

INTERNATIONAL MARKETING GUIDES

An Introduction to Online Engagement

A hands-on guide that looks beyond tactical engagement tips to define the six core ways brands can gain more traction online.

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PREFACE

What is online engagement?

Engagement is the online catalyst that converts prospects to customers, customers to loyal customers, and loyal customers to vocal brand advocates. A colleague once described engagement as, “The gravity that holds an audience in orbit around a brand.” As such, it’s become the newest competitive battleground for marketers. Just ask a CMO what their top ten online marketing concerns are. Engagement will usually appear in the top three. And, as challenging as engagement can be for domestic brands, it becomes even more elusive when trying to engage across the barriers of culture and language.

Online engagement can take many forms, from favoriting a Tweet to creating a video on YouTube. But, the reasons why people engage with brands remain consistent.

Put simply, people engage with brands they don’t mind being associated with and like. Those are brands they understand, value, relate to, and trust. How well does your brand compete on these criteria? If you’re not satisfied with the level of engagement your brand receives online, then there is a good chance that online visitors find the brand’s offer unclear, undifferentiated from your competitors, irrelevant to their needs, untrustworthy, or all of the above. These are the issues to deal with if you really want to solve engagement problem at the source.

THE ONLINE ENGAGEMENT SPECTRUM

Visit	Essentially, people just showing up, which increases web traffic.
Consider	Visitors hang around and consume content. This increases time on page, which is good for SEO.
Acknowledge	These are likes, rating, favoriting, essentially, pushing a button. They're low engagement activities, but do provide a public receipt that content was consumed.
Contribute	Taking the time to reply, leave a comment, or chat online.
Follow	People subscribe to your channel or RSS feed, which provides a passive channel of contact to these subscribers.
Information	This is submitting personal data, like filling out a survey, which provides marketing intel.
Permission	People submit an email or a phone number, which enables further one-on-one contact.
Create	People add things they've created or curated, like posts or pictures that enrich a brand's content.
Amplify	People share content with their proprietary audience and, in the process, promote brand awareness.
Advocate	This means actively endorsing your brand to their proprietary audience, which, in addition to promoting awareness, also fuels understanding, interest, and trust in the brand.
Convert	Perform the highest order ask on the asset — typically downloading, trying and/or buying something, or linking somewhere.

Why does the world need another guide on the topic?

Duffy Agency wrote this guide because we see a disconnect between the reasons prospects fail to engage with brands online and the tactics that are

widely prescribed to address the problem. Most books and posts published on the topic of online engagement focus on editorial tactics to improve content. Having worked with scores of international brands, Duffy Agency has found that poor editorial skills will certainly make matters worse, but, in most cases, they are not the source of the problem. The source of most online engagement problems are outmoded brand strategies that were not developed with an online audience in mind.

This guide takes a different tact in addressing online engagement: It focuses on the fundamental elements of a brand that need to be adapted to the new digital marketing landscape that has been shaped, in large part, by the internet over the past decades.

For most marketers, engaging with prospects online is a new skill. Pre-2005, when marketing communication was mostly one-way, engagement wasn't on the radar, at least not the way it manifests itself today. Drawing on our work with dozens of online brands, Duffy Agency has outlined a process that can be used to increase online engagement at its source. This guide will help your brand engage its online audience in a manner that will not only increase sales, but also drive loyalty and advocacy after the sale. Below are a few questions to help decide if this approach is right for your brand:

What type of engagement are you looking for?

If you're not satisfied with the engagement your brand receives online, your first reaction may be to try new tactics. A quick Google search will reveal oodles of quick fixes for online engagement, like addressing trending topics, writing snappier headlines, running contests, crowdsourcing, being more personal, real-time response, embracing causes, etc.

These tactics can be very effective at triggering engagement in the same way that tickling someone can make them laugh, whether or not they find the person tickling them funny or even likable. In our work, Duffy Agency has found this stimulated engagement to be very useful to boost online metrics. But we've also observed that the strongest brands in their categories tend to be the ones with solid organic engagement. That is, brands that people want to engage with even when they are not prompted to do so. This signals that the brand is striking a chord with consumers on a much deeper level and, therefore, is less dependent on tactics to attract engagement (or customers).

Any brand can adopt tactics that will produce temporary boosts in engagement. But that doesn't make them engaging brands, it just indicates skilled tacticians. To really move an online program to the next level, you should ensure that the brand's strategic foundation has been optimized for online use. That means going beyond triggering engagement online with one-

off tactics and addressing the source of what makes one brand more engaging than another. Once that is done, use short-term tactics to fuel that engagement and provide the occasional boost.

If your brand needs more than temporary boosts in engagement, then this guide will help.

Have you created a digital strategy for your brand?

When looking beyond the tactics, often more fundamental issues that are hurting engagement with the brand are found. That's because conventional brand models, upon which most brands are based, were created for a different reality: They simply don't take the new marketing landscape — defined by the internet — into account. Brands online today are exposed in a way that would have been unimaginable just five years ago. What passed as an adequate brand focus then can look like a blur to prospects online today. And, no one will engage with a blur.

What's more, prospects are assessing brands in greater numbers and at far greater speed and through far more touchpoints than was the case back then. Brand communication needs to be tailored to the digital environment to be more immediate and address the behavior of online prospects and customers. These are the root issues that make brands come to life online and elicit organic engagement.

Whether launching a new brand or trying to boost the online performance of an established brand, chances are you will need to reexamine the brand's basics to attract, hook, and engage more people online. That starts with re-examining how your category, value proposition, and position are communicated, and how these elements are supported by your brand profile. This isn't so much about changing the brand as it is about updating the way you profile and communicate your brand online.

If your brand strategy hasn't been revised yet for today's digital environment, then this guide will help. This guide began its life as part of an introduction to strategic online marketing for graduate students and entrepreneurs. Duffy Agency has since expanded it to provide business owners and brand managers with a conceptual framework and step-by-step advice to focus their brand offers online. As you might imagine, this will also focus these brands offline. Today, your brand's prospects and customers live with one foot in both online and offline worlds. To address this, you should ensure you project one seamless brand identity online and off. However, you need to start somewhere, and, as a digital-first agency, Duffy Agency's starting point begins online.

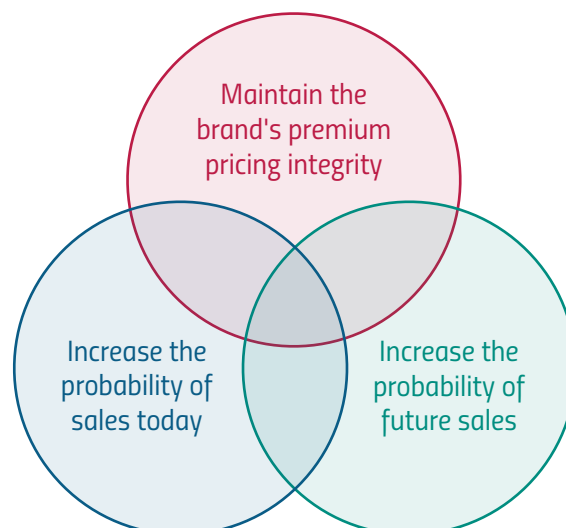
Introduction

HOW TO DEFINE ONLINE MARKETING OBJECTIVES

Before looking into how to help our brands compete better online, it may be worth considering why we're competing online in the first place. To many, the easy answer is to increase revenue. And, of course, revenue is vitally important since it is what ensures adequate cash flow to keep the business running.

But sustained profit margins and shareholder value come from a different metric: brand equity. A quick survey of the models for assessing brand equity reveal a heap of options. We've found most of these models are either too complex for practical use or are more retrospective tools rather than forward planning tools.

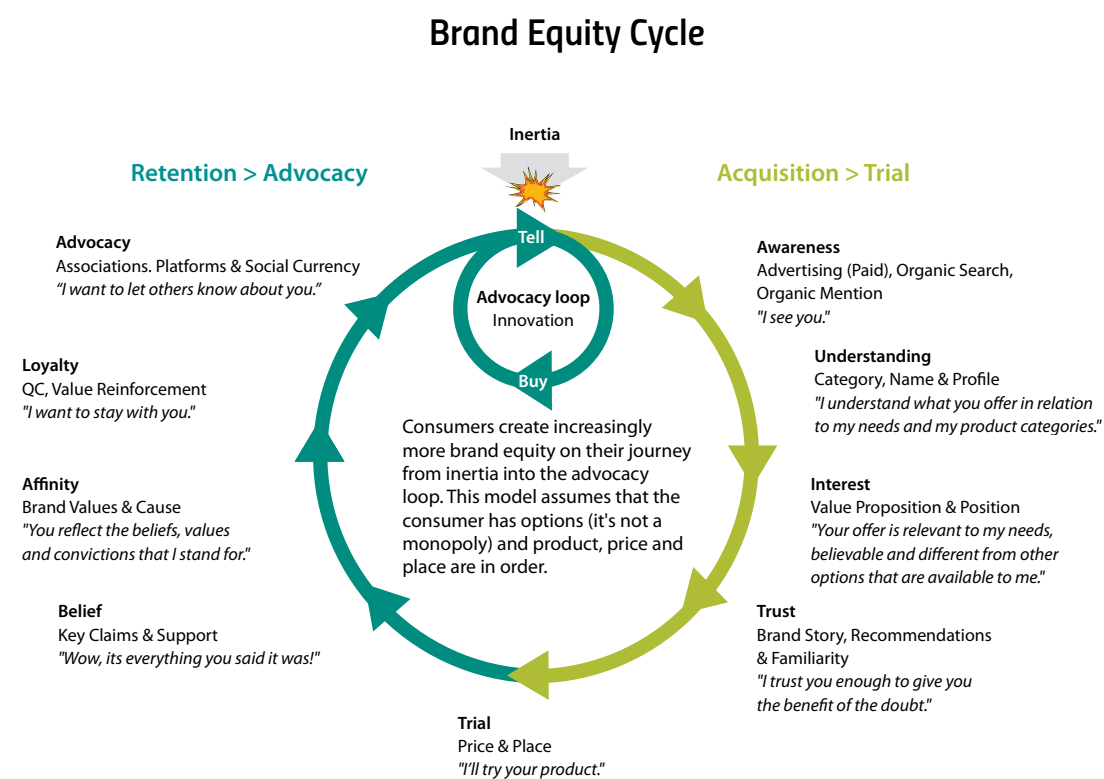
The challenge: Doing all three at once



At Duffy Agency, we have developed a consumer-based brand equity model that, by comparison, is easy to understand and use for planning and assessing marketing activities. This model is not based on financial valuation or product attributes. It's based on the conditions that must be satisfied to increase the probability of future purchases at a premium price point by a defined group of consumers.

