative executions that are off brand. Implementing it may work and create revenues for a short period. However, that will not create brand value over time. Achieving increases in brand value, while generating initial revenues, is how “show me the money” creative executions need to perform.

In fact, often times, the root of the creative concept is capturing a competitor’s position in a much more effective way. When this happens your brand is promoting the overall market category and not differentiating your brand within the category.

This remains true for creative executions that capture the second or third most important reason to buy your brand.

The skill to recognize this is simple, but forcing yourself to make these difficult decisions is harder than you may think. In many instances an executive will want to change the brand strategy and brand position so it does work with the creative execution. That’s dumb.

Killer creative is a term that should be used exclusively for on-strategy executions.

In summary, if any brand initiative, communication, experience or interaction with the brand does not exude the value of the brand strategy and position, toss it and call a meeting with the creative team.
Don’t chase your competition’s tail, or your own.

Another reason brands kill their chances of becoming associated with an iconic single-minded idea is they chase the competition. Most commonly, this manifests itself when a brand directly responds to a competitor’s advertisement.

The competitor focuses on and messages a different benefit. The brand begins to second guess its positioning because they think the competitor must know something the brand doesn’t (i.e. the competition must know what consumers will buy).

So the brand chases and reacts based upon this rationale. They develop a new messaging strategy and creative execution to support it.

What they don’t realize is this shift in messaging can impact the entire strategy of the brand’s intended position.

The decision to chase the competitor is a big one and may lead you astray of your brand positioning strategy.

Think it over carefully.
Guarantee absolute consumer satisfaction.

Legendary advertising guru David Ogilvy once said the two most important words in advertising are "new" and "free". He proved it in countless executions.

The third word is "guarantee."

A guarantee is a promise of brand value to your customer. It shortens their decision making process by reducing their risk of satisfaction.

If the customer does not like your product, give them their money back.

Call the unhappy customer. Ask what they didn’t like about the product or what part of the experience did not meet their expectations. Thank them for trying your brand. Tell them you will send a new product to test for free, if they are willing to try it again. And wish them a great day.

Do all of this with a smile in your voice.

Unhappy customers are opportunities. Address situations like this with honor and grace. These customers will respect this approach and it will leave you both with a good feeling inside. The reality of social media is that the consumer talks and others listen to both the good and the bad. In the end, if the product is not right for your customer, it might not be something you can change. However, if handled personally and with dignity, your brand can actually get stronger over time.

The returns are extremely low on many consumer products. And promising a "100% satisfaction guarantee" has boosted sales significantly for most of the brands we’ve launched.

Remember “My promise of value to you” at the beginning of this book. This is a critical element of successful brands today and will be even more so in the future.
Position your brand to live. Not simply exist.

Today, a brand is born and must live. This concept will prove to be a relentless evolution for brands in the consumer environment. Consumer expectations of brands are skyrocketing, which means you must position a brand to do more than exist. It must live.

Brands now live in dozens more environments than they did only five years ago.

- They are born on launch day
- They come alive
- They have a brain, heart and a spirit
- They have an appearance—a style, look, feel, attitude and appeal
- They have personality—a tone, voice
- They are mindful, helpful, engaging, curious and educational
- They empathize, teach, govern and solve problems
- They make requests of their consumers
- They have friends, partners, influencers and allies
- They also have enemies and naysayers
- They have goals, hopes and dreams

The culmination of a brand’s essence exudes them and consumers feel it. And your brand cannot control how your consumers “feel,” try as you might. However in this living and dynamic relationship consumers now demand to have with your brand, the one constant you can control is communicating the #1 reason why a consumer should try your brand.

A product is a finite thing that exists on a shelf, as a service or in a package. Today’s successful brands are born, come alive and grow to resonate with their consumers’ opportunity and challenges. And they do this in a more personally relevant manner than ever before. Creating a living brand ensures it can be extended to simultaneously meet the differing expectations of different cultures on multiple mediums.

Zappos breathed true life into its brand by harnessing every employee in the organization. Dozens of the people on their team have individual Zappos Twitter presences; all in the name of helping consumers and better paying off the #1 reason consumer should buy. Today, over 500 employees have a corporate Twitter presence for the sole purpose of supporting this value proposition of unparalleled service.
Socially exude your brand position strategy.

