



Keyword :
POSITIONING

How Search Proves the Principles of Brand Positioning

by Mark Vandegrift

DEDICATION:

To my wife and daughters for their unending patience and love — you inspire me every day.

And to all those who continually *search* to **rise above the clutter...**

“Mark Vandegrift’s book superbly links two important concepts: The impact of positioning and search in marketing strategy. As our culture has become more complex and integrated, Vandegrift suggests a positioned message is the key to search success. Moreover, the concept of positioning and search sit at the feet of analytics. Numbers and brands rule – and Vandegrift nails it.”

— **Dr. Michael A. Petrochuk, MHA, DBA, FACHE**

Director of the MBA Program
Professor of Marketing and Healthcare Management
The DeVille School of Business
Walsh University

“Having worked in and taught marketing for over 30 years, I am a firm believer in the concept of positioning. While some critics question its continued validity, Mark Vandegrift explains how its importance is actually increasing, using search to illustrate and corroborate his premise. I heartily recommend this clear, insightful and compelling primer to anyone seeking to improve their understanding and application of branding strategy.”

— **Scott K. Powell, D.B.A.**

Professor of Business
Grove City College

“As with great SEO, great positions reshuffle the order of brands in customers’ memory to place your brand ahead of competitors, including market leaders. Together, search and positioning carve a path to competitive advantage.”

— **William E. Baker, Ph.D.**

Professor of Marketing
College of Business Administration
University of Akron

“Google’s search bar works like our minds work. Go figure! Positioning is about owning an idea in the mind. That idea is expressed using very few words. Eighty-five percent of search terms are four words or less. Mark Vandegrift is the first to discover the obvious yet profound relationship of positioning and search. Google’s algorithms mapped what Jack Trout and Al Ries, the fathers of positioning, figured out nearly a half century ago.”

— **Dick Maggiore**

President & CEO
Innis Maggiore Group, Inc.

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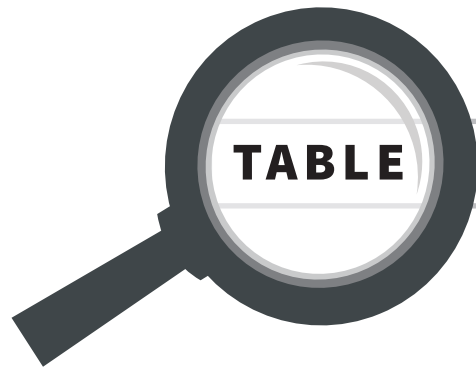
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INTRODUCTION: A DEFINITION AND A HISTORY LESSON

WHY WE NEED POSITIONING MORE THAN EVER

You may find it curious as to why we felt the need to *prove* positioning. If you are a marketer, perhaps you feel the positioning philosophy of marketing is universally accepted. We wish it were so. But working in the industry every day results in constant observation of the variety of philosophies in play, and very few of them follow the principles of positioning.

There are many pundits who feel a marketing strategy mainly formalized in the late 1970s could never apply in the digital age. The opposite is true. In fact, it was increased clutter that caused Jack Trout and Al Ries to publish their first book in 1981. As ever more clutter is created each day, the principles of positioning stand taller. We could simply point to our clients' marketing successes as proof.

Now, of course, we also have SEARCH at our fingertips. Search is an objective third-party mechanism that is part of every person's life. The search bar, results page and each element associated with search prove the very core principles of the marketing philosophy to which we subscribe. Read for yourself and decide **how search proves positioning**.

THE DEFINITION OF POSITIONING

If you're new to the marketing philosophy of **positioning**, this short definition and history lesson will help you better understand this book. If you're an experienced positionist®, at a minimum it allows you to understand the platform from which we write. While the principles of positioning may take longer to understand, apply and execute in your marketing, the concept is relatively quick to learn.

The elementary understanding is as simple as word association. For instance, what comes immediately to mind when you read or hear the word *water*? Your mind may trigger *bottled water* or *ocean water* or *bath water*. None of those answers are incorrect — they are simply the concepts your mind has tagged when you hear the word *water*. This word may have even triggered a memory, such as fun times you had in your pool during summer break or a traumatic event involving water.

Our minds are designed like a file cabinet with relatively minor variations on the storage and organization of information. As we consume information, our minds are designed to distill the information into very basic understanding, organize that information, and later retrieve it. To avoid overload, part of the brain's function is to ignore those things we've seen or learned before. Another part is designed to block clutter and overstimulation. And yet another part is designed to deep-file or even trash what hasn't been retrieved recently.

Large portions of the information processed by our brains every day are marketing messages. Research suggests we see and hear anywhere from 3,500 to 12,000 marketing messages per day. Our brains must consume, sort, block or store each and every message. Sometimes the message is new information that is additive to what our brains have already stored. Other times the message is new and a new “file” is created. But most times, the message is not new, not relevant or not applicable, so our brains ignore it — a self-defense mechanism to allow our brains to run (relatively) optimized.

Research suggests these concepts are stored in pieces that are the equivalent of one to four words as a single image. In other words, if *bottled water* is the concept, you don’t picture a bottle and water separately; your mind pictures a bottle of water.

Our brains have the amazing capacity to store, retrieve and update quickly. Call it real-time re-categorization. All information is consumed based on prior experiences and what exists in our memory banks. So when new information is received, it is in relation to the files already stored. That’s how our brain ignores what it already knows, updates what is additive, creates a new file and constantly re-categorizes so the files remain organized. Those who are older are sighing heavily realizing that this capacity slows down as the brain ages — one, because so much information is stored, and two, because our brain synapses slow down. We become like an old PC.

This very elementary lesson about the brain relates directly to the philosophy of positioning. As we consume information about a company, product, service or individual, our brains distill a message into a simple concept. The *simpler* and more *unique* the concept, the easier it is to file and retrieve. **The more we hear that same simple message, the more easily our brain retrieves the concept when we find it useful.**

For a company, product, service or individual to own a place in the mind, the brain has to first understand **what** it is, what **category** it fits into, whether it’s **relevant**, and if anything else **exists** in that file already.

For example, using the *water* concept above, the mind doesn’t have two definitions of *water*. Instead the mind adds a modifying attribute, which happens when we put *bottled* in front of *water*, thus, *bottled water*. We could take this further and add *sparkling* and get *sparkling bottled water*... still a single concept, but sub-divided so the brain can access a very specific type and packaging of *water* as it relates to the circumstances and timing of a person’s action.

For a company, product, service or individual to own a place in the brain — known as a **position** — it must create a meaning that is understandable, relevant and unique to the brain. When that entity’s name is associated with that **position**, it is a brand. Hence, the term **brand position** — the brand **holds** a **position** in the brain.

If a brand tries to hold more than one position in the brain, it becomes confused. Confusion leads to the brain going into self-defense mode and either deep-filing it, or trashing it altogether.

Therefore, in marketing terms, the **practice of positioning** is:

to find, then focus all marketing on, a brand's most unique and relevant difference.

And the **#1 rule in positioning** is:

A company, product, service or individual can stand for ONE IDEA in the mind.