That is, the likelihood of being able to generate future sales and profit by virtue of the brand's name appearing on the product. For Duffy Agency, the only aim of online marketing (or any marketing for that matter) is to develop brand equity as defined by the model.

Consider this model as an evolution of the classic sales funnel. The sales funnel models a consumer relation that begins with awareness and terminates in a sale. Our brand equity cycle includes sales as a vital part of the equation, but it is just one of several steps required to build a sustainable business of ever-increasing value.



Our model defines brand equity in the ten stages of development that a brand's audience passes through from consumer inertia to advocacy. These stages form our strategic framework. The value of each member of a brand's audience varies depending on where they are in the cycle (with Advocates being the most valued). The goal is to move people through these stages as seamlessly as possible with the end-goal of converting more of them into loyal and vocal brand advocates than your competitors do.

Let's use the example of a fictitious crayon brand named "Wipe Away" to describe the different stages a prospect would move through.

Inertia

The prospect has a relevant want or need but is not aware of the brand.

Example — *"I want my little Jimmy to draw, but my problem is that he scribbles all over the walls and I have no idea how to deal with that."*

Awareness

The prospect is exposed to the brand and it registers with them.

Example — *"I saw the Wipe Away logo, but I don't know what it is. Something to do with kids I think."*

Understanding

The prospect understands what category of product the brand stands for.

Example — *"I get it, Wipe Aways is a children's crayon brand. But I already buy Crayola for little Jimmy."*

Interest

The prospect is able to differentiate your brand from others in the category based on a value proposition that is relevant and believable to them at that moment.

Example — *"Interesting: Wipe Away crayons are water soluble so they wash off easy, especially from walls".*

Trust

The prospect trusts the brand enough to give it the benefit of the doubt.

Example — *"I was wondering if they were safe and worked well, but then I read some positive reviews on a Mommy Blog and saw that my friend Sally recommended them on Facebook. Wipe Aways are probably okay."*

Trial

The prospect purchases the product.

Example — *"They're at Walmart and cost about the same as normal crayons, so I'm going to buy a pack for little Jimmy."*

Belief

Based on their experience with the product, the prospect concludes that the brand delivered on its value proposition.

Example — *“Wow, Wipe Aways really work as promised! They wiped right off the wall.”*

Affinity

The prospect is receptive to looking for reasons to like the brand and concludes that the brand shares many of their beliefs, values, and convictions.

Example — *“This brand really gets me. They are into education, child safety, and the arts just like me. We have a lot in common.”*

Loyalty

The prospect becomes a customer and stops actively looking for other solutions because they are satisfied that the brand delivers the best value in the category.

Example — *“From now on, these are the crayons for me.”*

Advocacy

The customer wants to be associated with the brand and is prone to tell others about the brand.

Example — *“I’m posting little Jimmy’s wall drawings on Wipe Away’s gallery site and sharing them with my friends on Twitter and Facebook.”*


The end game is to keep brand advocates in orbit around the brand with constant innovation. At any moment in time, your target market will be spread across the different stages from inertia to advocacy. The marketer’s job is to manage product, price, place, and promotion in such a way that attracts as many of the target prospects as possible into the cycle and effectively converts them into brand advocates.

Brands and brand theory can be pretty nebulous. This model has provided us with a consumer-based vocabulary to speak about, plan, and measure brand performance in concrete terms. So when we talk about brand management at Duffy Agency, we are talking about managing these ten elements and facilitating the prospect’s journey through these stages to brand advocacy. If a marketing activity is not directly contributing to this cycle, then there is a good reason it should be axed.

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Chapter 1

HOW TO TELL YOUR BRAND STORY ONLINE (IN FOUR SECONDS OR LESS).

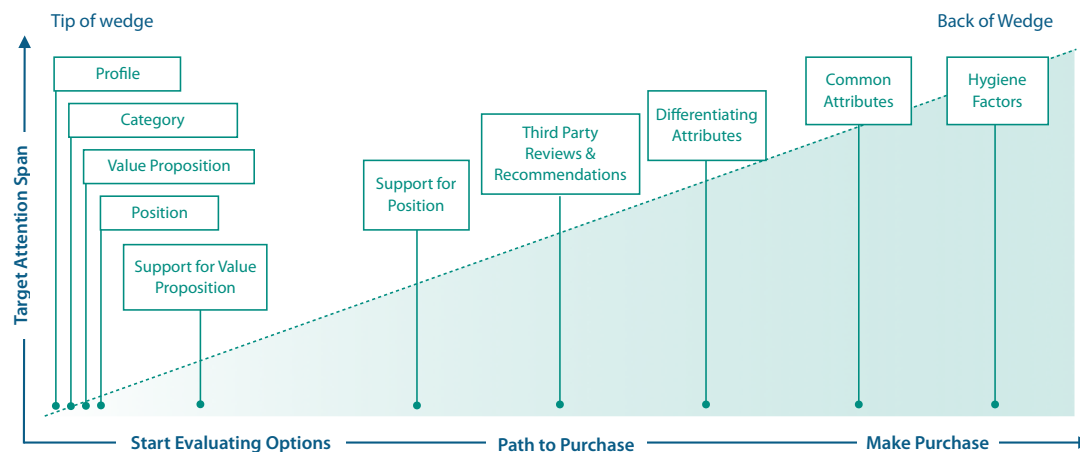
TMI, or too much information, isn't just a funny internet acronym. It's the reason why many brands fail to engage online. When the message is a muddle of ill-conceived, poorly-timed features, benefits, and claims that mirror competitors', it is often at odds with the way prospects make purchase decisions. This can make it difficult, or, in many cases impossible, for consumers to assess what the brand has to offer, what makes it different from other options, and/or if it can be trusted. All of which precludes the possibility of engaging, no less making a sale and creating a brand advocate. Approaching the market in this manner is a lot like trying to chop down a tree with the blunt end of the ax. It can be done, but it will require ten times the effort and, in marketing terms, that means ten times the budget.

Duffy Agency would like to propose a better way: Focus on the information needs of your prospects during each step of the purchase process, then shape your brand communication to answer those needs. An easy way to envision this is to picture a wedge like the one illustrated below. The wedge is formed by the amount of time consumers are willing to spend with brands along the path to purchase. As long as your prospects continue to see value in the engagement, they will continue to invest more time in your brand along their journeys. The challenge with this wedge is that the most critical decisions are made at the tip of the wedge, where marketers have the least amount of time to make their case.

To succeed, your prospect's interest needs to be sparked with a small amount of information at the start (the tip of the wedge) — if you ever hope to deliver the entire payload of features and benefits required to close the sale (the back

of the wedge). The sharper the tip, the easier the conversion process is from one stage of the brand equity cycle to the next. That's why you need to be very selective about what is said first. It should be clear, differentiating, highly relevant to the target, believable and, of course, true. It should also be communicated in about ten seconds.

Communication Wedge



The four gatekeepers to engagement

Consider a new visitor to your website. You've succeeded in attracting their attention, but now your brand has a matter of seconds to answer four fundamental questions. These questions act as gatekeepers. The answers your brand provides will determine whether the prospect invests more time with your brand or moves on to your competitor's site.

The four gatekeepers to prospect engagement:

① What are you?

Provide familiar cues to help prospects immediately understand your brand's category and, by extension, the need it addresses.

② Why should I care?

Single-out the one attribute of your brand that is most likely to influence your target's value perception.

③ How do you compare?

Highlighting something that differentiates your brand's offer from competing options.

④ Can I trust you?

Make sure your landing page(s) reflect a look and feel that your target will associate with a credible brand in this category.

These are the four gatekeeper questions that Duffy Agency will help you answer with this guide. Each will need to be answered within seconds of making contact. That doesn't give you much time for flowing copy, data sheets, or explainer videos. What is necessary is to condense the answers down into a sort of consumer shorthand that will make it easy for the prospect to get the big picture of your brand from a very small amount of information. That shorthand is strategic marketing communication. We'll show you how to use the four constructs below to convey the information necessary to hook prospects within the few first seconds online.

The four answers every brand needs to provide to prospects:

- ① **CATEGORY** answers "What are you?"
- ② **VALUE PROPOSITION** answers "Why should I care?"
- ③ **POSITION** answers "How do you compare?"
- ④ **PROFILE** answers "Can I trust you?"

An inexact science

At its core, strategic positioning and the related concepts covered in this guide are attempts to predict how consumers categorize, engage, evaluate, and choose among their options. The terms we define are constructs designed to help marketers see the world from their target's perspective so they can communicate their offer in a manner that the target will best understand and respond to. Sounds very neat and tidy in theory.



“
*Give me six hours to
 chop down a tree and I
 will spend the first four
 sharpening the axe.*
 ”

— Abraham Lincoln

In practice, however, it's a lot easier to determine the correct category, value proposition, position, and profile for a particular brand and target audience than it is to speak about these topics in general terms. When marketers try to do so, the definitions usually seem vague, overly theoretical, and often contradictory. A quick Google survey of any of these terms will reveal as much. The reason a uniform model to determine the right category, value proposition, position, or profile for any brand can't be produced is because there is no uniform way in which consumers categorize or evaluate their options.

So, take the definitions in this guide with a grain of salt. Use the processes outlined to focus your message online and engage your audience. But, bear in mind that the only people who really have that answer are your prospects and, provided you know how to ask them, they will never steer you wrong.

Testing your assumptions

Every strategy is based on assumptions. As these assumptions are validated, risk for your business is reduced. In each chapter of this guide, Duffy Agency will encourage you to test your assumptions about your prospects to ensure their validity. This can be done in a number of different ways, i.e. desktop research, online surveys, phone interviews, focus groups, etc. We have found

semi-structured, in-depth interviews with a small but representative sample of a brand's target market to be the most effective method for this type of investigation. Have a third party interview 10 - 20 prospects (at least three representatives from each target segment) along the lines recommended in this guide.

The reason using a third party is recommended is for the outside perspective brought into the process. That statement may sound suspect coming from someone who makes his living doing this type of work. You would be perfectly justified to ask, "Why not do it myself?" After all, you know your brand better than anybody, right? Yes, but when it comes to determining prospects' perceptions related to your brand, that familiarity is actually a liability.

Like psychotherapy, dentistry, and marriage counseling, the do-it-yourself approach is not going to work even though you're closest to the subject matter. What we actually pay psychotherapists, dentists, marriage counselors and brand-positioning consultants for is perspective. Their distance helps them provide a more objective assessment than you can achieve on your own.

