



## Brand Positioning Explored (Part IV)

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Now let's look at each element from Part III in a bit more depth:

### Target Audience

The target audience is obvious but important. The target can be defined *demographically* ("women 35-54"), *behaviorally* ("people who golf at least twice a month"), or *attitudinally* ("those concerned about whiter teeth"). All are vitally important as ingredients to a final Positioning in painting a complete picture of your product consumer. Effectively studying, understanding and describing your target at these levels is the foundation of a successful Positioning.

### Competitive Frame of Reference

This refers to the category into which consumers place the brand, surrounded by whatever **they** consider to be its natural substitutes. Shampoos, credit cards and luxury sedans are all frames of references into which consumers "file" relevant brand alternatives. Of course segmentation differences exist but are obvious: McDonald's and The Hard Rock Café are both places to eat, but they are not in the same frame of reference, even among those that eat at both. Sometimes the differences are more subtle. For instance, Coke and Pepsi are in the same competitive set and reference frame, but Dasani and Pellegrino probably are not. You need to be cognizant of where the differences lay in your category and be mindful of the strategic implications involved when developing a Positioning and the subsequent communications programs that might be employed.

### Key Competitive Benefit

This is the most important advantage that users of the product will enjoy, and which therefore attracts customers and helps maintain loyalty. Most important is that the benefit selected must be viewed by the target as **differentiating** the product from the competition, rather than being generic to the category. In the laundry detergent category, for instance, the differences are narrow but meaningful to consumers. Whiteness, brightness and cold-water-safe don't sound dramatically different, but each is a pillar on which multimillion-dollar budgets are built. Your key benefit identification should be limited, focused and as such, involve exclusion and sacrifice, as many brands have a multitude of benefits. However the discipline of establishing and living with a brand's optimum Positioning means making tough choices, and the key benefit is usually the toughest.

### The Key Reason Why

This is the brand attribute, either real or perceived, that makes the benefit credible. It can be based on customer experience (taste tests or testimonials), product attributes that will be evident in use (e.g. Sonicare toothbrushes), or provider's reputation ("new from Starbuck's"). As with the key benefit, discipline is required; one or two reasons why that **matters** gives much better direction to advertising or public relations programs than a laundry list that mixes the relevant and irrelevant.

The interplay between benefits and reasons why is complex. As a rule, the most effective benefits relate to how target customers **feel** after using the product or service, either physically or emotionally, and the best

reasons why are in fact likely to be attributes of the product. For instance, the family security benefit which Michelin has long conveyed so successfully is as emotionally appealing as the cute babies who deliver the message; safety attributes of the tires and the reputation of the manufacturer are the reasons why the message is credible.

### **In the End**

A marketing manager has three broad objectives on behalf of any brand: making people **aware** of it, favorably influencing their **attitudes** toward it, and changing their **behavior** to get them to buy it. The brand's Positioning is important in this process because it determines who needs to become aware, and what they need to become convinced of in order to induce brand interaction.

There's an old proverb about finding your way in an unfamiliar land that, in my view, many teetering brands appear to subscribe to, that goes something like: "if your destination is not clear, any road will do." However, in marketing, this doesn't hold, as knowing and setting specific brand direction is vital to success. For marketers in today's unforgiving marketplace, only a focused and well-defined "destination," or, Positioning, will improve productivity and results.

This is the final part of this series.