This is a brief cohesive definition for positioning. If you would like to dig deeply and discover this wonderful philosophy of business and marketing, start with the first book below. When you are bitten by the positioning bug, continue down the list. We have listed these in the order of what will help to most quickly grasp the various principles of positioning.

Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind — New York. McGraw-Hill. 1981.

Differentiate or Die — New York. John Wiley & Sons. 2000.

The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing — New York. Harper Collins. 1993.

In Search of the Obvious: The Antidote for Today's Marketing Mess — New Jersey. John Wiley & Sons. October 2008.

Jack Trout, Al Ries and countless others have written myriad articles and books on the topic, so one quick introduction to the concept of positioning hardly does the concept justice. Please consider this introduction the most basic of primers.

AND A BRIEF HISTORY OF POSITIONING TIMELINE

June 1969: Jack Trout's article, "'Positioning' is a game people play in today's me-too market place" appeared in *INDUSTRIAL MARKETING*, explaining the concept of and nascent principles of positioning.

Spring 1972: *Advertising Age* runs a series of three articles, "The Positioning Era Cometh" by Jack Trout and Al Ries. (*April 24, May 1 and May 8, 1972, issues*)

Spring 1981: Jack Trout and Al Ries publish their first book, "*Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*" (New York, McGraw-Hill).

June 2002: Innis Maggiore becomes the nation's leading positioning ad agency. Jack Trout, a mentor, friend and longtime associate of the agency, states: "Innis Maggiore, like no other agency, has successfully turned the principles laid out in our positioning books and created a disciplined practice. These guys really do get it."

March 2005: *Ad Age* readers voted Jack Trout and Al Ries' "*Positioning: The Battle for your Mind*" the No. 1 business book of all time, narrowly defeating "*Ogilvy on Advertising*."

October 2008: Jack Trout dedicates his book, *In Search of the Obvious*, to agency President & CEO Dick Maggiore.

January 15, 2010: *Business Week* proclaims, "*Positioning: The Battle for your Mind & The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing* by Jack Trout and Al Ries ... among the best books on marketing ever published."

June 4, 2017: Jack Trout passes away at the age of 82.

CHAPTER 1: A POSITION IS A SIMPLE SINGULAR CONCEPT (THE SEARCH BAR)

One of the basic **principles of positioning** is: The mind files information in short, very basic concepts. And one of the primary **goals of positioning** is: Become the category generic. Marry this principle and goal and do this quick exercise – associate a brand name with each of these basic concepts:

ketchup

facial tissue

search engine

office copier

adhesive bandage

gelatin dessert

glass cleaner

cotton swab

adhesive paper note

slow cooker

zipper storage bag

anti-dandruff shampoo

heartburn tablets

powerful quick-setting glue

That probably took you about 15 seconds to complete. Consider, each concept is one single idea described in four words or less. You didn't have to think "what is an office?" and "what is a copier?" Your brain knows that there is a single concept known as an "office copier" and it probably prompted you with the brand name Xerox.

Search statistics confirm that 89 percent of all searches are one to four words. And if you remove "how to...", "what is...", "definition of...", and similar phrases, that statistic jumps to well above

90 percent. Here is a March 2016 report showing the average number of words used in a single search:

Number of words: Percentage of All Searches

1: 31.68%

2: 27.81%

3: 19.01%

4: 10.29%

(source: <http://www.keyworddiscovery.com/keyword-stats.html> – 03/01/16 report)

By the time you reach five words, the percentage drops to 5 percent. At six words, half that. By eight words, you are well below 1 percent of all searches.

We think in very short and very simple concepts. It is the only way for us to process the **massive** amounts of information we consume on a daily basis. In 2010, at the Techonomy conference in Lake Tahoe, Google co-founder Eric Schmidt claimed, “Every two days humans are generating as much new information as had been created from the dawn of civilization up until 2003!” He continued, “That’s five exabytes of data!”

One exabyte is one quintillion bytes or 1 billion gigabytes. Today, we are producing almost 50,000 gigabytes of data PER SECOND! Compare that to the brain that some suggest can process 80MB of data per second. We can never catch up!

Our minds have to cope. The built-in defense mechanism in the brain is the prefrontal cortex (source: <http://www.livescience.com/13690-brain-clutter-filtering-brain-cells-110413.html>). Note, this same article suggests failure to filter may be the source of many mental disorders.

When the possibility of grasping a concept is more difficult, the brain will ignore it first **unless the individual consciously decides to process it** (e.g., math homework). We can, and do, process longer bits of information. In any given moment of processing, however, the easier information (e.g., “that man’s shirt is blue”) will process quickly, either being filed in the mind or trashed.

Marketing messages are some of the most common the mind processes. Given the above empirical information, why do we want to make our marketing messages so complicated? One case in point: Most organizations make their mission statement their marketing message.

Exercise: At this very moment, recite your workplace mission statement. Can't do it? Spoiler alert ... Neither can most employees.

One of the many reasons employees cannot remember mission statements is that they are frequently too long and complex for the mind to care or remember. Now imagine asking **your customers** to remember your mission statement every time you show them an advertisement. Sadly, many companies do.

This principle of positioning should not be hard to remember: keep it short and simple (KISS principle).

When you discover, re-discover or decide to market your brand's position, keep it simple, stupid (the other KISS acronym). Consider the state of your audience. Are they listening? Did they even ask you to talk to them? If not, then consider telling them the one very short, very simple, very relevant concept that differentiates you from your competition: your position. One to four words, over and over again.

Wouldn't it be great then, at the point they decide to seek information from you, if they were to use those very same words – your position – in the search bar? And of course, because you have great SEO, you rank #1 in Google for that phrase. Guess who gets eyeballs on your message now? This is when you can tell them the rest of the story – the voluminous information mentioned above.

The search bar validates that when we are interested and ready to seek information, we do so in short single-concept phrases. If we seek information that way intentionally, by reason we file concepts the same way. The vast success of the principles of positioning have told us this well before search.

SEARCH simply proves – with empirical evidence – what positioning already knew:

A position is a simple singular concept.

CHAPTER 2: A POSITION OWNS A PLACE IN THE MIND (THE SEARCH UNIVERSE)

Do you know the universe in which your company, product or service operates? In other words, in which category or sub-category does your audience roam?

If we lose sight of our target audiences, we will lose sight of this principle of positioning. Positioning is about differentiation and relevance. If you don't know the **competitive universe** in which you operate, you won't know how to differentiate against your **competition**. Similarly, if you don't know the customer universe in which you operate, you won't know how to be relevant to your **customers**. And if you aren't relevant and differentiated, you won't hold a position in the mind.

If you take your customer's point-of-view and start with a complete lack of knowledge of your product or brand, then you will get a sense of the path your prospect takes to become a customer. Consider this typical search process:

Customer Felt Need: I need a new car

Search: "new cars"

Results: dealerships, review sites, picture of cars, etc. = clutter!