So, find someone outside your organization who has experience in this type of research. Ideally, someone you trust to speak plainly about your brand. Because, as positioning expert Blair Enns explains, "No matter how hard you try, you can't read the label from inside the jar."

Purchase process vs. Path to Purchase

The purchase process begins when the prospect has decided on a solution and is evaluating options. But, it's worth noting that the purchase process outlined above maps only half of the journey that the prospect takes leading up to a purchase. There are three steps — each of which provide marketers an opportunity to introduce themselves to prospects and preempt the purchase process to gain an advantage over competitors before. We call this the path to purchase. Understanding it is essential to succeeding with content marketing and online marketing efforts.

Path to Purchase

The exact steps taken along this path will be different for every product. But, there are six characteristic phases that are used as a framework when mapping the behavior of prospects leading up to purchase. They are:

1. Defining the problem
2. Defining the solution
3. Identifying providers of the solution
4. Evaluating providers
5. Deciding on a provider
6. Making the purchase

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Chapter 2

HOW TO DEFINE YOUR BRAND'S CATEGORY

The first thing a prospect wants to know when encountering your brand online for the first time is, “What is it?” In its most basic sense, this question is answered with category. Leading brands tend to dominate a clear category. Think office supplies, premium coffee shops, or energy drinks and Staples, Starbucks, and Red Bull are likely to come to mind.

Like tabs in a mental Yellow Pages Directory, categories are the labels that prospects use to segment options into different buckets. For instance, for timepieces, there are clocks vs. watches. In watches, there are the categories of digital vs. analog. In analog there are a number of categories like dress watches, diving watches, chronographs, etc. Consumers tend to choose categories before they choose specific products in the category.

CATEGORY BASICS	
Objective	Highlights what makes your offer similar to those you wish to compete with.
Question	Answers the prospect's question: "What are you?"
Result	Gets you on your ideal prospect's long list by associating your brand with others that satisfy the most basic requirements of the solution being sought.
International	Strive for one category to be identified with globally, but accept that local exceptions may have to be made.
Top Tip	Since it is an attempt to find your space in the target's mental market landscape, it is important to talk with them and use their categories and not your own.

In most, but not all cases, you will not invent a category so much as identify it. Here is the process Duffy Agency uses to do that for our customers:

6 steps to defining your brand's category

1 Create a Hypothesis

Categories are how the target market segments the options available to them to satisfy a particular want or need. This will, most likely, be very different from the way you and your team segment those options. That's why your first step should be to define the category you believe you are competing in. This is your category hypothesis.

No matter what category decided on, remember that the category chosen will create a set of expectations from prospects that your product will need to satisfy. These are called hygiene factors. Typically, these are core features and benefits that are expected for inclusion in the category. Failure to deliver on these hygiene factors will knock you out of contention pretty early in the game. For instance, if you were a watchmaker who decided to sell a certain watch as a diving watch, then, based solely on the category, people would

assume the watch was waterproof to at least 100 meters, has a bezel with at least every five minutes marked to time the dive, was readable in the dark, and was resistant to corrosion from sea water.

2 Talk to your target

Now have your hypothesis checked against your target using a third-party investigator. Be sure to explore:

- a. What words prospects use to describe your category in conversation and when searching online.
- b. Determine if they consider other categories when seeking solutions.
- c. Check to see how other like-brands you may compete with are categorized.

3 Confirm your findings

Some categories are very clear cut, while others are not. Be mindful that categories can differ from country to country. If interviews are conducted, there probably is a rather small sample size. The interviewer should also be able to give you a sense if they feel there was any uncertainty based on their observations. But, in any case, you should confirm the results of the interviews by other means, such as keyword research with tools like Google Adwords Keyword Planner and Google Search Trends. If there are still doubts, consider a quick online survey with Survey Monkey or offline survey at a customer or trade event.

4 Choose your category type

The first decision you have to make is whether your brand will compete in an existing category or create a new one.

We said the objective of your brand's category is to identify with existing like-brands. But, there is an alternative: Offer your target a better solution that they've never considered before. This is the Blue Ocean Strategy approach, where new market space is created instead of competing in existing categories. Think Henry Ford introducing the automobile to people looking for a new horse and carriage. Brands in new categories are often competing with other categories for market share. Therefore, they often advocate their category more than their product to help the category gain traction and position themselves as its leader. Henry championed the affordable automobile category because he offered a car that was half the cost of a horse and buggy.

Creating a new category in the target's mind requires repeated exposure to your message as well as repeated exposure to third-party validation of the

category. That will only happen if you have sufficient promotion budgets or an innovation that is as newsworthy as a \$260 automobile was at the turn of the twentieth century and that you do the proper work to keep it in the news.

If there is a significant demand for a new product, chances are your prospects have already coined a category name for it. It just needs to be found and amplified. If you feel you can't compete well in any existing categories, then consider creating a new category in the customer's mind where your value will shine. In either case, bear in mind that it's not a category just because you say it is. Ultimately, consumers dictate categories, not brands. You can try to influence their categorizations, for sure, but your prospects are the ultimate arbitrators.

5 Define your category

If your brand is not in the category where your target is looking, there is a very good chance it will be overlooked on the prospect's path to purchase. Be sure to use the vocabulary your target uses even if it is not exactly in the words you would choose. This is typically a very factual definition only a few words long, such as "analog diving watch." It is not meant to communicate what makes your brand better, just what type of product it is. Your category statement is all about highlighting what makes you the same as other brands, not what makes you different or better. You will be able to use your value proposition and position to differentiate within your category.

Don't use your category to differentiate



Former Manhattan Lifestyle Concierge now successful Real Estate Broker, Meg Harvey

Resist the temptation to get too creative with your category. A real estate broker in New York specializes in helping Europeans find homes in Manhattan. Her clients often buy their homes sight-unseen, relying on her to find the right match. She realized that, in her role, she must get to know her client's lifestyle much better than brokers dealing with local clientele. She decided to use her category to communicate this difference. She stopped referring to herself as a "real estate broker" and instead categorized herself as a "lifestyle concierge." She changed her site's messaging, content, and SEO to communicate her new category. The phrase was an accurate description of what she did, but unfortunately the phrase is not used by her prospects and lacked the gargantuan marketing budget it would have taken to change that. The result was a sharp drop in web traffic, a spike in bounce rate, and a lot of screwy looks during introductions before she changed her category back to real estate broker.

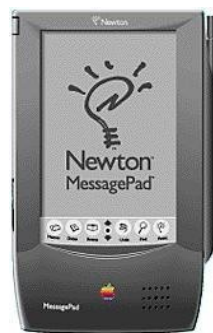
6 Communicate your category

No visitor to your brand's website should have to guess what category you compete in. Your main landing pages should be optimized with your category name so they will be easily found by search engines. And, when a visitor arrives at your site, it should provide the proper cues that prospects use to identify your category or simply state your category explicitly. This has a lot to do with how you profile your brand which is covered in chapter five.



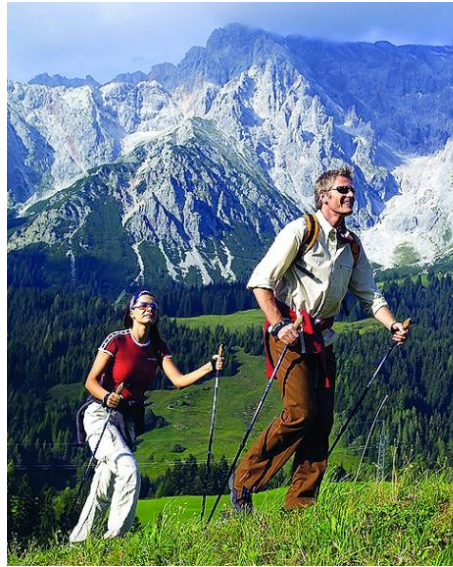
- **Tide Detergent**

A classic example of creating a new category is Tide. In 1946, Proctor & Gamble was faced with the challenge of introducing a new washing powder into a category that was already saturated with a number of well-established soap brands such as Ivory, Oxydol and Rinso. Tide is not made from fats and lye like traditional soaps. It is manufactured synthetically. Instead of competing with these soaps, P&G established Tide in a new category for synthetic soaps called “Detergent.” Today Detergent is the #1-selling category of washing powder and Tide has been the #1-selling detergent since 1946.



- **Newton & Segway**

Failure to establish a brand in a clear category (whether established or new) can send even the strongest products into obscurity. Consider the Segway or Apple’s Newton. These brands entered the market with great products and extraordinary awareness advantage, yet failed to gain consumer interest because they lacked a focused category strategy. The Newton was categorized as a “message pad,” the Segway as a human transporter. What’s a message pad or human transporter? We can see what the products do, but without a category to place them in, it is unclear exactly what problems they were designed to address and how they fit into our lives. This leads to consumer disinterest and marketing failure.



- **Walking Poles**

A European manufacturer of walking poles introduced them in America. They chose the category of “alpine equipment” (alongside ice picks, backpacks, and tents) because that is how customers in Europe (mostly living in and around the Alps) categorized them. However, the US target market was middle-aged women living in the suburbs. They were looking for walking poles in the “personal fitness” category (alongside pilates balls and yoga mats). This mis-positioning created an opportunity for a new maker of walking poles to introduce their poles in the fitness category and swiftly surpass the competing brand even though they were three years late to market.




Checklist: Category

- ☐ Have you verified your category assumptions with your target market?
- ☐ Is your category defined in the language most commonly used by your target?
- ☐ Is your category name the phrase most commonly used by prospects in search engines?
- ☐ Have you used keyword research and trend tools to verify how the category name compares in search?
- ☐ Does your category help the prospect understand what other brands you are comparable to?
- ☐ Does your product have all the features and benefits implied by the category name?
- ☐ Can you attain a leadership position in this category among your target market?
- ☐ If you are creating a new category, do you have a strategy as well as the time and budgets required to establish it?
- ☐ Is your category immediately evident to visitors to your website and other online assets used for customer acquisition?

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Chapter 3

HOW TO WRITE A COMPELLING VALUE PROPOSITION

There is a lot you can say about your brand. However, only one thing can be said first. That one thing should be your value proposition. It should swiftly identify the problem your brand is focused on and how it's solved. Your solution doesn't necessarily need to be unique, but it should be something that is highly relevant to your target and that you are uniquely qualified to deliver on. This should be something that earns you a spot on the prospect's short list. It also defines your brand's priority in serving the market. If you can convince the public that you deliver on this promise, it has a halo effect on all other claims.

For instance, Volvo chose safety as its value proposition and dedicated resources to ensure it maintained leadership in that aspect, which gave credibility to its other claims. No one buys a car for safety alone, nor is Volvo the only safe car, but this proposition gave something relevant for Volvo to be remembered by.