Executing your positioning strategy across all channels builds social capital and more trust in your brand. Specifically, trust surrounding the primary reason to try, buy, prefer and evangelize your brand.

Initially, create your brand voice to exude your brand’s personality. Craft and approve the strategy, tactical programs and supporting message platform and protocol. For the first 365 days after the launch of your brand, this strategy must exclusively laser-focus on engaging the world in conversation and trial surrounding the primary reason to buy your brand, including:

- Consumer engagement protocols to steer conversation toward the #1 reason to purchase your brand
- Fire drill protocols for missed promises in consumer value
- Top 25 to 50 situational communications that provide opportunity to steer the conversation toward the #1 reason to purchase your brand
- An editorial calendar of online events promoting the #1 reason to buy
- A promotions calendar for trial, preference and evangelism
- An influencer program creating mutually beneficial alliances with key opinion leaders surrounding your brand’s #1 critical difference in value
- Specific consumer educational strategies surrounding the #1 reason to buy
- A test matrix of call-to-action tactics to A/B test performance for consumer trial surrounding the #1 reason to buy

Develop your brand voice in a way that feels like it is a conversation. Consumers want to visit with you rather than be talked at. Seed and nurture an on-going conversation of primary reason to buy your brand. Do not get side tracked with cool ideas that do not support this position in some meaningful manner. Just don’t do it. Cool programs are cool. Strategic programs move business.

It is also important to create a visual map of all of your brand’s touch points in social media.

- Determine three goals that you want to achieve at each of these touch points within social media
- Determine who in your company owns each social media environment
- Determine a scalability plan and protocol as you add (or lose) people who are your brand’s voice in social media
- Train, incentivize and monitor their on-going conversation on the primary reason to buy your brand

At launch, the brands that integrate a dynamic social media section in their brand book have a significant advantage over their competitors. This strategy will create a major differentiator that will fly under the competitor’s radar. Your competitors simply won’t notice this strategy for a long time and when they do, they will most likely not be focused on their number one reason to buy their brand. If they did notice, they’d already be doing it, because it works.

This is a strategy with supporting tactics to modernize your brand launch strategy.
Repurpose your media marketing mix.

Go deep in social media.

Consumers are living differently.

Call it evolution.

The way people interact with brands and each other has changed. Here are some examples:

- Living in the moment is staring into a smart phone
- Texting is talking
- Brands have become verbs “Facebook me” “eBay it” “Google it” “Tweet it”
- iPads will soon be scattered around the house like magazines
- Consumers make purchase decisions based on the opinions of total strangers

Social media has become the truth serum for brands. Inquiries into a brand’s customer service department through social media platforms are faster and more helpful than a telephone call.

Facebook, Foursquare, Yelp and a host of other social channels give consumers a big voice. Help them amplify yours.

And this is only the beginning. Think about it. Social media is still in its infancy.

- Facebook was launched in February of 2004
- YouTube was launched in February of 2005
- Twitter was launched in July of 2006
- Pinterest was launched in March of 2010
- Instagram was launched in October of 2010
- Google+ was launched in June of 2011
- LinkedIn was launched back in the dark ages in May of 2003

Integrate a social media strategy across all social media cultures in a consistent manner. Do so by creating a consistent brand voice based upon a clear and concise message platform, across every medium. In a short while, this message flow will be ubiquitous throughout and across online conversations.
Your brand position’s success is a CEO decision.

It’s true that your brand’s difference must be valued enough to move the masses to purchase your brand and thus end their relationship with your competitor’s brand. However, to be a financially valuable difference over time, your brand difference must be sustainable over time.

If the difference of your brand position strategy is not sustainable, you are simply creating a new market category for competitors to quickly announce their entrance into. You educate the market, competitors enter it and bad things happen for your brand.

In contrast, if a brand’s difference within its new market category is sustainable and this #1 reason to buy is strong enough to move the masses to buy your brand, then it’s much more than a brand position strategy. It’s your business strategy.

