



Dick Maggiore: Getting 'right idea' with brand positioning statement

Tuesday Posted Sep 13, 2016 at 6:53 AM

Remember this rule: A brand can stand for only one idea.

By Dick Maggiore / Special to the Canton Repository

Readers no doubt understand when someone warns, "Don't put the cart in front of the horse."

We grasp the concept that our progress will be poor if we put our cart in front of our horse. The temptation, nevertheless, is to do exactly that in many areas of our lives.

Many in business put their carts in front of their horses when it's time to promote messages about their companies, products or services. In a hurry or pinched for resources, they decide to dispense with the preliminaries and start advertising.

That's putting the cart in front of the horse, a BIG mistake.

Before you write your tagline, before you create a Facebook or LinkedIn post, before you develop a newspaper, radio or TV ad, sales presentation, brochure or any other form of communication or advertising, you must find your position in the marketplace, the idea you want to own.

Before you can execute your brand messaging effectively, you must identify and understand the idea that differentiates your brand from the competition. We call this getting the "right idea." With that accomplished, you can work on getting the "idea right."

In advertising, getting the horse where it belongs (leading the cart) includes formulating a clearly developed positioning idea that can be own-able.

So, what is positioning?

Positioning is a marketing strategy aimed to differentiate a brand (a company, product or service, even an individual) in the minds of its customers in relation to competing brands to gain market share. The more meaningful the difference is to the customer, the better. The more different the difference is from its competition, the better.

Coke, for example, owns the idea of "the original." The tagline "The Real Thing" really is a good thing because it aligns so beautifully with its position. Vlassic owns the idea of "pickles," the category itself. Vlassic only makes pickles — nothing else. Heinz was No. 1 in pickles until it started making ketchup. Today, it's No. 1 in ketchup and a commodity-priced brand in the pickle category.

The No. 1 positioning principle is a brand can stand for only one idea. Companies want their brands to be all things to all people. They think if they can be everything for everybody, they will become wildly successful. Positioning prescribes just the opposite approach. It's all about focus. So, Heinz traded pickles for ketchup. Now, it's selling mustard and other condiments. Do they own the idea of condiments? Or ketchup? Stay tuned. We will see where this shakes out.

Other examples: Volvo owns the idea of "safety." FedEx owns "overnight delivery." Domino's Pizza owns "delivery." Papa John's owns "Better Ingredients."

Those are some of the winners. Others fell to the temptation of the most abused business practice: line-extension.

Bic introduced Bic disposable pantyhose. Gone. Colgate decided to use its name on a range of food products called Colgate's Kitchen entrees. Gone. Coors decided to bottle water. Gone. Zippo, the woman's perfume. Gone. Dr. Pepper Marinade. Gone. Virgin Water Purifier from Richard Branson. Gone.

Remember this rule: A brand can stand for one only idea.

At the top, we noted that a product (or service) must align with the positioning idea that you own or want to own in the minds of your customers. Our guide for writing a positioning statement follows (on the left of each line are the standard parts of the statement; the information in parentheses is the detail associated with your particular business):

- For (your target customer or prospect)
- Who (the compelling reason to buy)
- Our product (product name and category)
- That provides (The key benefit that directly addresses compelling reason to buy)
- Unlike (main competitor)
- Our product (reason[s] to believe).

Here is a real-world example:

- For (World Wide Web users)
- Who (enjoy books)
- Our product is (Amazon.com is an online retail bookseller)
- That provides (access to more than 1 million books)
- Unlike (traditional booksellers)
- Our product (is convenience, selection and low price).

And another example:

- For (adults)
- Who (suffering from a variety of cold or flu symptoms)
- Our product is (NyQuil, the original nighttime cold medicine)
- That provides (relief of symptoms so you can sleep)

- Unlike (conventional cold medicines)
- Our product (contains a combination of medicines).

The positioning statement is for internal use. It's your guide for decisions about your brand's external marketing activities. It's the horse that will pull the cart.

Dick Maggiore is president and CEO of Innis Maggiore, founded in Canton in 1974 and today the nation's leading positioning agency, building strong brands for companies in competitive markets here and across the country.