VALUE PROPOSITION BASICS

Objective	Highlights the one or two most enduring attributes the brand stands for and chooses one to lead with.
Question	Answers the prospect's question "Why should I care about your brand?"
Result	Gets you on your ideal prospect's short list by promising to deliver on one or two critical value requirements better than any other brand in your category.
International	Strive for one value proposition you can "own" and be identified with globally without exception.
Top Tip	Since it is a reflection of the higher aspirations of the brand, it should also help employees prioritize how they develop the product.

Value propositions can promise a functional benefit (what it does for your prospect), an emotional benefit (how it makes them feel), or a self-expression benefit (what it makes others feel about them). In fact, there are as many types of value propositions as there are consumer needs. On a cold call, it would be the one thing you say about your offer that keeps your prospects from hanging up. On your website, it should occupy the hero space on the landing page. It should pique people's interest because it is highly relevant and under-addressed in the category.

Your target has value requirements. These are the things they demand from the solution they seek. You can be identical to your competitors in every value aspect, but in order to compete, you must excel in at least one dimension of value that the target seeks. The value requirement(s) where you do (or could) outperform your competitors is where to start looking for your value proposition. It doesn't necessarily need to be unique, is probably not a priority for everyone, and may not always be rational, even in B-to-B purchases. But, your organization will have to be able to get behind it and work at developing your superiority in that area. Ideally, you'll choose an aspect of value that would be difficult or unlikely for competitors to copy too readily.

The mechanics of value

GIVE

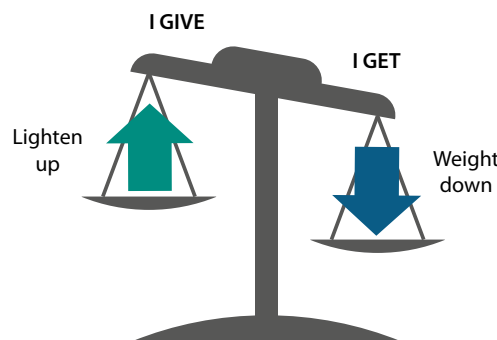
What I think I have to give

- Physical exertion
- Mental exertion
- Risk: Physical, Social, Career, Monetary
- Time
- Resources / Money

GET

What I think I get

- Labor Saving – Physical / Mental
- Amusement / Diversion / Enjoyment
- Security / Health / Well being
- Status: Social / Career
- Self expression
- More Time / Resources / Money



Most people think of the price tag when they hear value. But, value is not a number so much as it a ratio. It can be helpful to think of it as a mental scale used by consumers where “What I get” — “What I give” = Value. The brand that tilts the scale the most to the right wins. That can be done by lightening up the “give” side and/or weighing down the “get” side. But, in any case, the price tag is just one of several factors that can be used to increase perceived value.

In this equation, “What I get” is evaluated in relation to the specific need the prospect has and its priority. For instance, if an individual’s real motivation for buying a new watch is status, then they are likely to weigh the brand name more than specific features. “What I give” is evaluated in terms of the prospect’s resources or tolerances. For example, a well-paid but time-starved executive may weigh the time required to purchase the product much more than the price tag.

The value proposition highlights what has been done to tip these mental scales in your favor by either lightening up the “give” side of the equation or weighing down the “get” side. It is based on perceptions, not absolute truth. How your prospects value the various get-and-give aspects of your offer will, most definitely, be very different from the way you and your team value them. In fact, in many cases, the target will value things about the product that the marketing team never even considered. Best to check with the target first.

Keep the value proposition specific and non-subjective. Anytime you see words like “best” or “superior” or “effective” or “smart” in a value proposition, you should recognize it as shoddy strategy work. The whole purpose of the value proposition is to define exactly how your offer is best, superior, effective, or smart. Be specific. Stand for something. It doesn’t mean that’s all you offer, but it gets you seen and gives your prospect something that matters to remember you by. Here are a few steps to get you started:

7 steps to discovering your brand’s value proposition

1 Survey your competitors

Visit the sites of all main competitors. Look at the messaging and reverse engineer what their value proposition is. Write each down, then use your best judgement to prioritize them according to how well established the proposition is among your prospects and customers. Do any competitors own a word or claim in your prospect’s mind? If so, what is it?

2 Assemble the raw materials

Start with a blank sheet of paper and create a list of all the possible attributes, features, benefits, and other potential selling points for your brand. The only filter to apply at this point is truth: Write down everything that is true, regardless of differentiation, relevance, believability, or sustainability. You should have 25-75 attributes. These are all the things that could be said truthfully on behalf of the brand.

3 Filter your attributes

Now apply the following filters:

A. Differentiation Filter

Arrange your list into the following categories:

- Unique — only your brand can claim this
- Differentiating — only a few brands can or do claim this
- Common — many brands claim this
- Hygiene factors — expected for inclusion in the category

Be ruthlessly honest here, especially with regard to the hygiene factors posing as selling points. Hygiene factors are attributes that are essential to the prospect, but, at the same time, are fairly standard for the category and therefore expected and not noteworthy, e.g. “Our laptop computer comes with

a power cord.” Since people expect to get a power cord with their laptop, it is already communicated by the category. Mentioning this in promotion near the tip of the wedge is redundant and a waste of your most precious communication real estate. The place for this type of information may be on a spec sheet much further back in the communication wedge.

B. Relevance Filter

Next, take the factors that are unique and differentiating for your brand and order them according to which you feel will be most relevant across all your target segments. Which factors would tip the value scales most in your favor?

C. Believability Filter

In the best case scenario, you’ll be able to vividly demonstrate your value proposition with your own classic like the Krazy Glue hard hat spot, Pepsi Challenge, or Timex’s, “It takes a lickin’ and keeps on tickin’ ” campaigns. In any case, be prepared to support your value proposition and position with evidence. It can be factual (e.g. product features) or circumstantial (e.g. celebrity endorsement), but it has to be believable. And, just because it’s true, it doesn’t mean it’s believable. Cross off any attributes that you feel you can’t support or that simply will not be believed by your target.

D. Sustainability Filter

The last check is for sustainability. There’s nothing wrong with flouting short-term advantages while you have them (as long as they have passed through the four filters above). But, be careful about crafting your brand identity around them or becoming too closely associated with them because, if they are short lived, your brand could fade with them. Ideally, your value proposition is crafted around a claim that will maintain its relevance to the target, but also one that you will be able to maintain and defend indefinitely. So, cross off any attributes that are easily copied by competitors or otherwise not sustainable or defensible indefinitely.

New product categories are particularly vulnerable in this regard. That’s because the core benefits of new technologies tend to become hygiene factors as the category begins to mature. Equally challenging are product categories with fast-moving product development cycles, like many medical devices and technology brands. The shelf life of product innovations in these categories can often be measured in weeks.

4 Talk to your target

You should now have a list of several attributes that you have filtered and prioritized according to what you think will be most relevant to your target market. You also have a list of what your competitors claim to be their main

attributes. Time to put both to the test. Have a third party investigate your prospects to:

- a. Confirm the category and who is perceived as the major players in that category.
- b. Write a prioritized wish list of the top 10 factors that prospects want from your category.
- c. Probe to see which factors are felt to be most and least adequately served by their current options.
- d. Rate how each player in the category performs according to the criteria on the wish list.
- e. Only after this, show your list of filtered and prioritized attributes and get feedback.
- f. See which, if any, is most relevant to them and what support would be most convincing.
- g. Probe to see if there are attributes you have missed.

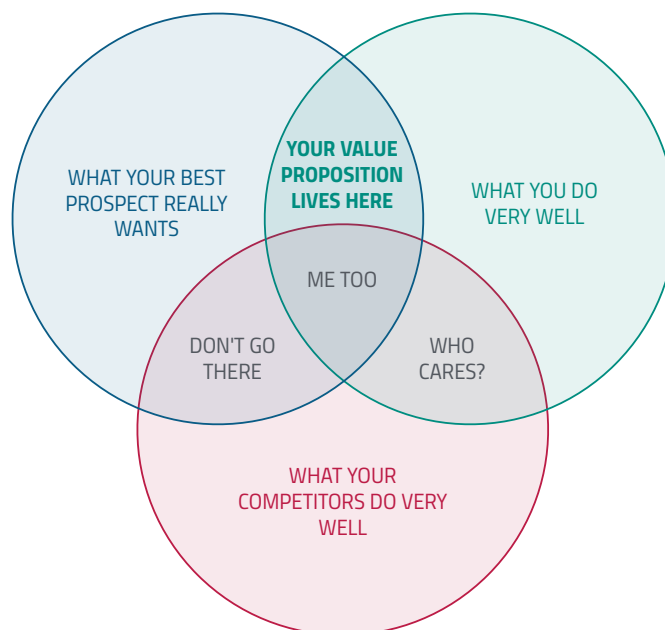
The mechanics of value propositions

In most mature categories, if you apply three factors to a Venn Diagram (1) What your ideal prospect wants from the category, 2) what your brand does, 3) what your competitor brand does), the picture can look rather bleak. Not much room to stand out. But, if you make a simple modification, you will start to see the opportunities for your brand.

Change your factors to:

- 1) What your ideal prospect REALLY wants from the category,
- 2) What your brand can or does VERY WELL
- 3) What your competitor's brand does VERY WELL.

This is the diagram to use when trying to find your unique value proposition.



5 Define your value offer

The results of the target interviews should have narrowed your list right down to what is:

- a. most relevant to your target; and,
- b. most credible for you to claim.

Define how your offer delivers value to the prospect in plain terms. Remember this is a strategy statement, not a tagline or headline. Your value proposition statement will never be seen by the outside world. Don't try to make it fancy, just extremely clear. You can try a template like the one below, but don't be restricted by it. Feel free to color outside the lines.

For ***(your brand's broad target market)*** who ***(statement of main problem your product addresses)***, ***(your brand name)*** excels at ***(statement of main solution you provide)*** because ***(primary support)***.

6 Support your value offer

Now list all the proof you have that directly supports your value proposition. Prioritize the points that your target indicated would be most convincing and/or that are most easily demonstrated. Be selective here. It's better to have three main points that are easy to remember and be known for than to have a bullet-proof list of twenty different support points, of which none will be remembered or associated with your brand. These are the reasons to believe that will be provided to the market.

7 Communicate your value proposition

Your value proposition should jump off the page when a prospect lands on your corporate site's homepage or main page of your product. It should be stated clearly and prominently whenever your brand is presented. It should also be reinforced with the type of content published (and avoided) and the topics you choose to focus on and people you engage with in your online networking efforts. It should also be reflected in the way you choose to profile your brand including the causes you support, the events you sponsor, and the spokespeople and brand ambassadors you select. Your dedication to this topic should shine through all your communication.