Modified Search: "minivans"

Results: more dealerships, review sites, pictures of minivans

Modified Search: "minivan brands"

Results: comparisons, reviews, buying guides

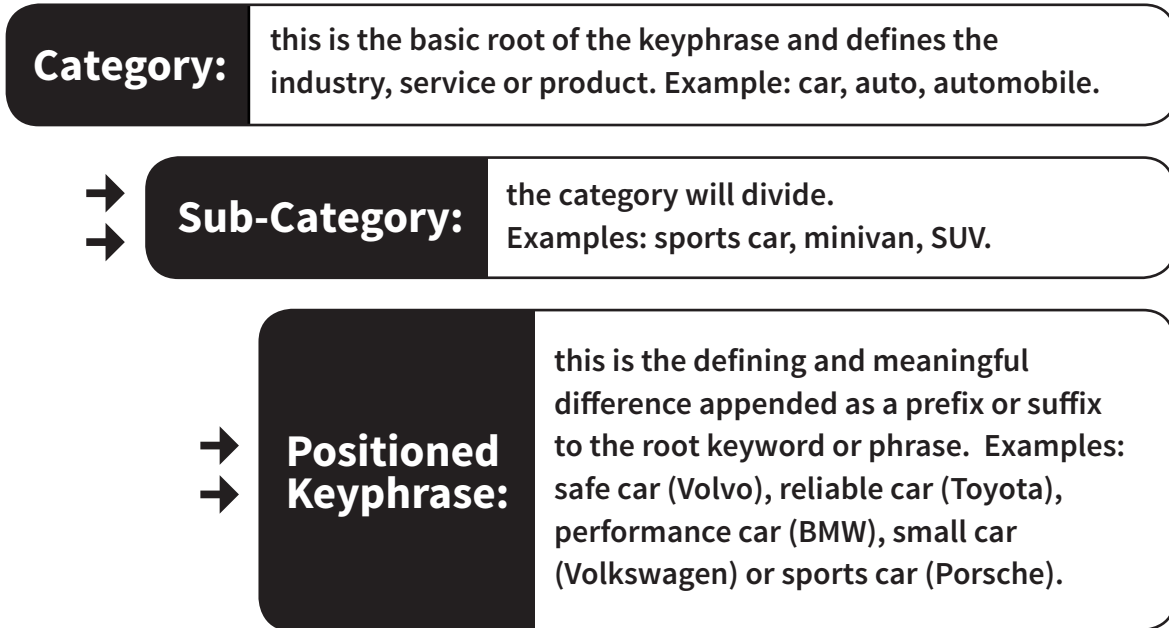
Notice how our minds work? We research a general query before diving in deeper to make a more confident buying decision. As we get deeper, our minds seek clarity.

From the above comparison/review/guide sites, your prospect likely will determine a purchase consideration list. They have yet to leave the sub-category of minivan. The searcher might know something about each manufacturer brand, but what is going to make the customer buy your minivan brand over the competitive brands? How will you differentiate in a relevant way to your target prospect?

Had you remained in the "car" universe, you might decide to position your product as the performance minivan. But in the "minivan" universe, you realize *nobody* buys a minivan for any reason close to performance. Instead, you might have the highest fuel rating, safety ranking or be the most affordable minivan.

In any case, your position must be **different** than the others in the category/search universe and **relevant** to those searching in this category/search universe.

Another way to think through the above example:

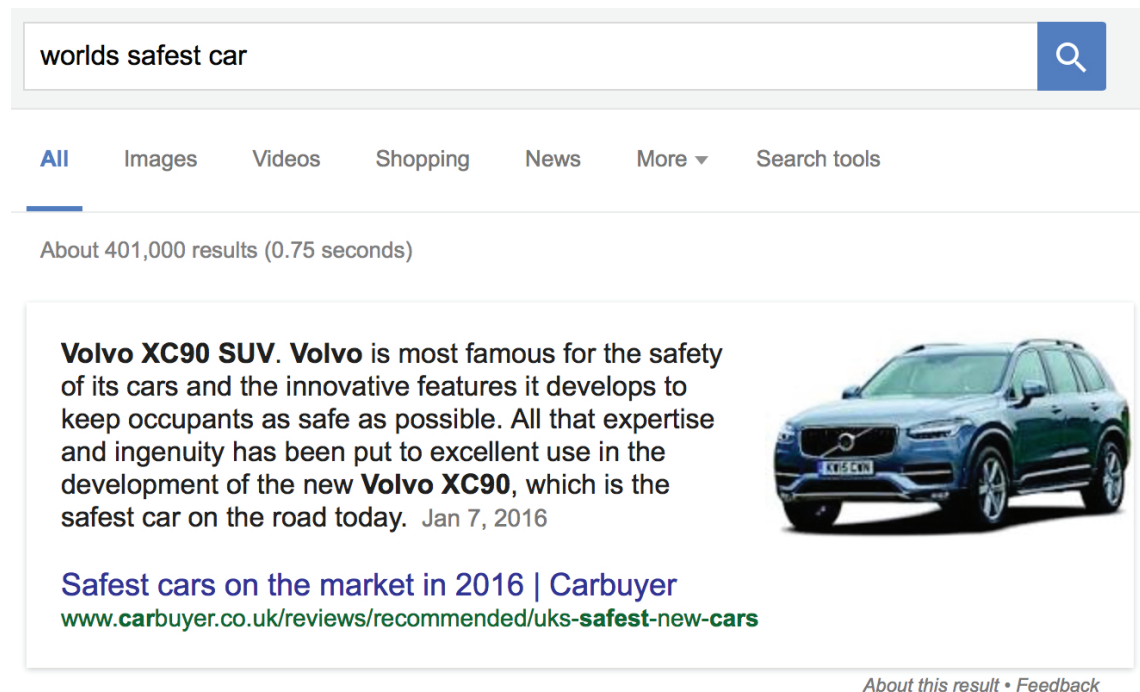


How would a prospect likely search for these positioning ideas? Take Volvo. A user is likely to query, “world’s safest car,” or “crash test rankings,” all of which build off the positioning idea in a way that is most relevant to the user.

VOLVO = safety = world’s safest car
crash test rankings
car safety features
consumer review car safety
safe sexy cars
safe sports cars
safe family cars
safe SUVs
and so on...

In the Volvo illustration, “safe cars” represents only a segment of the entire car-buying universe. Volvo determined long ago that the “safe car” universe was 25 percent of all car buyers. By focusing their company on the safety position, Volvo grew.

If you search “world’s safest car” today, the Volvo XC90 SUV appears as a full-feature listing in Google. (Note: Google varies its listings on almost every search, so you may not see the same result.)



The screenshot shows a Google search interface. The search bar contains the text "worlds safest car" and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar are navigation tabs: "All", "Images", "Videos", "Shopping", "News", "More", and "Search tools". Below the tabs, it says "About 401,000 results (0.75 seconds)". The main result is a card for the "Volvo XC90 SUV". The text in the card reads: "Volvo XC90 SUV. Volvo is most famous for the safety of its cars and the innovative features it develops to keep occupants as safe as possible. All that expertise and ingenuity has been put to excellent use in the development of the new Volvo XC90, which is the safest car on the road today. Jan 7, 2016". To the right of the text is an image of a blue Volvo XC90 SUV. Below the text is a link: "Safest cars on the market in 2016 | Carbuyer" with the URL "www.carbuyer.co.uk/reviews/recommended/uks-safest-new-cars". At the bottom right of the card is the text "About this result • Feedback".

