

Writing Your Brand Positioning Statement

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From the beginning of this content, we've asked you to practice the art of getting laser-focused, pinpointing the things that only *first* or *most importantly* set you apart from the competition. In *that* sense, tackling your brand positioning statement won't be all that different. But your positioning statement represents a plea for single-mindedness insofar as it pertains *specifically to all future marketing and advertising activities* your business undertakes—as well as other decisions around your branding efforts.

We'll define your positioning statement in more detail below; but know that this is where it differs from the other statements we've been discussing. Your [USP and value proposition](#) are *external* documents: Their primary role is to convince your target market of the distinct advantages of your product. And while your [mission, vision, and values statements](#) *do* give your team a roadmap for decision-making, they don't offer a clear view of your relationship to the competition—nor do they spell out the predominant message you hope to get across to your target market.

Your *positioning statement*, on the other hand, is an *internal* statement that will support you in creating specific marketing messages, tailored for—and aimed at—*your* market segment. It will elucidate for your marketing and sales teams *what* central claims their messaging should revolve around. It will bring both clarity and focus to your broader marketing and sales strategies, so that *all* teams lead with the same integral message and talking points. That consistency will be no small thing when it comes to your target market's experience with your brand messaging.

What *is* a Brand Positioning Statement?

The brand positioning statement is a short (1-3 sentence) statement that describes your brand's singular value to your target market as it relates to your primary competition. It packs a *lot* into a little verbal real estate: your customer persona, the primary pain point that you solve, the niche or category in which you compete, your product or service and its unique benefit, and the reason your target audience should believe you can *deliver* this benefit better than anyone else out there.

While the statement *must* be grounded in the reality of your offering, it should simultaneously be ambitious enough to give your company something to strive for. (We'll show you examples of this below.) Once it's developed, the statement will inform *all* key decisions you make regarding your brand, including your tagline, visual identity, packaging, communication channels, brand tone, new

product features—and of course, all advertising, marketing messages, and communication initiatives. (Indeed, each of these elements will come more easily once your positioning statement is in place.) Every decision your company makes should be accompanied by the question: "Will *this* support our positioning statement?"

That said, let's dig into the details.

The Four Essential Elements of a Positioning Statement

Traditionally, brand positioning statements contain four basic elements: your target customers, a competitive frame of reference (the market in which you operate), your primary benefit (which is also your "brand promise"), and the reason your market should *believe* that promise.

We'll say a bit more about each of these components in a moment. But first, we'd advise you to approach your positioning statement as a factual and rather formal document, rather than a witty or creative one. (There'll be plenty of room for your brand voice and personality elsewhere.) This isn't something your target market will see, so there's no need to impress anyone with verbal pyrotechnics. And precisely *because* every communicative strategy your team members execute will flow from this statement, you want to err on the side of clarity. The last thing you need is a set of conflicting marketing messages born of the fact that your employees all interpreted your metaphor-laden positioning statement differently.

Your target customers

Customer persona, target audience, ideal customer, market segment... call this group what you like. The point is that you need them—and you need to be absolutely clear who they *are*. We've led you through the process of [defining your customer persona](#) elsewhere; so we'd suggest you head on over there if you need refreshing. In short: What segment of the overall market is *most* excited and motivated by your offering? These are—and *will be*—your most valuable customers in terms of both revenue and loyalty. If you have more than one persona, choose the most important one: The one your brand speaks to most loudly.

Eventually you'll narrow it down to just a few descriptors for the sake of your positioning statement ("first-time homeowners," "male gamers in their twenties," "heads of HR for medium-sized businesses," and so on); but every one of your employees should be familiar with the more detailed persona you devise.

The market category in which you operate

This is also known as your "competitive set." It's the category, industry, niche, or vertical your brand operates within. Hopefully you've already done the work of [identifying your competitors](#); but at minimum, keep a list of 3-5 primary competitors beside you as you work. It'll help you keep your

points of differentiation front-of-mind.

It's essential to delineate the context in which you operate to give prospects a frame of reference. Remember, *positioning is always relative*: A given brand is never dependable; it's *more dependable*. Understanding the relevant alternatives to your business clarifies for your market the breadth of what you have to offer. If you're in the eyewear business, are you only competing against *prescription* eyeglass companies, or *sunglass* companies as well? Are you competing with stores that offer eye exams? And so on.