Value proposition in action

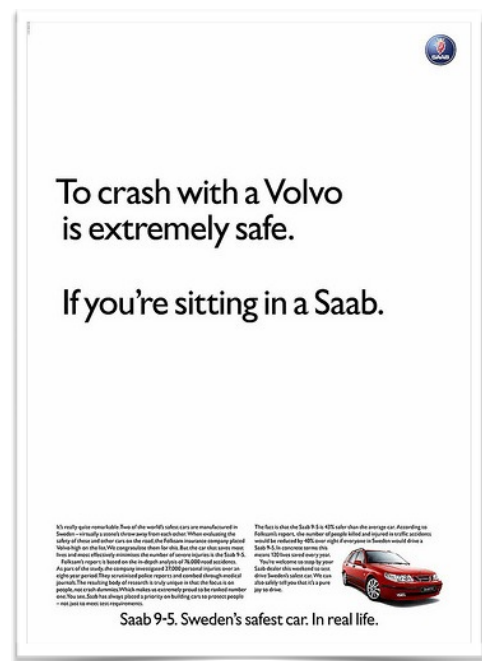
- **Burger King**

McDonalds launched the fast food category in 1948, when they applied production-line principles to the assembly of hamburgers. One by-product of this efficiency was a certain degree of rigidity. McDonald's system did not allow for special orders. Rival Burger King also used the assembly line concept, but theirs was slightly different in that it accommodated special orders. Research showed this struck a nerve with Americans. So, in 1974, they adopted a value proposition to leverage against McDonald's weakness: fast food made to order. This was expressed in the tag line "Have it your way," which they've stuck with for forty years.



- **Saab**

For most of its adult life, Saab Automobile was a premium brand in search of a value proposition. The fact that they never found one contributed to the company going out of business in 2011. But, in the late 1990's, an independent report was published indicating that Saab automobiles were, according to insurance company records, safer than Volvos. The knee-jerk reaction among many on the Saab team was to communicate this point aggressively in an attempt to steal some thunder from Volvo. Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed and the study was used to support Saab's safety claims further down the communication wedge, but not as the brand's main focus. Why? Because at that point Volvo had done such a great job driving home the safety message that Saab claiming to be safer simply wasn't credible — even if there was a study that said it was true. Unseating a



brand's value proposition can be done, but it's an expensive proposition if the brand in your crosshairs is as strong as Volvo and your only ammunition is a single study.

- **Ericsson Phones**

When mobile phones first went mainstream in the 1990's, the biggest concern was simply being able to make a call because there were so few towers. In response, mobile handset producer Ericsson focused their value proposition on engineering to deliver a reliable signal. That worked well for a few years, but then good reception became a hygiene factor as the category matured. Ericsson didn't monitor customer preferences effectively and kept focusing their product development and marketing communication efforts on better engineering long after the market had moved on to a new value battleground: Better design.

Nokia had anticipated this with a design-centered value proposition and decimated Ericsson's global leadership in mobile handsets. History would repeat itself in 2007, when the iPhone was introduced with a value proposition built around internet connectivity and software. The public shifted their value requirements in Apple's favor, but Nokia hadn't monitored customer preferences effectively and remained focused on conventional telephony attributes. Nokia was left in the dust.





Checklist: Value Proposition

- ☐ Is your value proposition focused on a specific problem?
- ☐ Does your value proposition offer a specific solution?
- ☐ Does your value proposition imply a specific target?
- ☐ Is the problem you claim to solve felt acutely by your target?
- ☐ Is your value proposition free of superlatives, like best, smart, superior, etc.?
- ☐ Have you verified your value assumptions with your target market?
- ☐ Does your value proposition work globally?
- ☐ Is your value proposition true, relevant, differentiating, believable, and sustainable?
- ☐ Does it address a need that the target perceives to be underserved in the category?
- ☐ Have you defined your proposition in plain terms that non-experts could understand?
- ☐ Can you support your value proposition convincingly?
- ☐ Is your value proposition unavoidable on your brand's main landing page?

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Chapter 4

HOW TO DEFINE A COMPETITIVE POSITION FOR YOUR BRAND

Your category and value proposition define what your brand is. Position defines what your brand is in relation to all the other brands in your category. Positioning is typically expressed as an aspiration that defines the words and sentiments you would like your prospect to use in differentiating your brand from others in the category. It should frame your argument, making sense of all of your selling points. For instance, when SAS had established its value proposition for on-time performance and global coverage (although it lagged in price and other areas), it positioned itself as the Businessman's Airline.



POSITION BASICS	
Objective	Highlights a common theme (red thread) that binds your total offer and helps your ideal prospect differentiate your brand from others in the category.
Question	Answers the prospect's question "How do you compare to my other options?"
Result	Helps you compete on the short list for purchase.
International	You are positioned in relation to other options on the market and your ideal prospect's perceptions of them. Therefore, strive for one position per target segment, which means your position should be assessed, at least, for each country your brand
Top Tip	Since positioning defines how you wish your target to differentiate you from competitors, its success depends on how accurately you have defined your target and how well you monitor their perceptions of all brands in the category.

We said you can only say one thing first. But what about the rest of your offer? Surely communicating your brand's other attributes could help create a favorable brand bias. The position lets you do this in a highly compact fashion. The desired position should build off your value proposition to infer superior value across the wider spectrum of requirements held by the target. It should, therefore, preclude the need to detail each and every feature and benefit. For instance, if a chain of gas stations positioned itself as the gas station for traveling families, it would create the expectation of clean bathrooms with changing tables, microwaves for baby bottles, and safe, well-lit facilities, without necessarily having to spell all these things out.

Don't confuse aspiration with reality



A brand's position is defined by its prospects and customers, not by its owners. Yet, ask a marketer what their brand's position is and nine times out of ten times they will read you a line from their brand strategy. That may be where they would like their brand to be positioned, but in no way answers the question you asked. The only way for a marketer to know how their brand is positioned is to survey their target market. The rest is just wishful thinking.

Imagine the confusion that would ensue on a sailing journey if the navigator used the current location and the desired destination interchangeably. That's what happens inside marketing organizations that state their positioning aspirations in place of their actual position. To help avoid this confusion, define these four dimensions for your brand and use them with your team:

- Reality: the objective truth about what the product or company behind the brand is and is capable of.
- Profile: how you portray that product or company brand to the target market.
- Perception: how the target market perceives/positions your product or company brand.
- Aspiration: how you would like the target to perceive/position your product or company brand to provide a strategic advantage.

If you want a formula for sustainable positioning, define and align the four elements above. The end game is this: What your brand is (reality), what you say it is (profile), which is how people perceive it (perception), which is how you were hoping they would perceive it (aspiration) in order to compete more effectively. This is Brand Nirvana, an ideal state that is never actually reached, but one that strong brands perpetually strive for.

The difference between desired position and value proposition can often seem academic since both help define your brand's offer. Although there may be cases where the two are the same (i.e. the value proposition is used as the

position), they address two different concerns prospects have as they take the first steps down the path to purchase.

Value Proposition vs. Position

VALUE PROPOSITION	POSITION
<p>What are you good at? Answers the prospect's question "Why should I care about your brand?"</p> <p>Specific: Focuses narrowly on one value where the brand delivers exceptionally well and that the brand actively supports.</p>	<p>How are you different? Answers the prospect's question "How do you compare to my other options?"</p> <p>General: Focuses on the bigger picture of the competitive ecosystem in which your value proposition lives. Puts your value proposition in a broader context that is easy for your target to understand and believe.</p>
<p>Global: Created in response to core category needs shared across your target market world-wide.</p> <p>Fixed: Core needs change but not that quickly, so the value proposition has a shelf-life range from the mid- to long-term.</p>	<p>Local: Created in response to perceptions target segments have about other options available in their specific market.</p> <p>Fluid: Perceptions change with each change in the market so the position has a shelf-life range from the short to mid-term.</p>
<p>Nurtured by Product Development: Value Proposition is something real to the extent that it can be developed, improved upon, and measured in some way.</p>	<p>Nurtured by Marketing Communication. Position is a construct that can be reinforced and clarified, but it is more of a theme than a tangible thing.</p>
<p>How: Helps the target market understand how the brand serves.</p> <p>Head: Value propositions tend to be (but are not always) based on a concrete benefit to be expected.</p>	<p>Who: Helps the target market understand who the brand serves.</p> <p>Heart: Positioning statements tend to be (but are not always) based on empathy and inclusion in a select group.</p>

Every brand that is considered by a prospect will be positioned by them. Your prospects will combine all their information, feelings, and perceptions about your brand to sum up the totality of your offer and differentiate it relative to other options in the category. That will be your position and it will weigh heavily in the final purchase decision. The only question is, to what degree do you influence that process? To do that, a clear statement of the desired position you want your brand to occupy in your target's mind needs to be drafted, then reinforced through your communication every chance you get. Below are a few steps you can use to help you define a valid position for your brand.

These steps are very similar to the process used to determine your value proposition. And, like the value proposition, you will most likely find that your target's perceptions will differ from country to country. Be sure to include the different major markets you serve when surveying competitors and interviewing the target.

6 steps to creating a differentiating position for your brand

1 Survey your competitors

Visit the sites of all main competitors for each of your major markets. Look at their messaging and try to reverse engineer what each one's position is. Write down their position and make a note if you feel the position has or is likely to gain any traction in the market.

2 Develop a hypothesis

You don't create positions so much as you anticipate and occupy them. Start by looking at the positions occupied by your competitors in each major market. Have they missed any? Are there any unclaimed positions within the category that would be relevant to both your value proposition and your target segment? Make a list of possible positions for each major market you serve and see how they fit. Arrive at a short list of two or three for each major market that are defensible and feel right for your brand. It's fine if the position is the same in every market, but you should not set out to make it that way from the start. Brands are positioned in relation to your target's beliefs and perceptions, along with the other options available to them. These are typically different from one country to the next, therefore, a brand's position is often different from country to country.

3 Talk to your target

You should now have a list of several possible positions that highlight not only

your value propositions, but also your entire brand offer. You also have a list of what you think are your competitors' positions in each market. Time to put both to the test with a third party who can investigate your target to:

- a. Confirm the category and who prospects perceive as the major players in that category.
- b. Describe how prospects distinguish / position the various brands in their own words.
- c. Describe how prospects distinguish / position your brand in their own words.
- d. Arrive at a description prospects feel best distinguishes your brand.
- e. Assess and discuss the appeal of your list of potential positions.
- f. Assess and discuss the believability of your list of potential positions.

