

Discovering How Your Brand is Currently Perceived

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Categories : [Developing a Powerful Brand Positioning Strategy](#)

In our [introduction to brand positioning](#), we stressed that your company's positioning strategy should ultimately revolve around the primary value you can offer your prospects. That value needs to be: 1) relevant to your target market; 2) something you are *capable* of delivering; and 3) unique, insofar as your competitors *aren't* offering it.

You'll notice this all boils down to differentiation. And there are steps worth taking if you want to grasp the differences between you and your competitors with absolute clarity. In the following sections, we'll help you answer some fundamental questions to get to the heart of your differentiation strategy, and—ultimately—your [brand positioning statement](#):

- Where do I think my business is today?
- Where does my *target market* think my business is today?
- Are the answers to these two questions aligned?
- Where are my competitors?
- Where do I want to be *in relation to* my competitors... and can I credibly get there?
- How do I differentiate myself to get to where I want to be?
- How do I *communicate* that difference to my target market as a series of cohesive, branded messages?

In *this* section, we'll work primarily through question 2 (and, implicitly, 1 and 3). After all, if your target market misunderstands you, it's likely that you misunderstand *yourself* at some level. And the last thing you want to do is undertake a positioning strategy without first knowing who you are.

That said, maybe you're a brand new business and your market hasn't had time to generate any perceptions of you. If so, we'd suggest you jump ahead to [understanding your competitors' positioning](#)... or, first [determine who those competitors are](#) so you can better position yourself relative to them. If you *have* been in business, on the other hand, you've got customers... and you can bet they have opinions about you. Read on to learn how to make those opinions serve your brand positioning strategy.

What is Brand Perception?

Let's begin with a distinction. Brand *perception* is different from brand *awareness* and brand

recall—two other terms you might hear thrown around the branding conversation. Brand *awareness* measures how likely a consumer is to recognize your brand or product when they're presented with it. (This is also known as "aided awareness.") Brand *recall*—also known as "unaided awareness" or "top-of-mind awareness"—measures how likely a consumer is to evoke your brand or product *without* being presented with it.

Brand *perception*, on the other hand, is not about *whether* consumers think of you, but *how* they think of you... indeed, how they *feel* about you.

To be clear: Brand perception is not something you have control over. It's not what *you* think your brand is, because your market's perception of you *is* reality. So while your logo, advertising, employee attitudes, product quality, and sales process play a role in *cultivating* your brand perception, your market *makes* your perception through how they *interpret* those things. In other words, you control the messaging; but you *don't* control how it's received.

Indeed, you can market your brand to your heart's content; but consumers have the tools, technologies, and soapboxes to undo, alter, and transform what you put out there according to their impressions of it. Their collective experiences (and the judgements that accompany them) form your overall brand perception.

Of course, brand perception is important because it profoundly influences purchase behavior, and it drives just about every business decision you'll make. But *now*, our focus is on brand perception as it supports *positioning*. After all, even if you discover that your brand perception is largely *positive*, if your market perceives your brand differently than *you* do, you'll want to know which aspects of your business *they* think are so great... because *those* are the elements you'll want to capitalize on. Focusing on the positive perceptions of your brand gives you something to build upon [when it's time to differentiate](#).

Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, famously described a company brand as "[what other people say about you when you're not in the room](#)." But businesses have access to technologies now that allow them to be "in the room" virtually all the time. We'll get to those things in a moment. First, let's discuss what you should be on the lookout for in your brand perception research:

Best Questions to Ask about Your Brand Perception

What should you be asking on your [customer surveys](#) or in your [focus groups](#) to clarify what your market thinks of you? What questions should you keep in the back of your mind as you wade through the data for market perception and customer sentiment? Here are some questions you should be able to answer at the end of your research:

- What does the overall sentiment about my brand appear to be? What emotions does my

brand typically elicit? What mood does using my product put my customers in?

- Has that sentiment changed over time? If so, how and when?
- How does my brand appear to rank in terms of consumer preference when compared to similar brands? What category do consumers put my brand in? What language do they use to rank or compare me?
- What does my target market *think* I do? What do they think I stand for? What problem do they think I solve? What are the key benefits they think I deliver?
- *How* do my customers use my product/service, and under what conditions?
- Which of my features are most talked about? What are the topics most often broached in relation to my brand? What has prompted spikes in conversation about my business or brand?
- What do people enjoy most about my brand or offering?
- What are customers' biggest *frustrations* with my brand or offering? If they could change *one* thing about my business, what would it be?
- What are consumers' expectations of my brand? How/where do they see me delivering on my promise? How/where do they see me falling short?
- Under what conditions do customers recommend my brand to others? What do they say about me when they do?
- What attracts customers to my brand rather than my competitors? What repels those customers who choose my competitors over me?
- How do my customers feel about my customer service?
- If my target market was to describe my brand in three adjectives, what would they be?