Specifics matter in search

Additionally, the Volvo example illustrates the ultimate job of the search engine: RELEVANCE. Users on the web today have learned to fine-tune their search queries for greater relevance. They realize intuitively that the more broad and generic the search term, the less satisfactory the result. Specifics matter. The most common practice among users today is not to wade past the first page of broad search results, but rather to append the initial search with additional, “long-tail” words, such as the queries in the above diagram.

The search process once again shows us a principle of positioning. When we consume messages, our minds sub-consciously seek to find a “reason to buy.” When we find this reason to buy, it is filed into a very specific category (or sub-category) in our brains. When we open the category in our brains (at the point of purchase validation), we access the brands that sit in that “folder.” The brands that have a place in the folder are the ONLY ones that have provided a compelling reason to buy.

The magic of 7

Research suggests that up to seven brands can sit in a single category in our brains. Ironically, in any single search universe, the top seven positions in search engines get 85%

of the traffic, with 61% coming from the top three positions (source: <https://searchenginewatch.com/sew/study/2276184/no-1-position-in-google-gets-33-of-search-traffic-study>).

It boils down to this: Our brains find the easiest path. They really do want the marketer to do the hard work. So, **do the hard work for the customer**. *Give the customer a clear reason to buy from you versus the competition.*

SEARCH simply proves – with empirical evidence – what positioning already knew:

A position owns a place in the mind.

CHAPTER 3: A POSITION MUST BE RELEVANT TO THE CUSTOMER (THE SEARCH ENGINE RESULTS PAGE)

Unless you've been living under a rock for the last decade and a half, you've heard the term *relevance* used in regard to search. It's Google's #1 promise to its customers: "*Google it* and we promise to deliver you the most relevant results so you only have to click once."

In fact, there is a whole industry focused on winning in the search engine results page. We call it SEO: search engine optimization. Many reading this book have hired an SEO firm. (And many of those same readers have fired their SEO firm – because they aren't marketers, but more on that next.)

Consumers want relevance. Many SEO firms try to trick the system. They take the lazy way out, using gimmicks to get a click. A click doesn't make the content relevant. Content that is not relevant is the number one contributing factor to a high bounce rate. Only proper content makes a search relevant and rewarding for your user.

Here's the reason: we think ranking well in the SEO space is akin to computer science. **Spoiler alert: it's not.** But when we put our lazy hats on, we realize that relevance in today's marketing world takes a lot of hard work. That's a cold hard fact. The promise, however, isn't a mystery:

**Be relevant and the search engines will reward you
(with more/higher rankings).**

Relevance in search engines means a promise to return unique search results so that when a result is clicked, it will deliver high value to the searcher.

Relevance in positioning means a promise to deliver a product or service that when purchased, will deliver high value to the buyer. So the promise is the equivalent:

**Be relevant and buyers will reward you
(with more business).**

Why is relevance so hard to come by then, if the potential reward is so great?

When the internet first launched, none of us knew how the baby would grow up. Search engines were even newer than the internet. Most of us handed our websites (or just a single web page) to those who knew something about computers. Made sense – at the time.

Fast forward a few years and we marketers realized the web is our greatest marketing asset. Now if we could just pry it away from the IT staff we handed it to! Not so fast, they said. So, we decided we would hand them our content and they would code the website and make typo fixes for us (pre-content management system days).

At the same time, this thing called search engine ranking appeared. All they said we had to do was figure out what keywords we associated with our business and they would dump those in the meta data. This was the first form of search engine optimization.

As time went by, guess who did this better than anyone? The porn industry. They used our keywords, our competitors' keywords and everyone's keywords. Yikes! Somehow "bottled water" pulled up results from the porn industry.

Skip ahead to 2005. Google was seven years on the scene and it began issuing statements on how to rank well in its search engine. Guess what was NOT on the list? Keyword dumping: putting all your keywords in the meta data of every page of your site. (Believe it or not, several companies still think this is good practice and do their SEO in such a manner.)

Today, we all stay glued to Google's latest algorithm updates: Penguin, Pigeon, Pirate, Panda, P...P...P. The goal is relevance. That has never changed. What has changed is how Google mechanically tries to deliver results that are deemed the most relevant.

We learned the essence of relevance in high school. Remember your high school English teacher? She taught you relevance before you knew how relevance applied to search: write a good thesis statement and the rest of your paper should stick to that thesis. Done. Relevance.

As the Google scientists inch closer to relevance perfection, they inch closer to making the content of any one web page reign supreme. What's in the headline? What's in the sub-headline? And what's in the copy? They are even "reading" the photos and graphics on the page to make sure they tie to the "thesis" of the page.

Relevance before differentiation

At our agency, relevance has always been our starting point because it's a basic principle of positioning. A difference – like a click – is worthless if it isn't relevant.

For example, let's say your business is banking. You have red steeples on your bank buildings. So you market as the "red steeple bank." Is it different? Definitely. Is it relevant? Absolutely not. Who cares that you have red steeples on your banks? I'm not putting my money in your bank because you have red steeples.

Therein lies this principle of positioning: the position of your product or service must be relevant. The higher the relevance, the more meaningful it will be to your target customers. Do the hard work to give them relevance. Avoid the bounce. Then it becomes easy.

The search results page is filled with relevant results. If it wasn't, we wouldn't use it. Relevance matters. So should your position.

SEARCH simply proves – with empirical evidence – what positioning already knew:

A position must be relevant.

CHAPTER 4: A POSITION MUST BE COMPETITIVE (THE PAGE TITLE)

Alert: **Positioning is a competitive strategy.** This next principle of positioning typically makes a lot of marketers uneasy. We live in an age where it's almost an evil to be competitive ("everyone gets a trophy"). But it's the foundation of positioning. If you don't like being competitive, you may wish to stop reading now.

The fact is, if you don't differentiate your brand against the competition, it will be weak and ultimately fail without some major crutches around it (e.g., a strong sales team). In the previous chapter, I mentioned the bank with red steeples. Is that different? Yes, but it flunks the relevance test.

Let's review how the most successful competitive differentiation works by using two of the most famous brands in the world: Coke and Pepsi. Let's start with Coke. Coke is the original. That is its position. Coke started in 1886.

Pepsi also had been around a long time (est. 1898) when, starting in 1964, it looked for the best competitive "play" to run against the established competition. **New.** *The drink of a new generation.* Why was this such a great move? Because Coke can't be the original and the new thing at the same time. When it tried, we watched the unfolding of one the most instructive marketing failure stories of all time: New Coke. Three months and a cloud of dust.