In order for a brand’s difference to be sustainable, the CEO must lead its executive team to deliver:

1. Company-wide resolve to succeed in delivering on this promise of differentiated value
2. Ongoing commitment to innovation that cements this value over time
3. Ability to open the “right” sales channels and fill them for consumer availability and purchase
4. Commitment to invest in systems that allow supply to scale with rapid spikes in consumer demand
5. The financial means and fortitude to produce/deliver this product/service
6. The sustained commitment to invest in marketing communications that tell the story of the brand’s difference so it can be owned in the mind of the target consumer
7. The creative ability to tell the right story in a clear, concise and memorable way that drives the trial of the brand
8. Product strategy to develop future products/services that leverage the equity created by the brand’s difference
9. The right team-building abilities to deliver all of the above in a timely manner
10. The company culture and internal communications surrounding the company’s commitment to your brand’s difference

In order for a brand’s position strategy to be wildly successful, it must be at the core of the CEO’s business strategy and execution plan. Without it, your marketing team will simply introduce a great new product to consumers that is replicated by a company lead by a CEO who lives that principle. Be that CEO.
Find and hire your internal brand rock star.

The company launching a new brand needs a champion, a chief branding officer with a platinum record. The brand leader, more than once, has successfully hired and inspired a premier branding agency, large or small, to successfully position and launch a new brand.

A product manager, marketing director or executive is not typically a brand rock star. They are simply “with the band.”

Beyond launch success, a true brand guardian inspires the desire within both the internal team and agency to want to work with them, not fear them.

It is a leader who:

- Has followers who want to follow him
- Never uses bcc in email
- Believes that freedom stimulates initiative within the branding agency
- Is a listener more than a talker
- Appreciates experiences and recommendations that others offer, even though it may differ from his or her current beliefs
- Doesn’t demand results, but fosters an environment in which results can be achieved
- Hires internal people who take initiative
- Challenges team members to define and pioneer an unmapped territory and create a solution that nobody else is able to do at the time
- Is a coach and publicly celebrates an individual’s ideas
- Cultivates positive energy cultures both internally and with the brand agency
- Promotes people and pays them accordingly, and is less tolerant about mediocre performances
- Is a conversationalist well versed in the brand, the product and the environment
- Collaborates with grace
- Is a decision maker who communicates decisions openly, not privately
- Accepts constructive critiques and implements or tries a new way—if only out of intellectual curiosity
- Is a rebel who recognizes that a really big idea is probably one that makes them feel uneasy, which is precisely why the big idea will get the attention the brand deserves
- Is a purveyor of fun; these cultures are full of the free flow of great ideas
- Collaborates with all key stakeholders including sales, product development, agencies
- Can strategize, plan and manage execution, a rare combination to find in an individual
- Continually protects the brand to ensure the voice remains constant throughout all communication channels

This rock star is ultimately the smartest, most valuable leader to own your brand’s future. Keep looking until you find this leader. Do not settle. He or she is the protector of your new brand. You don’t want to lose him or her, so pay very well.
Hire a team of specialists proven in positioning and launching the killer brands you aspire to create. It is the first big decision in your new brand’s life.

Companies and startup ventures with a thorough agency review process usually land the right team.

Makes sense right?

Too often, the due diligence is not done. This is a huge gamble with success and businesses don’t even realize it. Many do not ask all the right questions. By contrast, those who perform a rigorous assessment become loyal clients, simply because the fit is perfect for their needs.

It is important to note that my agency has 20+-/- team members. The due diligence process is different for larger established agencies. However, at an agency my size, the evaluation by a major brand launching a new product or a startup bringing their first product to market, is more or less the same.

The ultimate decision is too often based on “chemistry” or preexisting relationships between the decision maker and the agency, one that ultimately ends abruptly with mediocre launch success. It is crucial to hire a qualified team with the specific leadership, strategy and execution capabilities. They must also have a proven track record relevant to the brand opportunity. Large agencies offer the best of the best in every discipline, but come with a high price tag and the risk of prioritizing smaller brands less than their larger accounts.

Finding an agency that selects its clients as carefully as their clients select it, is the first step toward a great relationship.
Hire the agency stuffed with your target consumers.

Research is expensive. Retain an agency that knows more about your consumer and their culture than you do. Pick an agency that already walks in the shoes of that culture.

In addition to reading the agency’s white paper on the culture, have the agency present the top 11 facts / trends they already know about this culture through primary research. These agencies live in your culture and spend their days thinking about how to resonate with the culture. It’s not work for them. It is what they already think about every day and it’s how they live their life. It is their passion and you will be their passion too. The result is often great creative that is on strategy.
Know if your big idea has stopping power.

