



Identity: Aligning Positioning and Messaging for Clear Communication

The strongest brands have at their core a clear, succinct expression of the brand's positioning, supported by a portfolio of messages that align with that positioning.

Brand Positioning Defined

A brand positioning is the conceptual place you want to own in the target customers mind — the **benefits** you want them to think of when they think of your brand

Classic positioning examples include Volvo and “Safety,” Crest and “Cavity Protection,” and Miller Lite’s dual benefits of “Great Taste. Less Filling.” The chart below shows alternative positioning strategies, including sample taglines intended to capture the essence of the brand:

Alternative Positioning Strategies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Position and own the category benefit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Volvo: Safety - Miller Lite: Great taste, less filling - Disney: Magic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Position the product and the consumer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - U.S. Army: Be all you can be - Budweiser: For all you do, this Bud's for you - Pepsi: Pepsi generation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Position how the company does business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Burger King: Have it your way - United Air Lines: The friendly skies of United - WalMart: Always the lowest price 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Position against the competition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avis: We're #2. We try harder - Seven-Up: The Un-cola - Apple: Think different

In order to increase competitive insulation over time, a brand positioning should remain consistent. However, a positioning *may* need to change or evolve to reflect changing market conditions, including new competitors, new technologies and new target customers. Over the years, Crest, for example moved beyond “cavity protection,” to encompass “beautiful, healthy smiles,” given its expanded benefits (e.g., teeth whitening), new customers (beyond kids) and an expanded product set.

Importantly, a brand should only have one positioning at any one time, to ensure clarity and consistency. Remember, one brand equals one positioning.

The Role of Messaging

Communicating a single benefit, however, can limit a brand's appeal, particularly for higher-involvement purchases, where customers seek multiple benefits. (Volvo has a clear positioning, though doesn't sell nearly as many vehicles as Toyota.) In these cases, a

messaging framework should be developed to align a broader *portfolio* of messages with the core positioning.

Messaging Framework

In communicating multiple messages, it is important to think about the role that any one message may play in the overall portfolio. The chart below illustrates three specific types of messages and the corresponding roles they play:

Message Type	Role
Ante	Required to gain entry to considered set
Driver	Key benefits that differentiate products and services and drive preference
Reassurance	Elements, often times emotive, that solidify the bond with the customer

Here are some examples:

- **Message Type 1: “Ante” Benefits** include the most basic benefit(s) that a product or service may offer. This may be “taste” for food products, “low rates” for financial services or “efficacy” for prescription medications. An offering must deliver on these “table stakes” to be part of the consideration set of acceptable brands.
- **Message Type 2: Driver Benefits** often serve as the basis for positioning the product or service. Here, the benefits extend beyond antes to incorporate benefits that drive differentiation and purchase. This might include relationship benefits for a financial services company or extended release for a prescription drug.
- **Message Type 3: Reassurance Benefits** provide an emotional connection with the brand. These benefits often need to be communicated implicitly vs. explicitly. Telling a customer to “feel” a certain way for using a brand can be off-putting. It's often better to handle reassurance benefits through product delivery and tone and manner.

For more information on Aligning Positioning and Messaging for Clear Communication please contact [Tim Koelzer](#) at EquiBrand.