

Ten Tests of Your Positioning

-by Blair Enns

Winning without pitching begins with positioning. Ask yourself these ten questions to help determine if your agency is properly positioned for business development success.

1. Are you Afraid?

Most agencies are positioned too broadly, and thus repositioning exercises are usually exercises in narrowing the firm's focus. If you don't experience at least a little fear over the idea of walking away from numerous clients-to-be then you may not be claiming a narrow enough field of expertise. Be afraid.

2. Are you Energized?

Fear should give way to excitement. A valuable new position should get the adrenaline going as you begin to imagine the possibilities. Even years later you should be excited about your ability to find and help people who recognize your expertise. Nothing brings clarity like focus.

3. Is List Building Easy?

Once properly positioned, building your target list of clients-to-be to whom you will be most compelling and relevant should be easy. Agencies broadly positioned as relevant to everyone have a hard time deciding whom to target. Once your expertise is defined it's easy to spot the people you can help.

4. Are you Getting Attention?

Upon taking your message to the marketplace you will be met with interest or you will be lumped in with the sizeable group of agencies with homogenous or irrelevant value propositions and largely ignored. Well-positioned agencies break out of the herd and get the attention of clients-to-be quickly. Are your telephone introductions met with, 'Hmmm, tell me more' or do you hear, 'I get calls from firms like yours all the time.' Well positioned firms get attention early in the buying cycle.

5. Are you Charging More?

Profit margin is the ultimate indicator of differentiation. The fewer substitutes your firm is seen to have, the greater your ability to command a price premium. Well-positioned agencies don't compete on price – they charge more and still win the business. *That* is the benefit of a proper positioning: the ability to simultaneously maintain a sales advantage (win more) while commanding a price premium (charge more.) The specialist will almost always beat the generalist and will do so while charging more.

6. Do you Travel?

A client will travel great distances for specialized expertise but won't travel across town for what he can get down the street. Your ability to do business beyond your own backyard is a strong indicator of the perception of your expertise. In your mind there is a line of geography on the other side of which you don't see yourself competing. Is that line around your city, country, continent or the planet?

7. Do you Set or Impact the Buying Process?

Your power in the buy-sell relationship stems from the availability of alternatives to your firm. Your power is expressed through your ability to premium price and your ability to affect the

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buying process. Are you a good soldier, politely and promptly taking orders, or a good general, gently directing the course of action and next steps?

8. Do you Incur a Cost of Sale, or Does your Client Incur the Cost to Buy?

There are costs incurred when buyer and seller come together and the weaker party in the relationship bears the bulk of these costs. Well-positioned experts have no cost of sale, whereas poorly positioned generalists suffer from a high cost of sale. Your mantra should be, 'There is no cost of sale; there is only the price to purchase.'

9. Are you Allowed Time to Think?

Time to think is an indicator of a well-positioned expert who is charging for the value being delivered. Sweatshops are too busy completing tasks and meeting deadlines to afford the luxury to think about their clients challenges, or their own. The office of a profitable marketing communication agency feels like an expensive consulting firm, not a college dorm. Got your feet up on the desk?

10. Are you Getting Smarter Quickly?

Focus drives a rapid building expertise. Once sufficiently focused on an area in which you can lead, your directed thinking in that area will cause you to get smarter quickly. You should be twice as smart today as you were a year or two ago, no matter how long you've been in this business. Are you?

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