Pepsi painted Coke into a "corner." That corner is still big. In fact, the *original* position that Coke holds still makes it the market leader despite taste tests, Michael Jackson and a whole host of other ways that Pepsi has tried to knock Coke off its pedestal. But Pepsi also gained a large part of the soft drink market. The drink of a new generation made them a much stronger No. 2.

Like most sports, even though one team wins, there is typically scoring by both sides. Many successful businesses own fractions of market share. They've scored, and that's enough for them.

No one gets to have it all

Even Google doesn't own the entire search engine market, although it might seem like it. Someday, some search engine will come along and knock Google down a bit. Maybe not out completely, but it will gain some market share. Why? Because someone will find an angle (aka position) that goes against Google's size.

So, how does this relate to search? Every search engine results page has at least 10 results on it. These are known as organic search results. If the keyword is highly competitive, then you will also end up with many ads on that results page. At one point in time, Google had 10 of each listing on the page – 10 organic results and 10 paid results.

The results page is a perfect picture of the marketplace. Lots of options and no one company owns every single position on the page. You are presented with potentially 20 different options, in fact. So, how does a user choose? Many times, it's the page title from the page on your website.

We find the results page a thing of beauty. Wouldn't it be great if every time you had to buy something, you had a little piece of paper that listed all the brands for the product category with the reasons you should buy the companies' respective products? That's the search engine results page – kind of. The problem is that most companies don't write page titles competitively. But those page titles are exactly what show up as the blue hyperlink in the results page. David Ogilvy found that five times more people read the headline than the body copy. A page title is the headline for your ad. Does yours stand out?

Let's look at how good page title writing could change how you choose to click a result. These are in no particular order:

[Natural Toothpaste, Fluoride and SLS Free | Tom's of Maine](#)

www.tomsofmaine.com/oral-care/toothpaste

Tom's of Maine is proud of the ingredients that go into our **toothpaste**. Browse for our SLS and fluoride free products.

[Sensitive Teeth Toothpaste | Sensodyne](#)

<https://us.sensodyne.com/>

Learn how Sensodyne®, the #1 dentist recommended sensitivity toothpaste, can provide relief and long-lasting protection for sensitive teeth and acid erosion.

[Baking Soda Toothpaste | Arm & Hammer](#)

www.armandhammer.com/.../arm-and-hammer-baking-soda-toothpaste

It may surprise some to learn that baking soda is actually the least abrasive material for polishing and cleaning teeth.

[Fresh Breath Toothpaste | Close-Up](#)

<https://www.unileverme.com/brands/our-brands/closeup.html>

Unlike the typical opaque, mint-flavored toothpaste of the time, Closeup debuted in 1967 as a clear red gel with a spicy cinnamon taste and mouthwash right in the toothpaste.

[Fight Cavities Toothpaste | Crest](#)

crest.com/en-us/products/cavity-protection-toothpaste

Fight cavities with Crest Cavity Protection Toothpaste, accepted by the American Dental Association.

[Advanced Whitening Toothpaste | Colgate](#)

www.colgateopticwhite.com/whitening-toothpaste

A visibly whiter smile can be yours with Optic White® High Impact White toothpaste. Contains 2x the whitening ingredient and fluoride to fight cavities.

Inexpensive, Low Price Toothpaste | Pepsodent

<http://www.churchdwight.com/brands-and-products/brand-browser.aspx>
Cheap toothpaste from Church & Dwight.

Double Action – Clean and Fresh Toothpaste | Aquafresh

<https://www.aquafresh.com/products/extreme-clean/pure-breath-action-toothpaste/>
Voted Product of the Year in 2013, Aquafresh® Extreme Clean® Pure Breath Action can help get rid of bad breath, leaving you with pure fresh breath every time.

Great Tasting, Kid-Loving Gel Toothpaste | AIM

<http://www.churchdwight.ca/product.php?productid=90928> AIM® Cavity Protection toothpaste cleans, freshens and whitens. It also tastes great and offers the essential oral care requirements of cavity protection and tartar control. Children love its mint taste!

You might only care about one of the above positions. Doesn't the list above make it easy to decide? Each position is different. And competitively relevant. If you did a real search for toothpaste right now, you'd see many of them are fighting over the whitening space – very little differentiation.

Don't fall into the "me-too trap." This is marketing warfare. Be competitive. Write competitive page titles knowing you have competition. Positioning provides a clear choice to stressed consumers. Your clear position actually helps a customer choose your brand ... or not. That in itself is a benefit to your brand!

SEARCH simply proves – with empirical evidence – what positioning already knew:

A position must be competitive.

CHAPTER 5: A POSITION MUST BE CREDIBLE TO YOUR COMPANY (THE LANDING PAGE AND REPUTATION MANAGEMENT)

Beyond being relevant and competitive, the search experience for your site visitors must be credible to your company. This is really an added layer to your relevance. In this age of transparency and authenticity, the last thing you can risk is to draw a prospect with a brand promise that fails to deliver. Not only might you waste the lead opportunity, a worse consequence will be when you blow up your online reputation.

Marketers tend to miss the credibility proof inadvertently. While the world is filled with swindlers, they are still the minority. Instead, marketers miss because they don't understand the difference between marketing and sales.

Bill Bernbach – a legend of the marketing world – introduced the A-I-D-A model: attention – interest – desire – action. It is a useful filter for marketing and sales activities and more importantly, defines the role of each.

Marketing's objective is to gain the attention and interest (A and I of the A-I-D-A principle) of prospects around a single idea that positions the brand in the mind. Marketers should work to gain marketing **attention** with best practice marketing execution and gain **interest** with content that continually seeds its brand difference. This includes following the previous chapters' principles set forth for search marketing.

The great news about positioning strategy is that it is a business strategy first, one that informs your marketing. It also informs your sales, operations and organization as a whole. The key is: Remember that marketing is only the first step. Once a prospect gains search interest in your value proposition and you get the click, the marketer must convey the story with credible, tangible supports of that position. This is typically left to the sales team in more traditional media but requires the effort of all teams on the web. Only with credible messaging will a prospect become a lead and a customer become a loyalist.

The worldwide web has blurred the lines of marketing and sales. Some would suggest that a website should be written and designed by marketing. Others suggest sales. The answer is both. We have had no other marketing medium available to us that can move a raw prospect from **attention to action** so quickly and completely. E-commerce proves this. Amazon proves this.

So what truly is credibility? Think of it as your company DNA. It's your core belief. It's what makes you passionate about your organization beyond making money. And it is what prospects and customers feel when they interact with your brand.

And why does search prove credibility is required? One word: bounce. Bounce is typically defined as a single-page visit to a site. While this isn't always a bad thing if you get the sale by a visitor only viewing one page of your site, it typically signals the visitor has abandoned interest in your brand.

If you've done all the right things, from researching the best keywords, to writing competitive page titles and making them relevant to the type of lead you're targeting, yet drop the ball on the destination page messaging and content, you will have done a lot of work to show little result. *Lots of activity with little accomplishment.*

Your search visitors get an impression about your company very quickly, from the images to the headlines to the copy they scan. Within those few seconds, they have to identify that you are selling what they seek, then determine why they should buy from you versus the other competitive results that were in the search engine results page (SERP).