Your brand promise

By "brand promise," we mean the most compelling benefit your target market will experience from doing business with you—a benefit they *couldn't* experience with your competitors. As such, it's a lot like your [unique selling proposition](#): the point at which your ideal customer's desire (the one that hasn't been fulfilled yet) intersects with the thing *you* happen to do best. You'll often discover this in leveraging the weaknesses or oversights of your competitors.

Remember, we're talking *benefits*, not *features*. Customers want their problems solved (functional benefits) and to feel good while that's happening (emotional benefits); they're not interested in the fancy details of your methods or backend. What's the *one* benefit you can deliver with distinction that your competitors can't touch, because it's baked into the very DNA of your business? Service? Safety? Luxury? Quality? Authority? Experience? Economy? Task Completion? Entertainment? (We know; there may be several things that distinguish you from your competitors; but pick *one* here. [Market research](#) will have alerted you to the factor that's *most* important to your customer base. Choose *that* thing.)

The reason to believe your promise

Consumers these days are naturally suspicious. Your target market will want assurance that you can fully deliver on what you say you can; and your marketing messages (guided by your positioning statement) will have to speak to this demand. Without proof, the promise you make in your positioning statement will sound like a hollow set of platitudes. What evidence can you offer to back up your aforementioned benefit? What makes the case that your brand can deliver on its promise? (You can list more than one proof point here, by the way. Some businesses mention as many as three.)

"Proof" could be anything from describing your process to offering data on customer successes to prove you're legitimate. Maybe your proof stems from specific features or attributes of your product or service. For instance, maybe the fact that you don't have a brick-and-mortar store (and therefore, no overhead) "proves" why you're the most cost-effective option. If you're award-winning, mention that. If you can provide better functionality *because* you've integrated the most advanced technology, say that. It helps to complete the sentence: "We're able to deliver [brand promise]"

because _____." What you fill in the blank should be strong enough to dissolve whatever doubts prospects might have about your brand promise.

Examples of Strong Brand Positioning Statements

That may be a lot to take in at once, so we'll let you linger on some real-world examples. As we've mentioned, the positioning statement is an internal document; so you're not likely to find it on company websites. But some businesses have shared theirs over the years. We'll give you each statement and then break it down into the four component parts we just discussed.

Here's one from [Fat Guy Media](#):

"Fat Guy Media provides web design and marketing strategies that have real growth impact for local businesses. We do this by forming strong strategic partnerships with our clients and focusing our efforts on the goals that matter most."

- Target customers: small, local businesses who are looking to grow
- Market category: web design and marketing
- Brand promise: they'll grow your business
- Reason to believe: they form strategic partnerships and focus *only* on the most essential goals

And here's one from [Airbnb](#):

"For local and international travelers, Airbnb is the only booking website that connects you to unique experiences all over the world because we offer the largest selection, most diverse, top-rated and personalized places to stay."

- Target customers: travelers looking for unique and personalized experiences
- Market category: travel booking websites
- Brand promise: they'll "connect you to unique experiences all over the world"
- Reason to believe: Airbnb's large, diverse, and highly-rated selection

Here's one from [Zipcar](#):

"To urban-dwelling, educated techno-savvy consumers, when you use Zipcar car-sharing service instead of owning a car, you save money while reducing your carbon footprint."

- Target customers: educated, tech-savvy, metropolitan... and carless
- Market category: car-sharing services
- Brand promise: helps you both "save money" and "reduce your carbon footprint" (notice how Zipcar included both a functional *and* an emotional benefit here)

- Reason to believe: the reason to believe actually hinges on *prospects*, who'll help Zipcar fulfill its promise by *not* owning a car while using their service

And here's one from [Avis](#):

“Avis Car Rental is for business travelers who want express business services from a car rental company that eliminates wait times caused by leisure travelers. Unlike Hertz, Avis Car Rental is the only brand offering express business services because we are focused on meeting the needs of business travelers worldwide.”