Is it an uncomfortable idea?

Client-side brand executives get paid to make good decisions and launch or preside over brands that create value, make money and grow annually. They are expected to do so without making mistakes and thus their mindsets are stereotypically conservative.

Brand launch agencies are hired to craft and tell a new story of value—a true story of value that launches a new brand into a culture that drives new revenues and grows its market share annually. Brand launch agencies are conservative in that they are telling a true story of value.

However, since consumers have never heard this new story of value, or its brand, they don’t care about it. They don’t want to hear it. They don’t have the time to hear it.

Your brand and its story of value need a big idea to create stopping power. It needs the killer idea that stops the consumer in their tracks and redirects their subconscious mind into the conscious moment. It’s the moment in time they read, listen, see or experience your brand and its story.

Big ideas come in many forms. They are very rarely conservative and are often provocative.

The following is my litmus test for determining whether a big idea is truly brilliant and capable of propelling a brand:

1. Does it make me squirm?
2. Am I uncomfortable with it?
3. Do I try and make the idea less aggressive so I am more comfortable with it?
4. Do I feel it is too crazy to even present it to the client?
5. Do I think it’s an idea I should have come up with?
6. Will this idea last over time, or does it have an expiration date?
7. And, of course, does it directly align with the established brand position strategy?

If the answer is yes to all, then I consider it a possible big idea to launch the brand and go searching for a second and third option.

My litmus test on the value of a big idea is seldom, if ever, whether or not the client will like it.

Many brilliant big ideas get killed because they make a brand executive too nervous. Executives usually translate this by saying: “I don’t think we’re there yet.”

And it makes sense. It seems to be human nature to take the safest route.

The key here is to train these corporate brand executives to pay attention to this visceral and emotional response they have toward a creative recommendation.

The uncomfortable element of a big idea is often the key driver in breaking through a noisy market and creating the stopping power that your brand needs to tell its story. It’s the conscious moment for the consumer that who your brand noticed and entices a consumer to investigate further.
Never stop positioning.

Assuming you leverage these brand principles and your product can actually deliver 100% of the value your brand position promises, your business is most likely booming. This is no secret to all your fast-following competitors. If your brand is enjoying a lucrative brand strategy, somebody is paying attention. They are busily trying to improve upon it, commoditize it or just plain copy it.

Protect your brand position before they do this or, at least, while they are trying to. There are many ways to accomplish this, but I recommend you never stop positioning. Here are four options for protecting your brand:

» **Stay Put.** Don’t do anything. Typically this would be the right answer if you believe that your competitor’s move into your lucrative brand position is not sustainable. Or if you believe their ability to deliver 100% of the value promised by their brand position will fail and further validate your brand’s value.

» **Move Up Market.** Launch a more premium product/service offering surrounding your brand. Depending on the market, this premium offering may come in the form of a new product/service. Alternatively, you may simply reposition the existing brand to be more premium. This move would ideally reposition your brand with a unique value proposition that cannot easily be replicated. A brand can become more premium by boosting performance, ease of use, functional benefits, ROI or emotional value associated with your brand.

» **Move Down Market.** Keep the current product/service as is and launch a scaled down version of the current product/service that reduces the cost to the consumer, thus offering a more economical solution. If you do move downstream it is vital you are able to attract an entirely new market segment. Most innovators I’ve worked with have a passion for pioneering the next big idea, so a move downstream is usually what happens after they’ve sold out.

» **Bookend Your Brand.** In some instances the right strategy is to move upstream and move downstream to bookend your current product/service. In this case, it’s important that the brand’s repositioned value is targeting three clear markets and therefore tapping three distinct revenue streams with very little overlap.
Never blow off step one of your branding process.

Whether they forget or purposely neglect it, many blow off step one of the branding process. And since they do and I don’t want you to feel badly, I’m putting step one near the back of the book.

Ideally, before the product is even created the brand positioning process begins.

Prior to investing millions into product development, confirm who and why they will buy it. Do you know if enough of the market is unsatisfied with the product they are currently using?