If you are a manufacturer led primarily by engineers and they affect your web copy, chances are there will be little emotion in your copy. It will be technical in nature and fail to make an emotional connection.

If you are large corporation and have lots of products or services, your content will likely be overly generalized and likewise have little emotion or brand dramatization.

If you are a specialist, your inclination will be to get very geeky with your website content and miss the WIIFM (what's in it for me) component.

The key is to make an emotional connection with your target customer. Feel their need. Feel their pain. Understand their concerns, ambitions and deepest desires. Understand their environment. Think like they might think. It might go something like this:

- I have an issue with my landscaping. It appears to be insects of some variety.
- I do a search describing the bugs. Perhaps I even take a picture and upload it to Google Images to search for a similar-looking bug.
- I discover the culprit insect and do a search on how to rid my plants of the intruders.
- I find your site and learn you sell insecticides.
- I land on your site because your page title read, "Most Effective Green Solution to Getting Rid of [Name of Insect]."
- You serve up a page that:
 1. is a general listing of all your products (thousands of them), – OR –
 2. is an About Us page of why you make the world a better place – OR –

3. you tell me exactly how your insecticide will cure my problem, why it's green and friendly to the environment, and provide a Buy Now button (even if you don't sell it via e-commerce).

Which is more likely to get my business? #3, of course.

There are many ways to position products and services. When they are true to your company, you win. When you “fake it 'til you make it,” you're done.

Here's another reason why your position must be true: When your prospects learn about your product, they are unlikely to end their information-gathering on your page. They will likely seek more information from third-party sites – especially customer reviews – about others' experience with your product. If you've pushed a brand promise that rarely or never delivers, the cyber-world will proclaim it. You see this on Amazon. Stay away from those 2-stars!

In the online world, this is known as **reputation management**. If you are in the retail or restaurant world, you probably hang out on *Yelp!* to track the reviews. If you are in the contractor business, then *Angie's List* or *HomeAdvisor* is your space. Or in the travel industry, *TripAdvisor*.

The reason credibility is such a key positioning proof is that businesses spend so much time sculpting for search engines, getting clicks and developing demand/lead generation programs, then wonder why they struggle in generating sales from their digital properties.

Between bounce rates and customer feedback, it's easy to discover how credible your product is positioned online. When your brand position is backed by a positive brand experience, then analytics, cyberspace AND your customers' feedback will prove it!

SEARCH simply proves – with empirical evidence – what positioning already knew:

A position must be credible to your company.

CHAPTER 6: MARKETING YOUR POSITION WILL PROVIDE A RETURN ON RELEVANCE (THE ANALYTICS)

One of the most intriguing A/B tests we ran as an agency was to test multiple positions for an air cooler (also known as swamp coolers). The product name itself was rather generic – Air Cooler Plus* – but it had several attributes that could be raised up as a potential product difference: HEPA air filter, waterless, energy efficient and portable.

A little background: The client had hired us for positioning strategy work, yet was also intrigued with our recommendation that the company could sell much more if it did e-commerce strategically. Its search engine optimization alone was non-existent and we said we could help. Being the ultimate A/B testing company, the client suggested the internal marketing team compete with us over who could sell more units.

The challenge: The client’s marketing team would have the benefit of print ads, direct mail and direct-response TV all pointing to the corporate website. The agency had to compete solely with our own SEO’d landing pages and SEO tactics (on- and off-site), with one caveat: We were allowed to impact the copy in the client’s marketing communications.

Not being an agency to back down from a challenge, we accepted. Our plan was simple, seed the client’s marketing messages with the keywords we knew were differentiated and which we could own immediately. Between the name of the product and these four keywords, we felt we could own search. The agency bet that “waterless air cooler” would win, so that got the most mentions in most media. The others were treated as fringe tests, yet with sufficient mention to make the test valid.

There are two theories in play here: 1) as was stated in the previous chapter, consumers seek others’ opinions before making a purchase decision online, therefore they would search one of the few differentiated keywords we were betting on; and 2) most of us actually start in the search bar even if we know the web address, so even for those who would search the product name evident in the client’s response URL, we would still get traffic.

By owning the search engine results page, we had only one potential response competitor – if the reader or hearer of the competitor’s marketing media typed in the direct response web address, the competitor would win. **If the reader or hearer instead used the search bar, we would win.**

The landing page scheme was rather simple:

- AirCoolerPlus.com
- HEPAFilterAirCooler.com
- WaterlessAirCooler.com
- EnergyEfficientAirCooler.com
- PortableAirCooler.com

Each site above was sculpted for its respective keyword, which is obvious by the web address (which is also an SEO tactic). The client's landing page was on its own site with all of its other products and that's why we were able to own the product name's web address of AirCoolerPlus.com.

This was about as pure of a test of the power of seeding a positioning concept and owning it in the mind. Would search prove this?

You can already guess the answer. But it was a true beat-down. The agency outsold the client's marketing team by a 12-1 ratio. By owning the search engine results page (our results represented 10 out of 10 results in the organic listings), 12 out of every 13 times one of the client's marketing messages got a response, we intercepted the traffic. The project also confirmed we were right about the position: "waterless air cooler" was 83 percent of the keywords that resulted in sales, 15 percent was the product name (air cooler plus) and the balance was equally divided between the HEPA and portable positions (less than 1 percent each).

Until a brand name reaches equivalency with a concept already seeded in the mind, the name is not yet a brand.

Referring back to the primer in the introduction of this book, the mind thinks in simple terms. A brand simply represents a **shorthand** for that concept. It's easier to think and say Kleenex than it is to remember facial tissue. Likewise with Q-tip versus cotton swab or Google versus search engine. But gaining category equivalency takes a lot of time and money.

If you aren't the category equivalent, it is better to resort to your set of differentiated keywords you can own that will more quickly gain you equivalence with those terms.

Owning the SERP is a bit more challenging every day. Owning a place in the mind is even more difficult. Clutter is expanding exponentially. Marketing your keywords means you have broken down your product or service to its simplest concept. Assuming the keywords represent a concept that is relevant, competitively different and available, then either volume exists or, like "waterless air cooler," has the potential to grow volume quickly.

Even before you have read your sales reports, search and its resulting analytics will provide the first indicator that you found the correct position and are dramatizing it successfully. As we have demonstrated in this book, when all the principles of positioning are aligned and put to proper use, you will discover search is a great litmus test indicative of a positive return on investment. We have termed this Return on Relevance.

Return on Relevance means that all your marketing – including your search strategy – points to a strategically optimized position. It means you are getting eyeballs on your position and those eyeballs are converting at or above industry averages. Chances are if you are unhappy with sales, you can review your analytics and see where your search performance falls short.

SEARCH simply proves – with empirical evidence – what positioning already knew:

Marketing your position will provide a Return on Relevance.

