

## **Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind**

**Al Ries—2001.**

### **Chapter 1: what positioning is all about?**

- The average person can tolerate being told something which he or she knows nothing about. (Which is why “news” is an effective advertising approach.) But the average person cannot tolerate being told he or she is wrong. Mind-changing is the road to advertising disaster.
- The folly of trying to change a human mind became one of the most important tenets of the positioning concept. This is the one principle most often violated by marketing people.
- Since so little material about your candidate is ever going to get into the mind of the voter, your job is really not a “communication” project in the ordinary meaning of the word. It’s a selection project. You have to select the material that has the best chance of getting through.
- By turning the process around, by focusing on the prospect rather than the product, you simplify the selection process. You also learn principles and concepts that can greatly increase your communication effectiveness.

### **Chapter 2: the assault on the mind.**

### **Chapter 3: getting into the mind.**

- Easy way to get into a person’s mind is to be first.
- It’s better to be a big fish in a small pond (and then increase the size of the pond) than to be a small fish in a big pond.
- **For many** people or products today, one roadway to success is to look at what your competitors are doing and then subtract the poetry or creativity which has become a barrier to getting the message into the mind. With a purified and simplified message, you can then penetrate the prospect’s mind.

### **Chapter 4: those little ladders in your mind.**

- One prime objective of all advertising is too high in expectations. To create the illusion that the product or service will perform the miracles you expect. And presto, it does.
- To cope with the product explosion, people have learned to rank products and brands in the mind.
- A competitor wants to increase its share of the business must either dislodge the brand above (a task that is usually impossible) or somehow relate its brand to the other companies position. Yet too many companies embark on marketing and advertising programs as if the competitor’s position did not exist. They advertise their products in a vacuum and are disappointed when their messages fail to get through.
- “Avis is only No. 2 in rent-a-cars, so why go with us? We try harder.” For 13 years in a row, Avis lost money. Then they admitted that they were No. 2 and Avis started to make money. The first year Avis made 1.2 million. The second year, \$2.6 million. The third year, \$5 million. Then the company was sold to ITT.
- Almost two out of every three soft drinks consumed in the United States are cola drinks. By linking the product to what was already in the mind of the prospect, the “uncola” position

established 7-Up as an alternative to a cola drink. (The three rungs on the cola ladder might be visualized as; One, Coke. Two, Pepsi. And three, 7-Up.)

- More than anything else, successful positioning requires consistency. You must keep at it year after year.
- That's advertising your aspirations. Wrong psychologically. And wrong strategically.

#### **Chapter 5: you can't get there from here.**

- The operative word, of course, was "head-on." And while it's possible to compete successfully with a market leader (the article suggested several approaches), the rules of positioning say it can't be done "head-on."
- A better strategy for IBM's competitors would be to take advantage of whatever positions they already own in the minds of their prospects and then relate them to a new position in computers.

#### **Chapter 6: positioning of the leader.**

- Leaders should do the opposite. They should cover all bets. This means a leader should swallow his or her pride and adopt every new product development as soon as it shows signs of promise. Too often, however. The leader doesn't wake up until it's too late.
- The ultimate objective of a positioning program should be to achieve leadership in a given category.

#### **Chapter 7: positioning of a follower.**

- William Benton, founder, along with Chester Bowles the Benton & Bowles advertising agency, but in this way: "I would look for the soft spot in the business structure of the great corporations." The French have a marketing expression that sums up this strategy rather neatly. Cherchez le aeneau. "Look for the hole." Cherchez Je aeneau and then fill it.
- Too often, however, greed gets confused to positioning thinking. Charging high prices is not the way to get rich. Being the first to (1) establish the highprice position (2) with a valid product story (3) in a category where consumers are receptive to a highpriced brand is the secret of success. Otherwise, your high price just drives prospective customers away.
- Sex, age, time of day, distribution, heavy user.
- "But today in the product arena and in the political arena, you have to have a position. There are too many competitors out there. You can't win by not making enemies, by being everything to everybody. To win in today's competitive environment, you have to go out and make friends, carve out a specific niche in the market. Even if you lose a few doing so.