As you discover the answers to these questions, keep in mind *who is saying them*: demographic and psychographic data will help you [create your customer persona](#).

Monitoring and Measuring Your Brand Perception

Unfortunately, there's no simple metric to measure brand perception by. The more resources you

employ to uncover your "true identity," the more accurate picture you'll have of your market's perception of you. Remember, every consumer has their particular way of responding to your brand: Some have no problem opining all over social media; others won't think to complain or rave about you until they're prompted. Others you'll never *hear* from, but they'll be "telling you things" based on how they navigate your website. So get into "listening mode" and cover *all* your bases.

Consumer surveys

Let's begin with direct questioning, shall we? Note that we're calling this section "*consumer* surveys" rather than "*customer* surveys." When determining brand perception, you want feedback from *every* corner of your market: your most loyal customers, your new customers, the customers who've left you to do business elsewhere, and those who've never done business with you at all.

Of course, you'll have a different set of questions for each segment. What do your long-term customers love about you and how do they recommend you to their friends? Why hadn't your newest customers tried you until *now* and what factors prompted them to do so? (Your new customers' reasons for choosing you may be very different from your loyal customer base, which may "choose" you out of habit or long-held beliefs... pay attention to those differences.) Why did your recently-churned customers leave you? What would need to change for you to win them back? As for your non-customers, why did they choose another brand over yours to begin with?

Here are four survey types worth considering. Each captures feedback at different moments of the customer journey:

- A **Net Promoter Score (NPS)** ascertains how likely your current customer base is to recommend your brand. It's essentially a loyalty metric. The best thing about [the NPS survey](#) is that it's only one question long: *On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to recommend us to a friend or colleague?* While it won't get you nuanced information or qualitative data, an NPS is a good measure of current customer happiness, and how much brand loyalty you're starting with. (For scoring purposes: Those who score in the 9-10 range are "promoters"; those who score in the 7-8 range are "passive"; and those who score 6 or below are "detractors." Your total NPS = % of promoters - % of detractors.)
- A **Customer Satisfaction Survey (CSAT)** allows you to [measure customer sentiment](#) promptly after a specific experience with your business—a store visit, a purchase, a conversation with someone on your support team, and so on. Because they're concerned with singular encounters, CSATs will be more targeted... but if you're doing brand perception research, ask a few questions relating to their overall experience with your brand *as well as* questions about that particular encounter.
- **Product Surveys** measure—you guessed it—customer satisfaction with your product. This survey homes in on the specifics of your offering and the value it provides. It's a survey

you'll want to give to new, returning, *and* churned customers... but survey responses from your most loyal customers may give you insights into product benefits and overall business value for your positioning strategy.

- **Website surveys** typically come in the form of popups set to appear at different points along your visitors' journeys. (Survey platforms like [Zoho Survey](#) and [Qualaroo](#) offer popup features.) While these surveys are short and typically deal with your site's UX, you *could* include a brand-related question. Consider, for instance, a post-purchase popup asking your eCommerce customer why they decided to do business with you.

Surveys can also take the form of telephone calls and social media polls (the [Facebook Poll app](#), for example). You can send them through [email campaigns](#) or your market can access them through SMS or QR code. And of course, there's the focus group, which is like an *extended* survey—except you can ask more probing questions and come away with much deeper insights.

Social listening

You've got prospects and customers? [The vast majority of them are probably on social media](#)—and many of them *actively* so. Indeed, a 2015 study found [2.1 million negative brand mentions per day in the U.S. alone](#). That was four years ago; so you can imagine what that number looks like *now* (not to mention the number of *positive* mentions floating around out there). We're talking quantitative *scale* but with qualitative *insights* about brand equity. Between Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, and more, there's a wealth of data at your fingertips that could yield valuable intelligence in the form of unsolicited opinions of your brand.