4 Define your position

The results of the target interviews should have provided insight into what positions are relevant to your target. Your own assessment should have indicated what areas you can excel in. Combine these to define your position in plain terms. Remember, this is a strategy statement, not a tagline or headline. Like other strategy statements, your desired position will never be seen by the outside world. Your priority is clarity and accuracy, so don't try to make it fancy. To ensure a good fit with your value proposition, you can try to write your position as an extension of it, using the template below. However, if you find the template too restrictive, simply use in your own words.

For ***(your brand's broad target market)*** who ***(statement of main problem you address)*** ***(your brand name)*** excels at ***(statement of main solution you provide)*** because ***(primary support)***.

Like ***(three leading competitors)***, we ***(main point of parity)***.

But unlike them, we ***(main point of differentiation)***.

Therefore, in/for ***(specify market segment)***, we would argue that we are the only ***(position name)*** brand in the category.

5 Support your position

Next, for each market's position, list all the proof you have that directly supports your position. Prioritize the points that your target in that market indicated would be most convincing. These will be used to communicate the position in a believable manner.

6 Communicate your position

Positions are built on communication. Brands communicate in thousands of

different ways, from the advertising and packaging to customer service and pricing plans to the way corporate offices are decorated. Your position should form the backdrop against which all your communication takes place. It should define your tone and manner and be developed into a communication theme that frames all your communication and your relationship with the market. It should be reinforced with the way you communicate and interact with your online audience. It should also be reflected in the way you choose to profile your brand.

Position in action

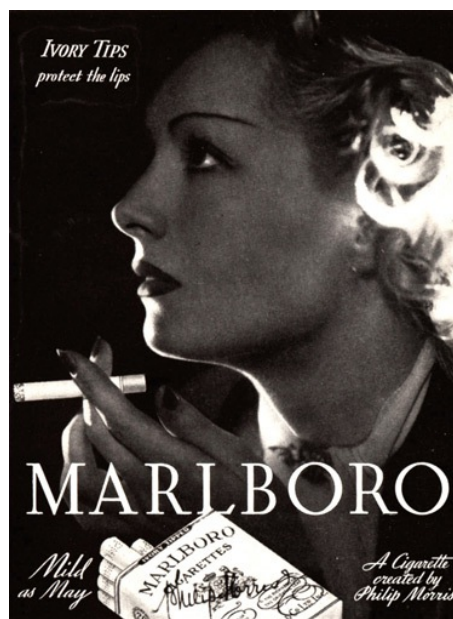


Photo: http://tobacco.stanford.edu/tobacco_main/index.php

- **Marlboro**

A good example of the fluidity of a brand position is Philip Morris's cigarette brand Marlboro. The cigarette was originally launched in 1924 with the value proposition of mildness, supported by a filter, which was a new innovation at the time. It was designed to make the smoke milder on the palate. This had much more appeal to women than to men. So Philip Morris positioned their mild, filtered cigarette as a niche brand for woman and reinforced this through advertising and packaging considered feminine at the time. They even colored the filter red so that lipstick marks would not show up. In the 1950's, cigarettes were first linked with lung cancer. This cast filtered cigarettes in a whole new light because they were perceived as safer. Given the threat of cancer, many men were receptive to switching to filtered cigarettes but did not want to be perceived as smoking a woman's cigarette. So, Philip Morris repositioned Marlboro as a very masculine brand. They didn't change the cigarette, just redesigned the packaging and other brand communication. The new advertising campaign featured the

iconic cowboy figure. After thirty years on the market as a woman's cigarette, a change of position catapulted the brand from less than 1% of the US cigarette market to the fourth biggest selling brand in just twelve months.



Photo: http://www.hemmings.com/hmn/stories/2011/04/01/hmn_feature18.html

- **Volvo**

Volvo decided to be best in class with regard to safety. That's its value proposition globally. This has influenced product development as well as other things. When selling station wagons to people living in affluent suburbs of Boston, the brand built off its value proposition to position itself as a "premium family car." That market had no shortage of premium import brands or family-oriented automobile brands. But, there were no premium family car brands. In Sweden, where the brand is far less exotic/premium, it still maintained its value proposition for safety, but used that as an indication of how well built the car was, allowing it to be positioned as a "durable family car."

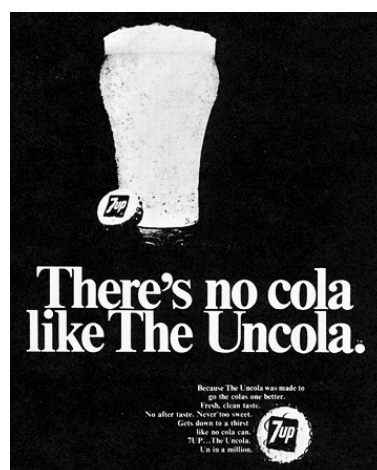


Photo: <http://www.donch.com/images/Portfolio/7up5.jpg>

- **7-Up**

Positioning can provide a powerful empathy magnet to attract new users and fuel loyalty. A good example of this is a classic positioning campaign

that was run by the lemon-lime soda 7-Up. It's a challenge to distinguish any brand in the crowded lemon-lime soda category against competitors like Spite, Shasta, Slice, Mountain Dew, Fanta, to say nothing of store and local brands. However, in America in the late 1960's, there was a strong movement that was decidedly anti-establishment. In the world of soda, cola, and specifically Coke, was the establishment brand in the pin-striped suit. It was also the largest soft drink segment and 7-Up wanted to take some market share from it. So, in 1967, adapting to the spirit of the times, 7-Up positioned itself as the anti-establishment soda, adopting the position as "the uncola." The concept of the uncola was expressed with a range of advertising campaigns appealing to the nonconformist in everyone. It positioned the brand as the most daring and most in-tune with pop culture, both important attributes in the category. 7-Up even took Coke's classic cola glass design and inverted it to create their own uncola glass.




Checklist: Positioning

- ☐ Is your desired position relevant to your target?
- ☐ Does your desired position clearly differentiate you from other brands in the category?
- ☐ Have you verified these assumptions with your target in all major markets?
- ☐ Does your position provide fertile ground for promotion and communication?
- ☐ Does your position help your best prospects self-identify?
- ☐ Is your desired position relevant to your brand?
- ☐ If it's a company brand does the position make sense with the product brands?
- ☐ If it's a product brand does it fit logically under the corporate brand umbrella?
- ☐ Have you investigated and adapted your position for each major target segment and market?
- ☐ Have you defined your desired position in plain terms that non-experts could understand?
- ☐ Have you made a plan to focus all of your brand communication around your position?
- ☐ Is your position clear and evident through the design of your website and other online assets?
- ☐ Is your position reflected in your content marketing and online networking?

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A decorative header featuring a teal geometric pattern of overlapping hexagons and polygons.

Chapter 5

HOW TO BUILD CREDIBILITY AND TRUST WITH YOUR BRAND PROFILE

You don't get a second chance to make a first impression. But, did you know that people form that first impression of you within just one-tenth of a second of meeting you? That may seem rather hasty until you consider that visitors to your website only require half the time. That's right. It takes the average person one-twentieth of a second to decide if a web page they land on has anything to offer them.

Decisions made that fast are not based on clever copy or well-crafted value propositions. They are based solely on profile: the look and feel of the page. Not what you say, but how you say it. It's immediate, it's visceral, and it matters. Although it is the fourth chapter in this guide, it's actually the first thing that matters when introducing your brand to new prospects. If things don't seem right within 50 milliseconds you have created an enormous barrier in your prospect's path to purchase.

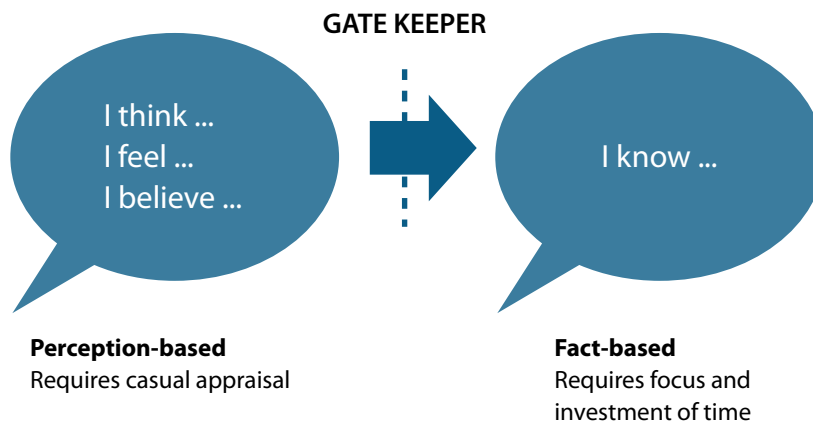
Your brand profile includes graphic design, but also encompasses all the other decisions you and your communication agency make as to how your brand will appear, sound, behave, and interact online. In addition to your web presence, brand profile is expressed through everything else associated with your brand: your office decor, your brand's values and preferences, the causes it supports, its taste in music and the arts, the way the receptionist answers the phone, your packaging, and your policies for returns. It takes a lot of diligence to create the same impression at every touchpoint. But the reason it's worth it is because that's exactly what it takes to build trust and confidence among prospects.

PROFILE BASICS	
Objective	Reinforce the brand's identity and make it easy to recognize and remember through its appearance, as well as all other relevant senses.
Question	Answers the prospect's question "Is this brand real and genuine?"
Result	Builds credibility, trust, and self-identification with the brand.
International	Your profile may be modified to meet and accommodate local positioning needs, but the core profile elements, such as logo type, logo, colors, fonts, graphic style, tone, manner, etc., should be identical across all the countries where your brand is
Top Tip	Make sure you have a user-friendly, graphic profile available to anyone working with the brand. Offer it online and as a downloadable PDF. Ensure that it covers needs that are particular to online, such as alternate web fonts and avatars.

At every step in the path to purchase, your brand is constantly being evaluated according to what it says and also how it says it. The "how" can reveal a lot to a prospect who is hungry for clues as to what it would be like to do business with you, but is on the lookout for discrepancies that may reveal greater inaccuracies in how the brand represents itself. The more integrated your brand profile is with the message you are delivering with your category, value proposition, and position, then the easier it will be for prospects to get their head around your offer and trust you enough to try.

For many hard-boiled business types, this can all seem too soft to matter. But, the truth is these soft issues are much easier for the brain to assess and so opinions are formed around them quite swiftly. If enough of these passive impressions are negative, the prospect is unlikely to invest the time and effort it takes to actively learn about your brand.

