

Assume the Position:
How to Write Genuinely Useful Positioning Statements
By Jonathan Kranz

A short time ago, I was consulting with the director of an entrepreneurial institute at a famous business school. He asked me for an opinion regarding several available options for a positioning statement.

Coming from a copywriter, my advice may seem a little odd: Don't worry so much about the words.

I suggested that he and his colleagues put the positioning statements on a white board, then, underneath each one, list the actual, tangible, physical things they would *do* (or should do) to fulfill that particular position. Determining the best position would not be a matter of choosing the "right" words, but of choosing the promise they were most prepared to keep.

If, for example, they define their institute as the "leading center for the education of entrepreneurs," they would need to take some action that demonstrates leadership, like administering the world's largest business plan competition or hosting the biggest conference for entrepreneurs.

If they choose, "innovative incubator for young entrepreneurs" as their position, they would have to embrace innovation, perhaps through a unique model of education or through a new way of networking students to mentors.

And so on. The point is that for the position to be credible, it has to be backed with something real.

The basics

If you haven't do so already, read the classic book on the matter, *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind* by Al Ries and Jack Trout. It'll tell you everything you need to know about the theory of positioning.

In practice, a positioning statement marries what you do (or offer) with the audience you do it for. In formula, it can be expressed as:

[NAME OF BUSINESS] is [KIND OF PRODUCT OR SERVICE] for [KIND OF PEOPLE].

Examples:

- Volvo is the security car for safety-conscious consumers.
- Home Depot is the hardware department store for do-it-yourselfers.
- De Cecco is the premium pasta for serious chefs.

Beyond the basics

Simple, right? But not easy. The temptation is to identify a desirable characteristic that appeals to a desirable market niche and say – tah dah! – that’s who we are.

That, unfortunately, is how many positioning statements are formed. Instead of establishing a credible market presence however, these pseudo-positions merely become an exercise in wishful thinking.

I leave you with the same suggestion I gave to the entrepreneurial institute: Think long and hard about the material substance of your promise.

If your position is centered on some kind of “exceptional service for busy people,” then you better NOT have an automated call system that puts customers in service limbo. If your position is built on “luxurious accommodations for discriminating travelers,” your hotel linens better have a high thread count.

Build your position on something *real*. Otherwise, you’re just creating castles in the air.

#####

© 2009 Jonathan Kranz

You may reproduce this article on your website or in your enewsletters *as long as you include the following attribution with active links:*

Article written by Jonathan Kranz of Kranz Communications, www.kranzcom.com,
jonkranz@kranzcom.com.