

# DISPATCHES™

*Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front*

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## THE BRAND IDEA CHECKLIST

*“Why does your organization exist? Why do you get up in the morning?  
And why should anybody care?”*

--Simon Sinek, TED Talk, 2010

Coming up with a winning brand marketing strategy has never been a paint-by-numbers affair. Like Marketing itself, any kind of competitive marketing strategy depends upon a blend of art and science, creativity and informed discipline. While there **are** certain “fill-in-the-blank” essential elements toward developing, say, a competitive Brand Positioning Strategy (such as the 5 parts of the classic BP Strategy or the 7 components within a Strategic Target), there is no pre-set formula for completing them. No, determining and describing a Positioning Target that the brand can win with still demands a balanced blend of marketers’ creativity and sound research. The good news is that, with some quality training, a few good models, and diligent practice, most of us can eventually become pretty competent at “blending” the art and science required for many of these fundamental marketing strategies...with a few exceptions, that is.

Time and again over the years we’ve found that crafting and articulating what is perhaps the most basic of marketing strategies—the *Brand Idea*—is also one of the most common of these few exceptions. A junior marketer can ask, “How do I know what kind of information I should put into the Psychographics component of the Positioning Target?” And one can readily put the marketer on the right track by citing segment “labels”—along with key attitudinal descriptors of those labels—derived from a qualified Psychographic Segmentation Study (or, for pharmaceutical and medical device brands, possibly from a detailed Sales Rep Physician Survey).

Similarly, another marketer might ask, “What makes for a complete Positioning Benefit?” While we cannot dictate exactly **which** benefits to choose, we can at the very least demonstrate the three types of positioning benefits (Product—What the product does; Consumer/Customer—What that provides the Consumer/Customer; and Emotional—How all of that makes the Consumer/Customer feel)...and urge the marketer to include one of each. But when it comes to the marketer’s question, “How do I know what kind of information to include in the Brand Idea?” well, providing any kind of proscriptive

response isn't nearly as easy. More and more we've come to understand *why* this is so: because figuring out *what* to include in the Brand Idea and *how* to say it is a lot more art than science.

One indication that crafting a Brand Idea is more art than science lies in the difficulty in finding a commonly accepted definition of the term. Unlike the definition of a Brand Positioning Strategy, which give or take a word here and there, is usually uniformly expressed, you're hard-pressed to find something similar for the Brand Idea. In fact, we find ourselves tinkering with the definitions we articulate. Still, most marketers would agree that a well-constructed, competitive Brand Idea would always, at a minimum, exhibit certain traits:

### **A Brand Idea...**

- **Is short—ideally *one sentence*; but not more than two;**
- **Is strategic—that is, expresses meaningful *differentiation*;**
- **Goes beyond the functional—incorporating the *emotive*;**
- **Conveys the Brand's *ultimate meaning* to the intended Target.**

So, for example, the Brand Idea for the overall Mercedes Brand would **not** be "*The ultimate in sophisticated luxury and German engineering*"...because, while such a statement is one sentence, and contains an implied differentiation ("the ultimate") as well as Mercedes' well-known ownership of "German engineering," it falls short of conveying the ***ultimate meaning*** that owning and driving a Mercedes holds for its ideal Target Customer. Sure, if one has a Mercedes he or she can appreciate the thoughtful features of German engineering and the resulting luxury these afford. But what does owning a Mercedes *really mean* to most owners? We think it's much bigger than those functional features and benefits: it's how it makes an owner (especially a first-time owner) *feel*: "***I have arrived! I've made it! I'm successful!***"

You may not fully agree with our take on the Mercedes Brand. That's okay. But we hope you will discern the difference between a Brand Idea Strategy that stops at the functional and one that translates the functional into an ultimate meaning. