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DRIVING UNIFIED LAUNCHES

SENDING THE
Right Message
about your Products

A Simple Look at Product Messaging and Positioning

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Delivering a successful product that offers a significant, compelling value to customers, and solves the problems that they have, is not a matter of luck. It is the inevitable result of following a process that creates a valuable product with compelling messaging and the right set of features that are presented to the customers that need it, in a way that shows its worth.

For any product to be successful, it needs to be built to deliver a value to the customer. The product also needs to have that value presented to the appropriate audience and done so in a way that the customer will understand and see the need for the product. Delivering this messaging in an optimal way is a process that begins with solid product messaging and positioning.



1.

What is Product Messaging and Positioning?

The product messaging and positioning document is a critical component of the overall product lifecycle. Many of the marketing materials that will be created, particularly those that will be outbound-focused, will be generated from this document, and it will constantly evolve throughout the lifecycle of the product. As a living, changing document, it needs to have an owner that is in constant communication with every department that touches the product, from engineering to sales to support.

In the beginning of the messaging document, the product, the target customer (market segment, vertical, etc.) and the product's main benefit statement will be clearly identified. This is important, as it sets the tone for both to whom the product is being offered and why it is important to them. The main benefit statement is not a product feature, but is the primary benefit that it provides to the end user. This is the fundamental benefit that the product will provide to the customer, and the basis from which everything will come.

Next, it is important to individually list out all of the unique value propositions for the product. The first section dealt with the single biggest benefit to the customer, but in this part, you should list out every value that the customer will receive in a comprehensive listing that the overall value proposition can be derived from. This includes any specific features that have a significant customer benefit. If there are benefits to a specific subset of customers, for example a new product may be attractive to an existing install base, then those benefits should be called out in a separate subsection.

Now that the product value propositions have been called out, the next step is to highlight the key benefits of the product. These are the benefits that the product will bring to the end user, and are the reasons why someone would buy the product in the first place. First the main two or three customer benefits should be called out, then a detailed list of all the benefits.

Following that, there should be a features section, which is different than the benefits. A feature could be a technical function that would improve performance of a process. The benefit would be a reduction in costs due to the improved efficiency that came about as a result of that performance improvement. The benefits come from the features.

Finally, the document should include the product descriptions in 25, 50, 100 and 250 word formats. These descriptions will all be similar, and should be a result of the product positioning, features and benefits called out earlier in the document.



2. What does this mean for audience targeting?

The product positioning and messaging document is critical to audience targeting because the two are tied together. Before a product is developed, there should be sufficient market research to determine that there is a market need for the product (e.g., businesses need data protection schemes to meet regulatory compliance requirements) and that the product developed meets those needs. The positioning document will call out the specific audience that is being targeted and how the product meets the needs of that group.

Once the messaging and positioning have been established internally, they need to be verified externally. This means that there should be an on-going engagement with the customers to ensure that the messaging resonates with them. If customers do not see the value, then this is the time to reevaluate the messaging to find out what would make the product compelling to them. It could be how the product is being presented, that the customer might not be the right one, or the product could be missing a critical piece. Working with your customers to ensure that the product is being presented to the right audience in the right way is as important as any product feature.

3. How it is important to embed into your Go to Market Plans.

This is an integral part of the Go to Market plans. The Go to Market plans include items such as identifying the market opportunity, target customers, competitors, pricing and how the product will be sold. The product messaging and positioning will tie into each of these components.

The positioning and messaging document identifies the right audience and the right market for a product. It will form the foundation for overall Go to Market strategy. As the Go to Market strategy is developed, the positioning document will identify the product features and target customers, which will in turn help to identify the competitors. The positioning document will be the foundation upon which a strong Go to Market plan can be built.



4. How soon should you start this?

The positioning and messaging are critical to the product. This is why the positioning and messaging should be started as soon as possible after the market assessment is completed and the product features have been identified. Most, if not all, of the marketing items that will be developed will come about as a function of the messaging, which will have a long development cycle so the document cannot be started too soon.

Remember that this will be a constantly evolving document. It does not have to, and in fact cannot be, completed right away. The important thing is to begin. Once you have an initial positioning document, it can be reviewed by others who can provide input. As more revisions are done, the document will get closer and closer to being complete.

5. How often should it be updated?

The short answer is that it should be updated as often as necessary. The real answer is that it should be updated often enough to reflect any changes in the market, customer needs and especially competitive challenges.

6. Who should review it and how often?

Initially the messaging should be reviewed by all interested parties, which can include product engineering, product marketing, corporate marketing, sales and sales engineering and the support organization. Over time each of these groups should be included in further reviews as the messaging evolves, to reflect updates to the product, new markets being targeted and changes to the competition.

7. How long does it typically take to create a good messaging document?

Ideally, a good messaging document will not be completed until the end of the product lifecycle. It will change as the product is being developed, and as features are added or removed to meet launch commitments, in order to reflect changes in market requirements and competitive pressure. The important thing to remember is to create an initial document so that it can be reviewed by the rest of the team to incorporate its feedback into the next revision.

8.

How many times should it be revised?

Any messaging document needs to be reviewed both early and often. In the data that we have collected in working with our customers, we have found that 10 times seems to be the magic number for the right number of revisions to be deemed “customer ready.”

There are two reasons why the positioning needs to be reviewed that many times. The first is that it is simply an interactive process. Many different people from a variety of internal organizations, with unique perspectives, will need to review and provide input on the messaging before it can be ready. Each of these different contributors will make edits, which may then need to be edited. Every time another person touches the document, that adds to the number of revisions.

The second reason is that if it is not revised that many times, it is not likely to be seen by the organization as complete. This is a function of perception. The messaging may be perfect with the initial draft, but until it goes through a thorough review and editing cycle, it will not be accepted as complete.

9.

How to build into everything that you do.

The product positioning should be an integral feature in every facet of the product release and management cycle. Since the positioning ties into everything, from early product planning to requirements documents such as the Marketing Requirements Document (MRD) and Product Requirements Document (PRD), all the way through to the final outbound sales and marketing materials it should be something that is looked at and used throughout the product release cycle.

**Marketing
Requirements
Document**

**Product
Requirements
Document**

10. How to perform messaging audits.

Messaging audits should be performed on an on-going basis. The owner of the messaging should be constantly in communication with the other parts of the organization to get feedback on how that messaging is being accepted and how it can be improved. Direct interviews should also be performed with both existing and potential customers. A thorough questionnaire should be prepared in advance to maximize the customers' time and to ensure that maximum benefit is received from the audit.

The messaging and positioning document is a critical piece of any product launch. It is the foundation upon which a product can be successfully brought to market. It is an ever-changing part of managing the product and as the product evolves, the messaging and positioning need to change with it. It also needs to grow and evolve to meet the needs of the marketplace.

A solid messaging and positioning document is one that is constantly changing and evolving to meet the needs of the market. This requires constant communication with customers, partners and the entire organization. Only by sustaining and nurturing the messaging over the entire life of the product can you help ensure that the product is being delivered to the right customer in the right way.





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