

# THE ART IN MARKETING STRATEGY – CREATIVITY VS. MEMORY

## *The Tools Of Marketing Aren't The Strategy*

Many years ago, I worked at an ad agency whose creative director boasted of his ability to generate good advertising ideas. The problem was that his ideas weren't very good. His ad campaigns usually fell short of objectives, or at least, generated no excitement, nor were they very competitive. They rarely were the right ideas for the campaigns involved. After awhile, I figured out what was wrong.

The problem was that he wasn't *creating*, or even thinking. He was *remembering*. He had a prodigious memory of what other creative directors had done, but apparently no real ideas of his own. He was, as we used to say in the Air Force, a tail gunner. The tail gunner always knows where he's been, but has no idea of where the plane is going. Looking forward was the navigator's job, which, ultimately, was to forge new directions that were relevant to the mission.

The curse – and challenge – of marketing is that it's at the apex of competition, which depends for its success on being ahead of the curve. Competing requires attracting the target audience's attention, generating excitement, enforcing credibility, and, in the case of professional services, building a context and an opportunity for selling. And it's all got to be done better than the competitors are doing it. Then it has a better chance to get to the bottom line -- which is the ultimate goal and value of marketing. A good memory is swell to have because you have to remember the way to use the skills, like a good artist knows how to mix paints and use brushes. But mixing paint and skillfully using a brush isn't the essence of what the great artist produces. It's the picture that counts, not the paint.

In marketing, like painting, the genius lies in the picture, not the tools used to paint the picture.

Part of the problem is that we all have the same marketing tools available to us. We all have media relations, seminars, articles, direct mail and display advertising, and so forth. And most marketers are fairly proficient at most of these tools. But if we all have the same tools, how do we compete?

The answer, of course, is resides in two things – the strategic use of these tools, and more significantly, the artful use of them.

Key to understanding strategy is to recognize that the tools aren't the strategy -- they are simply tools used to help the strategy function. A marketing strategy for a professional firm, no less than for a product, begins with ...

- An understanding of the market.
- This is followed by understanding the firm's ability to meet the needs of that market.
- Then comes an assessment of the *best way* to use the firm's capabilities to serve that market.
- It's in this last step that the choice of tools is made. It's here, as well,

that originality comes into play. How? There are many ways, but the simplest is to ask yourself, “This is the way I did it yesterday. Is it the best way to do it today?”

Here, too, is where the concept of *positioning* comes into play.

Positioning is a significant factor in artful marketing strategy. Positioning, simply put, defines your firm’s relationship to the needs and problems of the market. It’s not a *mission statement*, which is a projection of your firm’s objectives. It’s not a *niche*, in which you focus your efforts on a particular market or market characteristic. It’s not a *brand*, which is an implied promise of delivery of a specific kind of service.

A position asks, “What one thing, more than any other, is of the greatest concern to our market?” The position is predicated on the answer to the question, “What fact or value can we communicate to the market that would address that concern?” Essentially, it defines client expectations. It stems from the best possible understanding of the needs, aspirations, and expectations of the clients and prospective clients. It must be based on reality, and be consistent with your own firm’s business strategy.

Its emphasis is on how your market will perceive you, not on how you perceive yourself. This is why, in formulating a position, you can't guess, nor can you cast in terms of how you want to be perceived. In the most successful positions, there is always a measure of research, without which you are likely to miss the market's needs, and thereby waste a good opportunity to reach out to that market.

A strategy based on positioning not only focuses your marketing program, but, if it’s well thought out and crafted, it focuses the thrust of your strategy. Perhaps best of all, it defines your firm better than any claims you may make.

In addition to a firm’s overall position, each of a firm’s practices faces a different market, and therefore may require a different position.

A classic example of a position is the famous sign in the war room during former president Clinton’s first election campaign. It said, “It’s the economy, stupid.” It signaled that the economy was foremost that year in the public’s mind. Every piece of writing, every speech, had to address the economy. And so it must be in any marketing program predicated on the position.

Can memory of what others have done serve in crafting a position? No, because each firm faces a different market, with different needs. Thus, a position must be original and relevant to your particular firm..

And the more original, and the more accurately it addresses the market’s needs, the more successful the strategy – and the more successful the firm.

It’s very easy to fall into the habit of using the same strategy over and over as well as strategies that others have done. . But if you do, the chances are that one or more of your competitors will outthink you. That your target market will get too bored to pay attention to your message. That your programs will fail, and that you’ll be out of a job in 18 months.

That’s why, in marketing, originality works better than memory.

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