**Disclaimer: the product in discussion in this chapter is no longer available. The client decided to pull it from the market due to supplier and efficacy issues.*

CONCLUSION: SEARCH PROVES POSITIONING WORKS

If you are like me, you have marked passages that you will return to later for additional consideration. But if you don't reread anything else in this book, I hope you will regularly read Jack Trout's original article on positioning. It is reprinted in its entirety in the section that follows. Trout's article is an amazing reminder of the conditions in which he marketed that we still experience today.

Some have argued that positioning is no longer relevant. To them, we make this challenge: Read Trout's article and tell us you wouldn't suspect it was written within the past few years. Except for a few older companies' brand examples he cited, you will find it as applicable today as it was in 1969. You will also find it amazing to see the few media choices he lists ... today we have media proliferation unlike anything imagined in 1969.

Today clutter is at an all-time high. The mind, however is a limited container. Despite the ability of advertisers to push out more and more messages, the mind's capacity to receive those messages has not increased even a little. And due to poor un-positioned marketing messages and massive self-publishing, that clutter increases daily.

The search bar — that singularly focused, relatively small box — provides clear physical evidence of how our minds work. We find the category in the mind, append it with a few descriptive words, type a phrase and press enter with hopes we'll find a reason to buy.

You — the marketer — work every day to win in search engines. Why struggle harder by ignoring the principles of positioning? Marketing is an art. Search engine optimization is a science. The science is easy. The art is not ... until you fully grasp the principles of positioning and make your marketing "cumulative" just like Jack Trout states in his article.

‘POSITIONING’ IS A GAME PEOPLE PLAY IN TODAY’S ME-TOO MARKETPLACE

by Jack Trout

from *INDUSTRIAL MARKETING: JUNE 1969*

There’s an old story about a traveler who was asking a farmer for directions to a nearby town. The farmer replied, “Well, you go down the road for a mile, turn left at the fork. No ... that won’t work.

“You turn around and drive for half-a-mile til you hit a stoplight, then turn right. No ... that won’t work either.”

After a long pause, the farmer looked at the confused traveler and said, “You know what, son, you can’t get there from here!”

That happens to be the moral of this article.

For today you spend millions of dollars on great advertising and still fail miserably if you don’t play by the rules of a game called “positioning.” In other words, “You can’t get there from here.”

Today’s marketplace is no longer responsive to strategies that worked in the past. There are just too many products, too many companies and too much marketing “noise.” We have become an over-communicated society.

If you have any doubts, just count the number of media that carry your communications. There is television (commercial, cable and pay). There’s radio (am and fm). There is outdoor (posters, billboards and spectaculars.) There are newspapers. Direct mail. There are mass magazines. Class magazines. Enthusiast magazines. Business magazines. Trade magazines. Annuals. Semiannuals. And on and on. And, of course, buses, subways and taxicabs. Generally speaking, anything that moves is usually carrying a “message from our sponsor.”

Thousands of commercial messages compete daily for a share of the prospect’s mind. And, make no mistake about it, the mind is the battleground.

To better understand what you are up against, consider the mind as a memory bank. Like a memory bank, the mind has a slot or “position” for each bit of information it has chosen to retain. In operation, the mind is a lot like a computer.



2009 Photo: Jack Trout and Innis Maggiore principals. Innis Maggiore is the nation’s leading positioning ad agency, acknowledged by Jack Trout, the father of positioning. Pictured left to right: Jeff Monter, Dick Maggiore, Kathi Maggiore, Jack Trout, Lorraine Kessler, Mark Vandegrift.

But there is one important difference. A computer has to accept what is put into it. The mind does not.

In fact, it's quite the opposite. The mind, as a defense against the volume of today's communications, screens and rejects much of the information offered it. In general, the mind accepts only that which matches prior knowledge or experience.

In other words, the mind will accept only new information which fits its previous pattern of slots or positions. It filters out everything else. And it doesn't make much difference how "creatively" the new information is presented.

For example, when General Electric tells you its computers are better than IBM's computers, you don't believe it. That doesn't fit what most people think about IBM. You would accept new information on light bulbs from GE, but not on computers. This explains the difficulty that GE or any other company faces when they try to take their established position into a totally new field.

The computer "position" in the minds of most people is filled with the name of a company called "IBM." For a competitive computer manufacturer to obtain a favorable position in the prospect's mind, he must either dislodge IBM or somehow relate his company to IBM's position.

Yet, too many companies embark on marketing and communications programs as if the competitor's position did not exist. They advertise their product in a vacuum and are disappointed when their message fails to get through.

The successful companies play a game called "positioning." They are aware not only of their own position, but of their competitors' positions as well. They know when they can get there from here and when they can't.

It wasn't always this difficult. A quick look at the history of the communications business might give you a better understanding of how we got to the "positioning" era.

Back in the 1950s, the communications and marketing business was in an era marked by what Rosser Reeves called the USP, or "unique selling proposition." Marketing people disregarded feelings people had toward companies and focused their attention instead on products and their differences. In a lot of ways, these were the good old days where the "better mouse trap" and some money to promote it were all you needed.

But technology started to rear its ugly head in the late 1950s and, as we entered the '60s, it became more and more difficult to establish that unique selling proposition.

Your "better mouse trap" was quickly followed by three more just like it. All claiming to be better than yours.

It got so bad that one product manager confided to me, "Wouldn't you know it. Last year we had nothing to say, so we added 'new and improved' to our package. This year the research people

came up with a real improvement in the product and we don't know what to say.”

It was the avalanche of “me-too” products that ended the USP era.

The next phase saw the rise of the “image” concept. Successful companies like General Electric and DuPont found that reputation or “image” was more important in selling a product than any specific product feature. The programs of the new technology companies (Xerox, IBM, etc.) were spectacularly successful. Those of older, established companies were less successful.

The architect of the image era was David Ogilvy. As he said in his famous speech on the subject, “Every advertisement is a long-term investment in the image of a brand.” And he proved the validity of his ideas with programs for Rolls-Royce, Hathaway Shirts, Schweppes and other products.

Just as the “me-too” products killed the USP era, the “me-too” companies killed the image era. As every company tried to establish an image for itself, the noise level became so high that relatively few companies succeeded. And most of the ones that made it, did it primarily with spectacular technical achievements, not spectacular advertising (Xerox and the dry copier, for example).

Today, we are entering the positioning era. This will be an era that recognizes the importance of product features and the company image, but more than anything else, stresses the need to create a “position” in the prospect’s mind.

Positioning is a game where the competitor’s image is just as important as your own. Sometimes more important. The famous Avis campaign, “We’re only No. 2. So why go with us? We try harder.” was a classic example of establishing a position against the leader.

The recent Transamerica program, where they established a position as the service company, was another excellent piece of work. And notice how a typical opening sentence in an ad related to what was already in the reader’s mind: “Most people think we’re an airline. If we wanted to be known as an airline we would have bought one.”

In the positioning era, the name of your company or product is becoming more and more important. Take airlines, for example. As more route structures overlap, a thing like your name can be an anchor. No matter how much money you spend.