#### **Chapter 8: repositioning the competition.**

- For a repositioning strategy to work, you must say something about your competitor's product that causes the prospect to change his or her mind.
- What happened to Pringle's potato chips? Introduced with a \$15 million fanfare from Procter & Gamble, the "new-fangled" potato chips rapidly gobbled up 18 percent of the market. Then the old-fangled brands like Borden's Wise struck back with a classic repositioning strategy. They "In Wise, you find: Potatoes. Vegetable oil. Salt. "In Pringle's, you find: Dehydrated potatoes. Mono-

and di-glycerides. Ascorbic acid. Butylated hydroxyl-anisole.’’ Sales of Pringle’s came tumbling down. From a respectable 18 percent of the potato chip market to 10 percent. A far cry from P & G’s goal of 25 percent. Oddly enough, research isolated another problem. The most common complaint against Pringle’s is that they “taste like cardboard.” It’s exactly what you might expect from a consumer exposed to words like “di-glycerides” and “butylated hydroxyl-anisole.” Taste, esthetic or gustatory, is in the mind. Your eyes see what you expect to see. Your tongue reacts the way you expect it to react. If you were forced to drink a beaker of di-hydrogen oxide, your response would probably be negative. If you asked for a glass of water, you might enjoy it. That’s right. There’s no difference on the palate. The differences in the brain.

- As long as you have figured out a unique position, you have a chance to develop a successful brand.
- “We’re better than our competitors” isn’t repositioning. Its comparative advertising and not very effective. There’s a psychological flaw in the advertiser’s reasoning which the prospect is quick to detect. “If you’re so smart, how come you’re not rich?”
- A look at other comparative ads suggests why most of them aren’t effective. They fail to reposition the ‘competition. Rather, they use the competitor as a benchmark for their own brand. Then they tell the reader or viewer how much better they are. Which, of course, is exactly what the prospect expects the advertiser to say.

#### **Chapter 9: the power of the name.**

- Today, however, a lazy, say-nothing name isn’t good enough to cut into the mind. What you look for is a name that begins the positioning process. A name that tells the prospect what the product’s major benefit is?
- “As a guide, the five most common initial letters are S, C, P, A and T. The five least common are X, Z, Y, Q and K. One out of eight English words starts with an S. One out of three thousand starts with an X.
- There were two popular names (David and Michael) and two unpopular names (Hubert and Elmer) on some of the compositions. Each composition was given to a different group of elementary-school teachers to grade.

#### **Chapter 10: the no-name trap.**

- ‘When they have a choice of a word or a set of initials, both equal in phonic claims, people will invariably use the word, not the initials.
- In the same way, a musician learns to read music and hear the sound in his or her head, just as if someone were actually playing the tune on an instrument. Try to memorize a poem without reading it out loud. It’s far easier to memorize written material if we reinforce the aural component, the working language of the brain. Which is why not only names, but also headlines, slogans and themes should be examined for their aural qualities. Even if you plan to use them in printed material only.

### **Chapter 11: the free ride to trap.**

- “Good thinking, Harry,” and another money-saving idea is instantly accepted, as most money-saving ideas usually are. But lo and behold, instead of eating into the Dristan and Contac market, the new product turns around and eats into the Alka-Seltzer market.
- You’ll find many house names in the Colgate Palmolive line. To name a few: Coleate Dental Cream, Colgate Instant Shave, Colgate 100 Oral Antiseptic, Colgate Toothbrushes and Colgate Toothpowder. Also Palmolive Liquid Detergent, Palmolive Rapid Shave, Palmolive Shaving Cream and Palmolive Soap. You won’t find any house names in the Procter k Gamble lineup. (To consumers, Proctor, the iron, is as well known as Procter, the gamble.) Procter & Gamble carefully positions each product so that it occupies a unique niche in the mind. For example: Tide makes clothes “white.” Cheer makes them “whiter than white.” And Bold makes them “bright.” With fewer brands (51 major brands versus 65 for Colgate-Palmolive) Procter & Gamble does twice as much business and makes three times as much profit as Colgate-Palmolive.
- When a really new product comes along, it’s almost always a mistake to hang a well-known name on it.

### **Chapter 12: the line extension trap.**

- The consumer and the manufacturer see things in totally different ways.
- This, of course, is the essence of positioning. To make your brand name stand for the generic. So the prospect freely uses the brand name for the generic.
- While line extension is usually a mistake, the reverse can work. Reverse line extension is called “broadening the base.” One of the best examples is Johnson’s baby shampoo. By promoting the mildness of the product to the adult market, the company has made Johnson’s baby shampoo one of the leading brands of adult shampoo. Notice the characteristics of this broadening the base strategy. Same product, same package, same label. Only the application has changed. If Johnson & Johnson had line-extended the product and introduced Johnson’s adult shampoo, the product would not have been nearly as successful.