Luckily, it doesn't have to mean diligently combing through every social media post *yourself* for that freely-volunteered information. Social media monitoring tools such as [Zoho Social](#), [Hootsuite](#), [Sprout Social](#), [Brandwatch](#), and [Social Mention](#) allow you to set up alerts for mentions of your company name, product, or any other keyword of your choice. The platforms track mentions *for* you—across channels—and alert you whenever they discover new ones.

Of course, *pay attention to negative mentions!* But know it's the *positive* mentions you'll wield for your brand positioning. Those "differentiating factors" we've been discussing should put you in a *good* light. Drill down and get specific: What are people actually *saying*, and about which aspects of your business? Categorize those positive mentions (customer service, product features, customer benefits, appreciation for your [company mission or values](#), and so on). This will clarify where you shine.

Finally, filter your mentions chronologically so you know your market's *current* perception of your brand. We don't have to tell you that customer perceptions can change so subtly over time that you miss the shift altogether... and that they can also change on a dime. So make sure it's the *recent* mentions you're paying the most attention to.

Review sites

Granted, social media platforms are *kinds of* [review sites](#); but we're talking sites dedicated to this genre. [Yelp](#), [Angie's List](#), the [Better Business Bureau](#), and any industry-specific review sites ([OpenTable](#) for restaurants, for example) should be combed and mined. Don't discount review sites like [Glassdoor](#), which will reveal *internal* sentiment: Some of the strongest brands out there have positioned themselves based on how they treat their employees. For instance, since 1984, the grocery chain [Wegmans has given more than 36,500 employee scholarships](#), totaling \$115 million, through its Employee Scholarship Program. Its employee treatment has earned it deep customer loyalty.

If you're already signed up for [Google Alerts](#)—which tracks more than social media mentions—you'll get notified about reviews; but if you're just starting out, it doesn't hurt to do some initial tracking yourself. Encourage your happiest customers to opine publicly. Sure, [positive reviews are the strongest form of advertising you've got...](#) but they'll also get you details you might not get directly from your customers' mouths. Those customers who express delight in person don't always have the time—or the ability—to articulate the reasons for their delight. Review platforms give them the space to describe the logic behind their love... which gives *you* a better sense of your strengths for positioning purposes.

Website traffic

There's a lot to measure when it comes to site traffic. Tools such as [Zoho PageSense](#), [Google Analytics](#), [Clicky](#), [Kissmetrics](#), [Crazy Egg](#), and [Zoho SalesIQ](#) track page views, conversion rates, bounce rates, referral traffic, and more. While the relationship between site traffic and brand perception may not be entirely clear to you (it's just a bunch of data points, right?), think seriously about what each metric might mean. For instance, longtail keyword data—the search terms users type into Google to find you—can clarify what consumers call you, how they understand you, what they want from you, and whether they have any misperceptions about your brand. "Time on page" data tells you which of your web pages are most compelling, suggesting where consumers' positive sentiment lies in terms of your content. With every data set analytics gives you, ask yourself how *that* set of data reflects visitor perception of your brand.

Internal resources

By "internal resources" we mean your customer service team, your email inbox, your chat logs, and so on. Your service team probably knows more about what delights, confuses, and frustrates your customers than *anyone*; and while they may not be taking daily notes on these things, spending a few hours with them may reveal a world of detail you wouldn't otherwise know about. So will spending a few hours combing your inbox and chat logs for consumer sentiment.

I've Done My Brand Perception Research... Now What?

Thing one? *Keep an open mind about everything you've heard and read.* It's easy to get defensive and feel "misperceived" in the face of consumer feedback. But remember, that's the whole point of brand perception: Your target market owns it. And whether or not you *agree* with it, *it's how you're perceived.*

During your research, you may have discovered that your prospects and customers think differently about your brand than you do. You'll have to determine what this means: Have you not been wholly clear about what your business is about? What in your messaging is vague? Or are you simply promising something you're not delivering on? As soon as possible, you'll want a match between internal and external perspectives.

But since we're talking about positioning: For the moment, focus less on the negative perceptions you've uncovered, and linger on the positive ones. *These* are the elements of your business that shine, and that you'll want to highlight in your positioning strategy.

By now, hopefully you're clear about how your target market perceives your brand in its current iteration. Before you can differentiate, however, you need a strong sense of how that same market perceives your competitors. In the next section, we'll discuss [how to determine your competitors' brand positioning](#). (Hint: Some of the strategies are the same... but others are very different!)