- Target customers: "business travelers who want express business services"
- Market category: car rental (notice how *Avis explicitly* positions themselves against a competitor)
- Brand promise: "express business services" without the wait times created by those pesky leisure travelers
- Reason to believe: *Avis prioritizes* business travelers

And finally, here was Virgin America's (before it became Alaska Air):

"To savvy business and leisure air travelers (average age: 44), Virgin America is the brand of contemporary air travel that is making flying fun again by disrupting the domestic airline industry with distinctly designed aircraft, technologically advanced amenities, and world-class service."

- Target customers: intelligent and practical air travelers (business *and* leisure) in their '40s
- Market category: air travel
- Brand promise: "making flying fun again"
- Reason to believe: Virgin America gave *three* reasons: its "distinctly designed aircraft, technologically advanced amenities, and world-class service"

While carefully and deliberately worded, none of these statements is particularly creative or original. Indeed, you probably noticed some grammatical similarities across the board. Which leads us to...

Brand Positioning Templates

We don't advise using templates for much in your business; but given the practical, internal nature of the positioning statement, it may help you get the ball rolling to plug your facts into a formulaic sentence structure. From *there*, you can play a little. (While the exercise of "plugging in" might seem simplistic, the work of discerning *what* to plug in certainly isn't. Every word will be calculated, purposeful, and backed by data.) We'd suggest you experiment with a few templates. This will help you see your positioning from a number of possible angles, give you perspective, and let you focus

on your value.

In [Crossing the Chasm](#), [Geoffrey Moore](#) offers a positioning statement template that looks like this:

Here's a simpler, one-sentence template from [EquiBrand](#), which dispenses with statement of need and competitive alternative/s (they're implied in this sentence):

Here's a third:

A fourth alternative is to take any of the positioning statements we showed you above, delete the language that's specific to *that* company, and insert your own. Avis' positioning statement would give you a template like this:

Pro tip: Creating a mock positioning statement for your competitors can be a valuable exercise. It helps you more strongly position yourself *against* them *while* familiarizing you with the genre.

Testing the Strength of Your Positioning Statement

As we've discussed with the other brand documents you've created so far (your [mission statement](#) and [USP](#), for example), your brand positioning statement is hardly a one-draft affair. A single word replacement can make the difference between a benefit that resonates and one that falls flat in your marketing; so try out as many variations as you and your collaborators can come up with. Use the following questions to assess both your first draft *and every subsequent draft* until it fulfills these criteria as wholly as possible. (And get your stakeholders and most loyal customers in on the Q&A):

- Can we legitimately stake a claim to this market position? Is there *anyone* else in our industry that provides this value to our target market better than we do, and that could rightfully claim our position? If not *now*, is it a position that future competitors could easily

co-opt or impoverish?

- Can we take full ownership of this claim and deliver on our promise with such absolute consistency that our difference is reinforced with *every* interaction consumers have with our brand? Do we have the budget/resources/team to sustain it?
- Is the statement hyper-focused on our target market and their needs—specifically a need that is going largely unmet elsewhere? Is the point of difference that we're owning actually *relevant* to our target market (is it something they're *asking* for)?
- As the basis for our marketing messages, are the promise and proof strong enough to motivate our ideal customer to action?
- Is our brand promise believable and written in such a way that it promotes trust? Is our proof based on hard data, or is it adjective-riddled and "fluffy"? Is our promise consistent with what customers *already know* to be true of our brand, the way we operate, and the benefits we deliver?
- Will the statement stand up to whatever counterattacks we might get from competitors?
- Does the statement leave room for growth? Are *at least some* aspects of it timeless—appealing to priorities and values that aren't likely to significantly change despite shifts in the market or company evolution (new products or market segments, for example)? Can we imagine industry developments in the next decade that might undermine this positioning or render it irrelevant?
- Is our language as clear and succinct as possible?

Once you've settled on your positioning statement, socialize it among your team. They'll routinely refer to it to ensure that your marketing strategy—as well as every *other* brand-based decision—is in alignment with your declared direction.

Congratulations! You've crafted a killer brand positioning statement, and you're turned confidently in the direction you'd like to move. Now for the movement. In the final section, we'll discuss how to [implement and evaluate your positioning strategy](#), so all your customer experiences and communications support it.