

Positioning—Be the Same Before You Can Be Different

“We’ve become very good at developing the wrong thing” confessed a product development manager recently.

More and more technology companies are coming to realize that a clear position for any product is a prerequisite for market success. Codified development processes, automated configuration management systems, improved development tools, increased spending on quality are all important to delivering quality and timeliness. But, without the right combination of features & benefits these initiatives don’t really generate sales - particularly from new customers. These activities address areas of “dissatisfaction” - issues/attributes that are expected from a product but which usually don’t contribute to standing out in a crowd.

Effective positioning involves balancing two issues: being the same... while still being different.

When it comes to being different, here is a simple exercise to test the effectiveness of your positioning before you commit development resources:

1. List out all the reasons your customers should buy from you.
2. Now erase everything that your competitors might say as well.
3. What is left is what differentiates you in the market. Is it enough? Is it relevant to real customers - beyond your development team.

Some sources of differentiation...

- ~~///~~ Ambiance
- ~~///~~ Assurances
- ~~///~~ Conformity
- ~~///~~ Consistency
- ~~///~~ Empathy / Enjoyment
- ~~///~~ Features/functionality
- ~~///~~ Performance
- ~~///~~ Reliability
- ~~///~~ Responsiveness
- ~~///~~ Scalability

“Take unfair advantage of what is already on people’s minds”

“The process of changing a mind has the opposite effect. It reinforces it.”

Jack Trout

“The essence of positioning is sacrifice.”

Edwin Burbrow

POSITIONING - BE THE SAME BEFORE YOU CAN BE DIFFERENT

~~///~~ Serviceability

~~///~~ Usability

In our view however, many products not only lose out due to lack of differentiation but to lack of "sameness" as well.

Recently, we attended an IT trade show. As we wandered the aisles, we literally had no idea what each company was selling. Finally we began playing a game to determine how many questions we had to ask before we could understand what the company in the booth was offering. Our first question was always "What do you sell?" In general it took 3-5 naïve questions (our specialty!) to understand how to categorize them. Once I did that I could grasp the value they were trying to offer and with whom they needed to be compared. Then and only then was I ready to consume their story of differentiation.

My conclusion? Unless you have a boatload of money and marketing talent you need to ***be the same before you can be different***.

Few buyers will be able to appreciate your uniqueness until they can get comfortable with your sameness.