Why soft issues matter: Selective Attention



Unlike the other topics covered in this guide, we can't prove step-by-step instructions on how to build your specific profile. But we can provide some helpful guidelines starting with a written brand strategy.

6 steps to creating an honest and compelling brand story

1 CODIFY YOUR BRAND

If all touchpoints are meant to reflect the same brand profile, then it only makes sense that the elements that make up the brand profile would be committed to paper. Whether it's with a simple brand brief or more in-depth brand codification tool make sure you document all your brand's moving parts. Aside from helping you communicate your brand, this exercise will often reveal flaws in your brand logic that can be fixed, as well as gaps that need to be filled. Our brand brief covers a dozen essential elements like category, value proposition, position, target, and competitor analysis. Our full brand codification tool covers over fifty items. Whatever you use, just make sure to commit the essence of your brand to paper and have it scrutinized for a sanity check by someone outside your team. This is the skeleton upon which your brand story will be fleshed out.

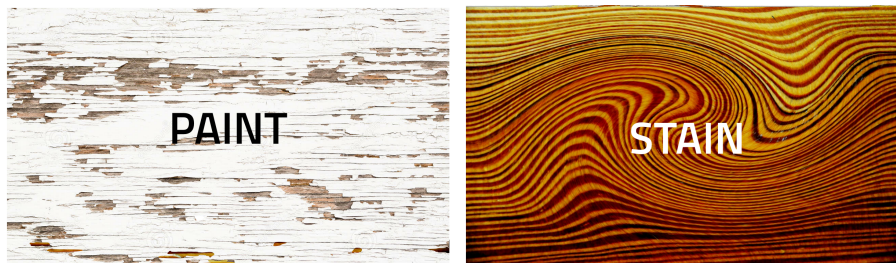
The brand codification process typically involves defining and aligning elements like:

- Target audience / segments
- Target beliefs & perceptions
- Target options / competitors
- Category
- Value proposition
- Position
- Speaking points
- Personality
- Selling points
- Tone & manner
- Visual profile
- Backstory
- Brand persona
- Brand architecture
- Vision, mission, goals

2 REVEAL YOUR BRAND STORY

How did your brand start? Who founded it? What were the founder's stories? Where did the brand originate? What era was it founded in? What idea or principle was the company conceived around? What obstacles were overcome? What mistakes were made? What accomplishments achieved? What forces shaped the values of the company? Questions like these are the basis for your brand story.

As you develop your brand's unique story, remember that there are two types of brand stories: painted and stained.



For the painted brand story, you simply take the image that you think the public wants and you cover the brand with it. This isn't difficult to do. But, it is rarely original, it's easy for competitors to copy, and it tends to peel away with time. That's why painted brand stories are not recommended for premium brands.

For the stained brand story, you study the grain of the brand. Then you apply the right stain to reveal what is already there, just in a better light. This requires more craft, but is also more genuine, believable, and enduring. Duffy Agency works with our customers to create the latter type of brand stories that are original, true, and engaging.

In this manner, the brand story is not fabricated so much as it is revealed. While it is true that every brand has a story to reveal, that doesn't make those stories equally engaging, compelling, or believable. For that to happen, the story must be crafted.

3 CRAFT YOUR BRAND STORY

Crafting a brand story involves more than simply documenting the company history. True brand storytelling involves fully developing the brand's character without straying into fiction. This includes the brand personality, back story, persona, voice, mannerisms, vision, mission, goals, ethics, values, tastes, tone, look, feel, and behavior. As Harry McCann famously phrased it, "Truth well told."

Having a three-dimensional brand persona has become more important with the development of our digital culture over the past decade. Before that time, brands could get away with being one-dimensional because marketers had much more control over how the brand would be exposed to the public. Typically, exposure was in short, meticulously controlled and choreographed glimpses through TV spots or print ads. Communication was one-way and brands were not expected to speak much. All this has changed. Today, brands are online 24/7 and are expected to interact and communicate non-stop. And, not just delivering their sales pitch, but also reacting to real consumers in the real world.

**"Every brand has a unique story to tell. It just needs to be
coaxed to the surface for all to see and admire."**

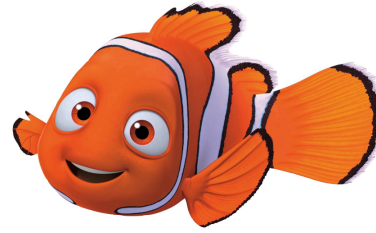
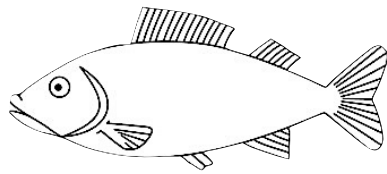


Photo: frenchantiques.blogspot.com

A fish that
gets lost

VS.

NEMO



Most traditional brand models were not created to deal with this level of hyper exposure. As a result, many brands languish online failing to engage. Flat brand strategies built around analog brand models prevent these brands from interacting in a manner that today's prospects find convincing. In these cases, a digital brand strategist can develop the brand strategy to add the extra depth and voice that is required online today. This isn't about changing the brand strategy so much as developing what's there to better meet the new challenges and opportunities brands face online.

In that sense, brand development in marketing today is a lot like character development in film-making. It starts with a core idea that in itself may be rather generic or just plain boring, like "a fish that gets lost." Then, the story is developed and brought to life with details, form, voice, personality, drama, and behavior. This is challenging work that requires skill. But, the end result is a story that the audience can recognize, relate to, remember, and believe in, like the story of Nemo.

4 OPERATIONALIZE YOUR BRAND STORY

Once your brand story is brought to life, the next job is ensuring that the story is communicated to and understood by everyone on staff. This is important because it will be up to them to reflect this story every day in their jobs. This step of bridging the brand story from paper to operations is a challenge for all companies. Our advice, after decades of experience working with scores of businesses, is to operationalize the brand using a bottom up rather than top-down approach.

With the top-down approach, senior management decides what the brand means for all the employees, and then tells them what to do in order to accurately reflect the brand. But, since the small group making the rules can't possibly know all the intricacies of everyone's job, this approach results in a rather superficial brand profile. Just as important, it fails to engage the knowledge and interest of the rank-and-file employee (which is essential for the brand to really take within the organization). For organizations looking to

create more meaningful and enduring change, there is a better way: Bottom up.

With the bottom-up approach, the brand story is taught top-down, but how that story will be reflected in day-to-day operations is defined from the bottom up. Managers are trained in the brand story, including the brand's values and vision. Then, they are asked to suggest ten measurable ways they could better reflect the company's values in their day-to-day work. Brand strategists assess and discuss their answers with managers to ensure proper interpretation. Then, the managers are tasked to teach the brand story to the people that report to them, ask the same questions, and assess and discuss the employees answers. This process is repeated from the top to the bottom of the company. Each employee's answers are cataloged in a database.

Together, these answers constitute the operational foundation for communicating the brand on a day-to-day basis throughout the company. The answers also:

- a. provide a receipt that the employees understood the message and how it relates to their jobs
- b. engage employees with the brand by having them internalize, interpret, and provide input to the project as it relates to their jobs
- c. communicate senior management's commitment to the brand story
- d. provide measurable criteria to rate the company's success at bridging the brand into operations
- e. provide a basis for assessment on how well individual employees are "walking the walk" with regard to living the brand.

4 COMMUNICATE YOUR BRAND STORY

Only after the story is internalized and, more importantly, operationalized should it be communicated to external stakeholders like customers, prospects, partners, and vendors. Of course, communication is more than the company's advertising rhetoric. The brand story should shine through all aspects of the brand experience at every touchpoint online and off.



But, if we focus on online, a brand's graphic profile and, specifically, its web design and user interface design will speak volumes to prospects in a split second. Their importance cannot be overstated with regard to online marketing. Beyond that, an obvious channel for communicating brand values is through the various types of online content the brand produces. A sign that your brand is not adequately developed is if your team struggles for content ideas for apps or to fill blogs, Facebook, and Twitter streams, as well as Instagram and Pinterest boards. With a well-developed brand, you'll find an abundance of ideas jumping out from the strategy.

Care should be taken to maintain the brand profile over time. Many elements of the profile, particularly graphic design elements, may need to be changed or updated over time. On a personal level, this would be like an individual changing hairstyle or clothing over time. These things can change, but we wouldn't expect radical changes in an individual's personality or history. By the same means, the core elements of a brand's profile, such as its personality and story should be timeless. Once these core elements are established, stakeholders will expect:

- Continuity — same personality reflected across all touchpoints
- Consistency — same personality over time

Be sure not to disappoint them.

5 DON'T OVERLOOK TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Okay, so far we have touched on profiling the brand by ensuring there is a convincing brand story. But, there are other less creative aspects to brand profiling that, although technical, are every bit as important.

These are the nuts and bolts of your brand's online presence, which are often an afterthought for marketers, but are on the front lines with regard to the prospect's experience of the brand. These include things like whether your brand's website is optimized for mobile or not, whether it is ADA/508 compliant, its load speed, and linking. It also includes site navigation and overall user experience. How your brand ranks in search is also important. It is difficult to convince prospects that you lead your category if you don't lead in search results.

Expectations with regard to online execution are constantly raising. Prospects used to be very forgiving with regard to production quality online (remember those Common Craft explainer videos that were all the rage five years ago), but that is rapidly being displaced with expectation of quality comparable with the local TV station. Same goes for content in general.

From the social platforms your brand engages on to the production quality of its content, right down to the load speed of your servers, digital details shape the perception of your brand in very powerful ways. It's worth auditing them regularly to ensure your brand is up to snuff.

6 GET PERSPECTIVE

Be sure that you base your brand's profile on your strategy as opposed to the artistic whims of a web designer. And, be sure to identify the key assumptions that the profile is based on. All strategies are based on assumptions about the market, most of which are untested. The more you vet these assumptions, the more you reduce the risk of failure.

Having a third party validate your assumptions with the target is an excellent idea. You may know your brand and your market better than any outsider, but the outsider has one essential ingredient you don't have: perspective. Without that, you're really operating in the dark. This is particularly important when marketing over borders. It may add to your timeline and budget, but it could cost your brand a thousand times this investment if you guess wrong on the target's behalf.

Perspective can also help ensure that your brand message is being expressed consistently across all touchpoints. Marketers tend to focus a disproportional amount of attention on brand communication via promotional activities like websites and advertising. However, prospects today form perceptions of brands from the other end of the spectrum, by researching your product and company online via third-party sites. In this networked marketplace, the opinions of friends, colleagues, and trusted review sites are far more influential than a brand's marketing communication. It's important to use a tool to monitor online mentions (buzz) about your brand and competitors.