Consider the plight of an airline I’ll call “Airline x.” It is in the middle of some difficult times. It has some unprofitable routes, but some good ones as well. And it certainly has tried. Airline X was among the first to “paint the planes” and “dress up the stewardesses” in an effort to improve its reputation.

Its advertising has been beautifully done. And Airline X hasn’t been bashful when it comes to spending money. If you’re not in the airline business, you probably wouldn’t guess that “Airline X” is Eastern — right up there spending with the worldwide names.

For all that money, what do you think of Eastern? Where do you think they fly? Up and down the East Coast, to Boston, Washington, Miami, right?

Well, they also go to St. Louis, New Orleans, Acapulco, etc. But Eastern has a regional name and their competitors have broader names which tell the prospect they fly everywhere. In Eastern's case, it would appear that their name has put them in an uncomfortable position. And the more they promote "Eastern," the more they "can't get there from here."

This brings up another important point in regard to positioning. Your program has to go beyond just establishing a name. Too many programs start there and end there. To secure a worthwhile position for a corporate name, you need a thought to go with it.

One of the best executed programs around is the one for Olin. The ads are beautifully done. But what is Olin? What is their position? They haven't left me with anything. In fact, I'm a little confused. How about you?

One thing that's worse than "just a name" program is one without a name. That sounds like it could never happen doesn't it? Well, it does when companies use initials instead of a name. And you see this happening quite often in today's marketing arena.

What companies like ACF, AMP, GAF and TRW fail to realize is that initials have to stand for something. GE stands for General Electric. And everyone knows it. These companies were given their nicknames by their customers. This is why they are so valuable.

When a company gives itself a nickname, it doesn't work as well. When General Aniline & Film changed its name to GAF, all they caused was confusion. And confusion is something the mind rejects, making it impossible to establish a position.

To test this point we performed an awareness study on a matched sample of both "name" companies and "initial" companies. The survey was conducted over a *Business Week* subscriber list and companies were selected that had corporate programs running.

The "name" companies had an average recognition score which was 19% higher than the average score of the "initial" companies.

In the first 10, the "name" companies had seven positions and the "initial" companies only three.

The results show that if you start with initials, you've got a long way to go.

The toughest marketing problems usually occur when a company competes with another company that has a strong, established position. For the best example, let's return to the world of Snow White and the seven dwarfs, i.e., computers. IBM has become a state of mind. They have established a position that is unrivaled in the history of marketing.

How do you advertise and market against this kind of overwhelming position? Well, first you have to recognize it. Then you don't do the thing that too many people in the computer field do — act

like IBM. A company has no hope to make progress head-on against the position that IBM has established. And history, so far, has proved this to be true.

A better strategy for IBM's competitors would be to take advantage of whatever positions they already own in their prospects' minds and relate them to a new position in computers.

Recently, General Electric has begun to make progress in the computer field by establishing a position in "time-sharing." This is an especially appropriate move because they happen to be one of the biggest users of computers. And time-sharing is a user-oriented idea.

RCA is a leader in communications. If they positioned a computer line that related to their business in communications, they could take advantage of their own position. Even though they would be ignoring a great deal of business, they would be establishing a strong beach head.

Obviously, these are over-simplified examples but the point is that it's almost impossible to dislodge a strongly dug-in leader who owns the high ground. You're a lot better off to open up a new front or position — that is, unless you enjoy being shot-up.

Another problem that occurs fairly often is represented by the one B.F. Goodrich faces. What do you do when your name (Goodrich) is similar to the name of a larger company in the same field (Goodyear)?

Goodrich has problems. Our research indicates that they could reinvent the wheel and Goodyear would get most of the credit. If ever a company could benefit from a name change, they're one.

Some of the best practitioners of positioning today are to be found in the consumer goods world. Which proves that the concept is applicable to products as well as companies.

Ask anyone who put the first 100-millimeter cigarette on the market and most people will say "Benson & Hedges." Wrong. The answer is "Pall Mall Gold." Benson & Hedges was first to establish the *position*.

A product that put the "benefit" into its name was able to dislodge a product that had the "means" in its name. Carnation's Slender vs. Mead Johnson's Metrecal. The name "Slender" had a great deal to do with Carnation's successful positioning.

These programs point to a very important benefit that your company can derive from positioning. It's the fact that your programs will become cumulative. You can keep them up, year after year. The high cost of media today demands this. If all your great ads aren't building you a strong equity or position, I'm afraid all you're getting for your money is ads. And you're not going to get there from here.

If I've moved you to possibly consider your position, I'd like to offer you four simple rules for playing the game:

- 1) Find the people in your own organization and your agency who understand it. It's tough work and it's not played well by amateurs or non-believers. It is played well by people who have good marketing sense. It's also played well by people who have "vision."

Positioning is a concept that is cumulative in nature. Something that can take advantage of advertising's long-range nature. Because of this, the people who work with you will have to be able to understand what you are trying to build. Top management has to make decisions as to what the company will be — not next month or next year, but in five years.

They have to have vision. There's no sense building a position that's based on a technology that's too narrow. Or a product that's becoming obsolete. When you're betting on the come, it takes a lot of understanding, faith and good teamwork.

- 2) Be brutally frank about your product or company and its reputation. Try to eliminate all ego from the decision making. It clouds the issue.

One of the most critical aspects of “positioning” is being able to evaluate objectively your products and how they are viewed by your customers.

As a rule, when it comes to building strong programs, trust no one, especially product managers. The closer people get to products, the more they defend old decisions or promises.

Get your information from the marketplace. That's the place where your program has to succeed, not in the product manager's office.

- 3) Change what you have to change. Take advantage of what you can take advantage of. Base these decisions on what's in the marketplace, not what's in the company.

Nothing in this marketing game stays the same for very long. Technology sees to that. To succeed in taking advantage of opportunities, you have to be sensitive to this change.

Even something as basic as a corporate name is under fire today. A corporate name may be geographically restricting, too long, outmoded in terminology, too limiting in scope, misleading, difficult to remember, hard to pronounce, or associated with past failures. Any of these may be a marketing millstone. In other words, you are starting with two strikes against you.

On the other hand, you might have a great corporate name, but too many brand names, too many programs, too many graphics, no uniform treatment of corporate identity, no corporate direction. In other words, you are not putting your best hitters at bat.

Whatever your situation, before you can build a strong position you have to build a strong foundation.

- 4) Establish your position and build a program around it that's big enough to get noticed.

The noise level today is fierce. There are just too many “me-too” products and “me-too” companies vying for the minds of your prospects. Getting noticed is getting tougher.

With this noise level you just have to be bold enough and consistent enough to get noticed.

The first step in a positioning program normally entails running fewer programs but stronger programs. This sounds simple but it actually runs counter to what usually happens as corporations get larger. They normally run more programs but weaker programs. It's this fragmentation that can make many large advertising budgets just about invisible in today's media storm.

One of the largest business paper advertisers today is General Electric. Think of the last three ads they've run. If you can, you are either an employee or a competitor.

These four points are a start. Put them all together and I'll guarantee you'll get to where you want to go from here. And do some great work on the way.