

Position Your Organization as a Partner to Your Customers

Use these nine questions to position your organization for success.

By Ed Rigsbee



If you would like to develop a strategy based on quality relationships, take a look at how your customers currently perceive your organization. Ask your customers what they think of you through surveys or simply by word of mouth. The conversation they have with themselves about you is their reality.

You can boost your chances of success in an uncertain economy if you position yourself as a partner to your customers. Sit on their side of the table. Learn what's valuable to them and what isn't. When you're clear about how you want the market to perceive you, you can then drive this positioning strategy throughout your organization.

Answer the following positioning questions, and your chances for success will dramatically increase.

1. Who are your customers? You have many different types of customers—potential donors, funders, board members, people who use your organization's services. To better understand who your customers are, explore these sub-questions:

- Who do you want them to be?
- What must you do to get them?
- Who has chosen you?
- What are their demographics?

2. Where are your customers?

- Where are they geographically?

Socially? Economically?

- What publications do your target customers read?
- What media format are they likely to frequent?

3. How do your customers find you?

• Word-of-mouth, drive-by or walk-by traffic, snail mailings, e-mailings, phone solicitations, yellow pages advertising, local cable station, radio, newspapers, specialty magazines, and cross promotions are possibilities.

• Maybe they've heard of you through a media interview or article.

• How about the Internet? Are you linked to other relevant sites? Will you show up on search engines? Do you have a presence on social networking sites?

4. How do your customers perceive value when selecting an organization with which to partner? Technological capability, knowledge, overall service, unbundling of services, integrity, selection, price, geography,

and a cadre of other factors will affect their selection process.

5. How do your customers prefer to do business?

- Do they walk the partnering walk or just talk it?
- Ethnic and cultural concerns are critical factors in today's diverse society. Are you willing to walk the extra mile to understand and fulfill your diverse customers' desires and needs?

6. Who is your competition? Who might your customers go to instead of you? Who has the capability and willingness to make a greater commitment to partnering than you?

7. What benefits are your competitors' customers receiving? Spending time thinking about solutions to customers' problems and challenges from your competitors' point of view will serve you well. Know how your competition thinks and acts. You can learn from them. To win, you must know your competition better than they know themselves. Be careful not to select copycat positioning; rarely is it successful. Adapt rather than adopt.

8. What is it about your organization that really gets you excited? Whatever it is, market through that window with all your energy and passion.

9. What is your uniqueness? It may be a personality trait, an area in which you excel, or the one thing for which your customers are always complimenting you. Find this and you've struck gold! People prefer an original whenever possible. Help them find it in you.

The answers to the above nine questions will help you define a partnering positioning strategy. This may be a completely new direction or simply an adjustment to your current strategy. If you do select partnering, remember it's not a quick fix for your ills; it's a long-term visionary strategy to which you and your organization must commit in order for success to follow.

Your most challenging positioning task will be to select a concept and hook (make partnering part of it) and then stick to it. This will also be your most rewarding strategy. ■

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