» What specifically are they unsatisfied with?
» What will your new product need to laser-focus its innovation on in order for them to try and buy it?
» Is your innovation enough for them to change brands?
» What competitive brands will your product innovation intend to replace?
» Can these competitive brands simply add your innovative attributes to their product in a reasonable timeframe, thus rendering your efforts obsolete?
» What is the investment required in media for you to compete, be heard?
» How does this compare to your competition’s level of investment?
» Can you deliver all this with the team, resources and timeframe required to capitalize on this innovation?

Are you sure and is your research bulletproof?

With a big **YES**, then craft, develop and test the product’s brand strategy, position and messaging.
A/B test to validate your brand position strategy.

There is potentially a short-lived opportunity for a new brand to gain momentum on its competitors. These dynamic market attributes are not readily noticeable to the uneducated eye. One significant opportunity results from the slow shift toward real-time consumer testing and research.

Brands can A/B test everything with their social media friends. They can test concept A versus concept B for their opinion on almost anything including, packaging design, new product features, product names, new marketing campaign concepts and most importantly, your brand position.

Not only will it provide real time results, but also equally as valuable, it creates a strong bond between the consumers and the brand. Consumers will feel part of the brand and its future success. When the winning concept goes to market, reward all the people who selected that version. This early participation, and perhaps a welcome discount for early adopters, will cement the brand’s bond and promote impressive word-of-mouth around the brand’s thoughtful and grateful behavior.

Some paranoid brand managers may not like this because of the perception that the competition will learn their “secrets”. The correct timing of the testing and some thoughtfulness around messaging can minimize the risk and maximize the gains.
Think different, as Steve Jobs would say.

There are few marketing problems that can’t be fixed with proper brand positioning.

It seems that nearly all products and service categories begin to become blurred and head towards commoditized uniformity. Market categories are often referred to as commodities, when they are not commodity markets. Brands get stuck in an on-going rut of “me-too” product feature updates to “keep up with the Joneses.” Pricing and promotions programs are akin to one another and are a dime a dozen. Communication and advertising programs are heavily influenced by one another and copycat creative concepts begin to pop up. Basically, the market category becomes a noisy mess of confused consumers looking for the best deal among homogeneous products.

Some people call it a marketing problem.

They should consider it a brand position opportunity.

It’s an opportunity to think differently and deviate from the standard, accepted, predictable and established norm. Some of the leading CEOs have the eccentricity for unconventional creativity, the chutzpah to take a leap of faith before they can prove the success of their idea. They carry the charisma necessary to inspire an entire company to “think differently” and nurture a culture that delivers an entirely newly promise of value.

Steve Jobs reinvented Apple. Twice.

Jeff Bezos reinvented the bookstore and the department store with Amazon.

Richard Branson redefined international air travel with Virgin Atlantic.

Blake Mycoskie, launched the TOMS shoe brand by creating the “One for One” business model, which provides a new pair of shoes to a child in need for every pair purchased. The rudimentary shoe began as an updated version of the alpargata—a 100 year old shoe design worn by farmers in South America. Blake clearly didn’t read our principles on brand naming prior to naming his brand. He originally called his company “Shoes for Tomorrow,” but later shortened the name to “TOMS Shoes.”

It simply takes determination and resilience combined with these principles serving as the foundation for your imagination. There are virtually no commoditized market categories, just categories stuffed with commoditized marketing professionals.
LAUNCH is a playbook of proven strategic brand principles that guide critical decisions prior to the introduction of your new brand. Created by MicroArts Creative Agency, these principles provide a raised foundation for strategic thinking and creative execution. You’ll see over the heads of most others in your market.

Based on a set of principle beliefs, insightful observations and branding street smarts, LAUNCH aims to inspire:

» **STRATEGIC** positioning of a new brand
» **BIG IDEAS** that launch a new brand
» **FOCUSED** launch executions
» **INTRINSIC** social branding
» **CREATIVE** culture building
» **CRITICAL** values for entrepreneurial success

LAUNCH is written exclusively for those who think **a lot**.

Author: **Peter Lee Getman**  
*Entrepreneur, Branding Professional and CEO of MicroArts Creative Agency*

**MY PROMISE TO YOU**  
No new buzzwords • No coined marketing terms • No fancy-pants industry speak  
No eye glossing statistics • No MBA market concepts • No new Internet marketing tactics  
No deep dives in research • No exhaustive step-by-step processes • No social media 101 education

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