### **Chapter 13: when line extension can work.**

- **The classic test** for line extension is the shopping list. Just list the brands you want to buy on a piece of paper and send your spouse to the supermarket: Kleenex. Crest, Listerine, Life Savers, Bayer and Dial. That’s easy enough. Most husbands or wives would come back with Kleenex tissue, Crest toothpaste, Listerine mouthwash. Life Savers candy, Bayer aspirin and Dial soap. Line extensions like Kleenex towels, Life Savers gum, Bayer non-aspirin and Dial antiperspirants have not destroyed the brands’ original positions. Yet. But give them enough time to hang themselves.
- Where is the strength of the Kraft name? It’s too diffuse. Kraft means everything and nothing. Line extension is a weakness, not strength.
- In addition to the shopping list test, there’s the bartender test. What do you get when you order the brand by name? “J&B on the rocks” should get you scotch. “A Beefeater martini” should arrive with gin. And “a bottle of Dom Perignon” will definitely get you champagne. What about

“Cutty on die rocks”? You’ll get scotch, of course, but will you get Cutty Sark or the more expensive 12-year-old Cutty 12?

- What do you know about Cadillac? How long is it? What colors does it come in? What’s the horsepower of the engine? What options are available? To the average automobile prospect, General Motors has succeeded in communicating almost nothing about Cadillac. Except its position as the top-of-the line, domestic luxury automobile.
- It will stretch, but not beyond a certain point. Furthermore, the more you stretch a name, the weaker it becomes. (Just the opposite of what you might expect.)

#### **Chapter 14: positioning a company, Monsanto**

- It’s a basic principle of positioning to avoid the areas that everyone else is talking about.

#### **Chapter 15: positioning a country, Belgium.**

- First, it related Belgium to a destination that was ‘already in the mind of the traveler, Amsterdam. In an positioning program, if you can start with a strongly held perception, you’ll be that much ahead in your efforts to establish your own position,
- The lesson here is that positioning may require you to oversimplify your communications. So be it. There is no other way. Confusion is the enemy. Simplicity is the Holy Grail.

#### **Chapter 16: positioning a product, milk duds.**

#### **Chapter 17: positioning a service, Mailgram**

#### **Chapter 18: positioning a Long Island bank.**

- But conventional wisdom is not positioning thinking. Positioning theory says you must start with what the prospect is already willing to give you. And the only thing the prospect gave Long Island Trust was the “Long Island position.” Accepting this position allowed the bank to repel the invasion of the big city banks. The first ad stated the theme.

#### **Chapter 19: positioning the Catholic Church.**

#### **Chapter 20: positioning yourself and your career.**

- **Their own promotional** strategy is often based on the naïve assumption that ability and hard work are all that counts. And so they dig in and work hard waiting for the day that someone will tap them on shoulder with the magic wand. But that day seldom comes. The truth is, the road to fame and fortune is rarely found within yourself. The only sure way to success is to find yourself a horse to ride. It may be difficult for the ego to accept, but success in life is based more on what others can do for you than on what you can do for yourself.

#### **Chapter 21: 6 steps to success.**

- 1. What Position Do You Own?
  - Positioning is thinking in reverse. Instead of starting with yourself, you start with the mind of the prospect. Instead of asking what you are, you ask what position you already

own in the mind of the prospect. Changing minds in our over communicated society is an extremely difficult task. It's much easier to work with what's already there.

- 2. What Position Do You Want to
  - In your own career, it's easy to make the same mistake. If you try to be all things to all people, you wind up with nothing. Better to narrow the focus of your expertise. To establish a unique position as a specialist, not as a jack of all trades generalist.
- 3. Whom Must You Outgun?
- 4. Do You Have Enough Money?
- 5. Can You Stick It Out?
- 6. Do You Match Your Position?
- The secret to establishing a successful position is to keep two things in balance: (1) a unique position with (2) broad appeal.
- **There are two kinds of** marketing people. "We" people and "they" people. "We" people have trouble understanding the essence of the new concept: You don't position the product in the sales manager's office. You position the product in the prospect's mind. "We" people turn out in droves for self-help seminars. We people are convinced that with proper motivation, anything is possible. "We" people make dynamic speakers. 'Our will. Our determination, our hard work, our superior sales force, our loyal distributors, our "this" and our "that". With these things, we will be successful.' Maybe. But "they" people usually see things more clearly. "They" people focus their attention on the competition. "They" people scan the marketplace like a general scans the battlefield. "They" people seek out competitive weaknesses to exploit and learn to avoid competitive strengths.