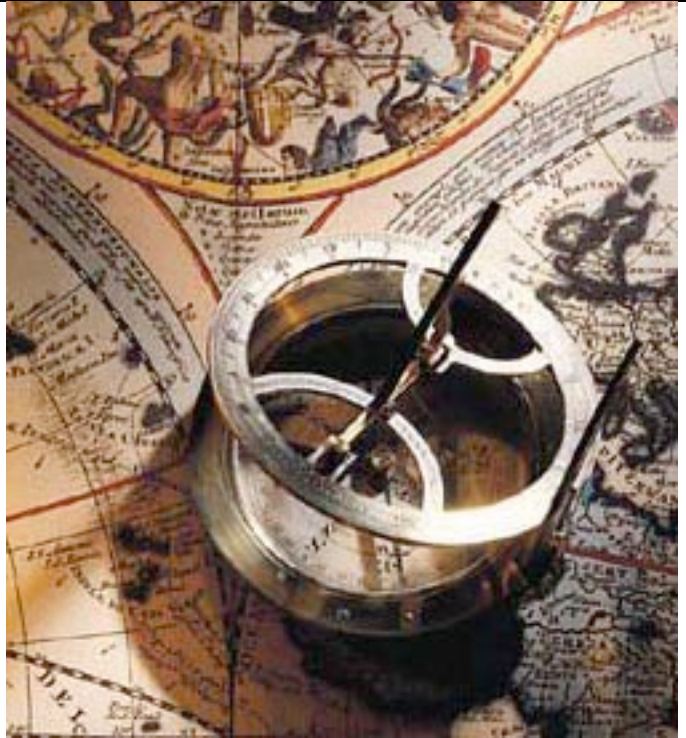


Proactive Positioning...

Gaining an Edge in a
Hyper-competitive
Marketing Environment

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The realities of the marketplace dictate that organizations pay attention to fundamental marketing issues that determine present and future success or failure. Competition for increasingly scarce donor resources is one reality. Ever-increasing sophistication of competing organizations is another. Failure of organizations to be in touch with the marketplace is another. But the most significant reality that will determine the outcomes — good or bad — of your marketing efforts has far less to do with you than with your target constituencies. This reality is how you are perceived in the minds of your constituencies. Your position relative to your competitors and relative to your own perceptions. All of which is critical in creating and nurturing the bond that ties together your organization, your cause and your donors.

**Your Position — Whether you believe you do or not,
you have a position.**

- Is what people perceive about you true?
- Is what they actually perceive what you *desire* people to perceive about you?
- If not, what can — or should — you do to influence their perceptions?

“Position” is a passive noun, not an active verb.”

Harry Beckwith

You can't position yourself as anything. Your donors or customers do that. Because they're the ones who choose how to perceive who you are and what you do and whether it's important to them. But you can leverage the position you occupy and make it work for you. And you can take steps to strengthen, or even alter, people's perceptions and make them work for you.

A three-step approach to strengthening your position in the mind of the donor...

While volumes could be (and have been) written about market positioning, there are some basic steps you can take to be proactive in communicating the image you want your constituencies to have about your organization. Being intentional about creating perceptions needn't cost thousands of dollars or demand the fulltime attention of a marketing director. But being intentional does require *attention* to details about your organization and your efforts to communicate them appropriately. I suggest you follow a simple process:

Step 1 — Understand where you're at — “Know thyself...and know your donors!”

Internal perceptions — what your organization thinks about itself — are important, because that knowledge serves as a benchmark against which to measure reality. Ask the critical questions that define your organization:

- What business are you in?
- Whom do you serve?
- Why do you serve them?
- How do you serve them?
- Who are your competitors?
- What makes you different from your competitors?
- Why should someone give to your organization?

External perceptions — what target constituencies think about you — are critical. Forget what you think about your organization — at least for the moment. What you think isn't what causes donors to give. What they think does. So you must define as accurately as possible what your position is in the minds — and even in the hearts — of your donors. Answer the above questions from their perspective and their perceptions. Even better, take the time to ask your donors to answer the questions. Simple surveys, or at the very least, a series of focus groups with key constituents, can demonstrate what you *don't* know about their perceptions and suppositions.

STEP 2 – Create your organization’s “Positioning Statement”

A positioning statement describes what you want audiences to think. A statement of position based upon the exercise above admits the truth. What are the elements of a positioning statement? Focus on the answers to the questions above! What buttons help you by strengthening what you already own? By differentiating you from your competitors? By emphasizing a benefit or benefits?

The rules for effective positioning statements (and, thus effective positions) are really quite simple:

- a) Be memorable: Your position should aim at the mind – and at the heart.
- b) Be concise: Your position should be singular: one simple message.
- c) Be different: Your position must set you apart from other organizations.
- d) Be focused: You cannot be all things to all people. Choose your most powerful positioning tactic.

Time for a reality check... Analyze the “gap” between what you wish people believed about you and what they actually do. If the gap is too large, you will have an impossible task trying to change their “reality.”

“Craft bold dreams and realistic positioning statements.”

Harry Beckwith

STEP 3 – Establish and reinforce credibility for your position.

Remember – you cannot “position” your organization. The donor/customer/prospect does that. But you can help in how and what you communicate that will reinforce your desired positioning objectives.

“Credibility is the key to the whole market-positioning process.”

Regis McKenna

According to a study of donors to Christian organizations and their donors conducted by the Barna organization, a significant percentage of Christian donors’ giving is based not upon what organizations do, but who they are. Whether they’re a “good” organiza-

tion, accomplishing good things. And many of them rely on the advice or recommendations of someone they trust. This illustrates the importance of credibility. And credibility is a product of three things:

• Inference • Reference • Evidence

People form impressions based upon what they infer about your organization. What you say matters. Who you partner with, or where. Being able to point to significance achievement, a significant grant, or event. References are important to people's giving decisions. They ask friends, colleagues, co-workers and pastors "do you know anything about so and so...?" Testimonials become very important to you. As does "word of mouth." Both enhance your credibility. Most important of all is evidence. Success reinforces itself. Hard results. Facts and statistics. The indication that your organization is successful and that you achieve what you are trying to achieve. McKenna states that without the evidence to back it up, positioning is hollow. Put these credibility-builders to work for your organization in your marketing and development programs, in your communications, and your interactions with various constituencies. Build inference, reference and evidence into your newsletters, brochures, your direct mail, your presentations, and into your events and your press releases and your conversations with everyone.

Years ago, Ries and Trout defined "positioning" as a battle for the mind. In the context of ministry activity it is also a quest for the heart. Remember that "position" is a passive noun. You can't control where individuals decide to place your organization in their hierarchy of importance. But you can influence the credibility of your position, and thus, the attractiveness of your organization.

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