BRAND PROFILE IN ACTION

- **Glassing**

A brand profile that attracts attention is great, but not when it creates obstacles further down the road. Few examples communicate this better than this campaign for Glassing, a premium eye-wear brand. These sophomoric ads communicate little about the brand other than they have

hired a very green creative team who probably only speak English as a second language (bad puns are the calling card of copywriters developing campaigns in languages other than their own). Attention grabbing? Yes, but for all the wrong reasons (unless you are selling to six-year old boys).



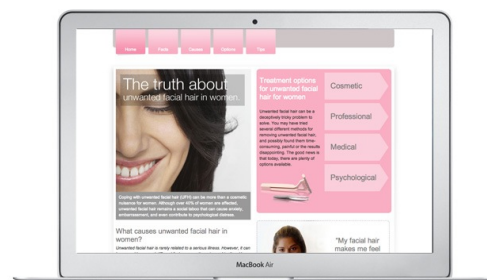
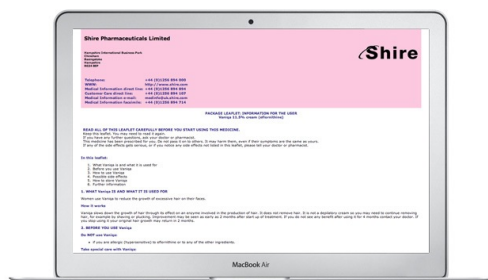
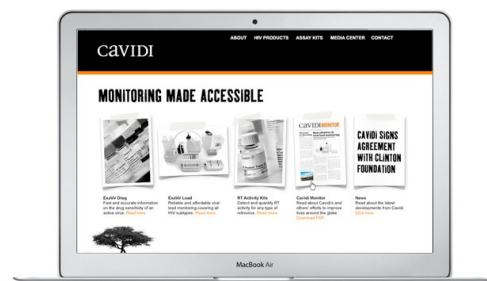
Glassing: Premium eyewear. Unfortunate profiling.

• First Impressions

As we've already said, brand profile is more than your website design. However looking at a few online brand makeovers Duffy Agency has done recently, you can start to see what a difference a brand's profile can make when it comes to making that first impression online. In each of these cases, the brand's design not only lacked confidence, but it also obscured the position, value proposition, and category of these brands.

Before

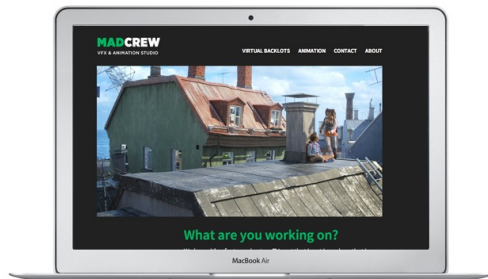
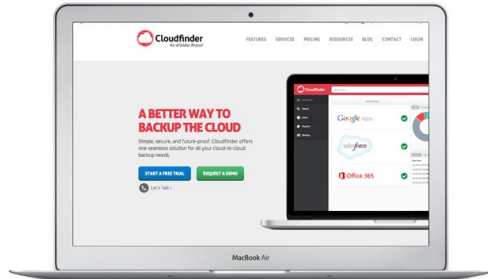
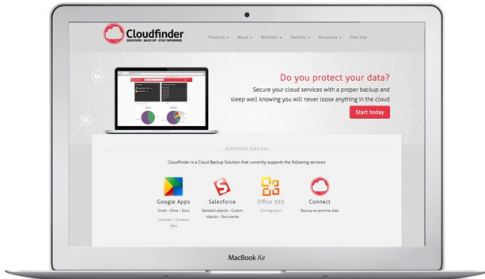
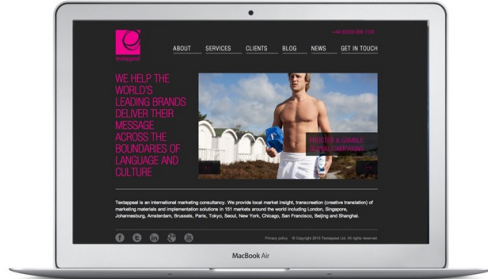
After



Before



After





Checklist: Brand Profile

- ☐ Have you codified and documented your brand?
- ☐ Have you written your brand's back-story?
- ☐ Have you documented the facts surrounding your brand and how it was founded?
- ☐ Have you documented your brand's personality traits, values, and vision?
- ☐ Have you crafted all of the above into a compelling brand story?
- ☐ Have you based your brand profile on your broader brand strategy?
- ☐ Have you verified the assumptions in your strategy with your target in all major markets?
- ☐ Have you trained your staff in the brand story and received their feedback on how to implement it in day-to-day operations?
- ☐ Is your brand profile truthful and authentic?
- ☐ Is your brand profile differentiating and competitive?
- ☐ Have you checked the various technical aspects of your online presence to ensure they also reflect your brand values?
- ☐ Do you monitor online buzz about your brand to see how well it correlates with the profile you are trying to project in the market?
- ☐ Have you used a third party to assess your brand profile in comparison to competitors?

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CONCLUSION

Creating a sharper, more relevant focus to your brand communication means your message will penetrate faster, easier, and more effectively than your competitors'. That means online that translates readily into increased engagement and sales. But after you succeed with the four steps (category, value proposition, position, and profile) outlined in this document there is one last thing you'll need to succeed: a method to maintain the focus you've worked so hard to create.



IMAGE BY ANDRÉS DÖR

One of the primary tasks of strategic marketing, online or off, is helping brands focus both their message and their target audience. It's a process of elimination that requires ruthlessly cutting the extraneous, irrelevant, and me-too until you are left with the few parts that actually differentiate your offer and matter to your target. But that means making decisions. And, that

means taking risks, after all what if you choose the wrong thing to focus on? And that makes a lot of marketers anxious. As Pontus Staunstrup pointed out in a recent post on the subject, "A key aspect of strategic development is that it forces us to make — and commit to — decisions. ... To many managers, this is a frightening prospect." So, in many cases they simply don't do it. Worse still, they rationalize their unwillingness to focus with faux-focus or (fauxus, for short).

It starts with the marketing manager agreeing to the brand's category, value proposition, desired position, and profile. Then, over time, they begin to lose their resolve. Sometimes it is because they did choose the wrong value proposition or position. But far more often, it is because nature hates focus almost as much as it hates a vacuum. People outside the marketing function who don't understand the necessity of focus start contributing their varied opinions.

The brand manager tries to accommodate these different views by "developing" the strategy. This means adding novel items like "Key Message," "USP," "Core Value," "Principle Attribute," "Lead Selling Point," etc. Most of these are euphemisms for "alternate value propositions." Before you know it, the brand communication architecture is a crowded smorgasbord of positioning possibilities and reasons to buy. The brand manager will rationalize the inclusion of all the extraneous elements based on the fact that every extra bit and bob has been given an important-sounding label. To the non-marketer, this looks like a focused strategy. The rest of us see it for what it is: fauxus.

This guide provides brand managers with a conceptual framework and step-by-step advice to focus their brand offer online. Duffy Agency has found this approach will do more for building audience, driving engagement, and bottom-line sales than hopping from one tactic de jour to the next. But, the approach outlined in this document cannot work in companies who fail to make a clear distinction between risk avoidance and risk management. Marketing is an attempt to predict the future. Risk is inherent in that endeavor and, therefore, needs to be embraced. We can mitigate this risk greatly with research. But, data and insight will only take a brand so far. At one point, marketers must use that input to make a choice and focus. That's what risk management is all about: Accepting that you'll never have perfect information, but striving to reduce the gap in your understanding so that your leap of faith is as short as possible given your resources. Ironically, taking intelligent risks regularly is the lowest-risk strategy for managing any brand.

The other alternative is risk avoidance. Managers who avoid risk use fauxus to give the appearance of being decisive without actually making any decisions.

On the surface, choosing not to focus the brand message (being everything to everyone) appeals to common sense as the safest way to proceed, i.e., “casting a broader net.” But, a marketer who avoids risk is like a lifeguard who avoids water. They both pose a great risk to any person/brand under their supervision. Avoiding risk for brands means keeping the message either me-too or broad. Either choice cripples the brand’s ability to distinguish, differentiate, and penetrate crowded markets with a message. Online this results in low brand engagement, and lack of affinity and advocacy.

The tendency to avoid risk rather than embrace and manage it is not necessarily a character flaw. It can be a learned behavior in corporate environments, where risk is discouraged and failure punished. Over time, this type of environment can turn even the best brand manager into a bland manager. In such cases, corporate survival trumps marketing strategy and the bland manager winds up making decisions based on what’s best for their career rather than what’s best for shareholders. The real problem is that the best marketers will shun these types of companies and their marketing departments will become magnets for aqua-phobic lifeguards.



So, the first step after focusing your brand is to be sure the person in charge of the brand is capable of managing risk and understands that he or she is expected to take intelligent risks regularly, even if that means occasionally failing. Steve Hunton provides a nice overview on the subject in his [Introduction to Risk Management](#). It's important that senior management provides an environment, at least in the marketing department, that encourages and supports intelligent risk taking. Conversely, risk avoidance

should be the trait that is openly disparaged. It should be called out and punished with the same vigor we usually reserve for foolish risk-taking with the brand.

The steps covered in this guide are a lot easier by comparison. If followed, they will result in one focused message that cuts through the clutter online to engage the right target market and trigger sales and brand advocacy.

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About

THE AUTHORS

This guide was written by the folks at Duffy Agency, a value-based, digital marketing agency specializing in helping international brands.

Founded in 2001, Duffy Agency is a part of TAAN Worldwide (www.TAAN.org). We have offices in Malmö, Sweden, and Boston, USA, with 60 affiliated TAAN offices in major markets across six continents. Like conventional digital agencies, we create websites, apps, and online creative campaigns. But before we do that work, we provide strategic brand development, digital strategy, and planning. We also follow through with web presence management and/or training to ensure that our work produces a business result. Why? Because for many of our clients we are paid for the results we produce, not the time we spend. This value-based approach aligns our financial interests and provides an exhilarating and effective working relationship.

Duffy Agency has worked with hundreds of international brands in over 45 different countries to help them achieve their marketing goals through a combination of sound brand strategy and online marketing skills. Our approach removes silos and gets all online activities (e.g. websites, social, content, email, advertising) pulling in the same direction. This helps our brands grow and engage their online audience faster and more cost-effectively.

There's plenty more we could tell you, so if this sounds like it may be useful for your brand, get in touch. Just google us for more details, or send an email to info@duffy.agency and one of our partners will eagerly engage with you.

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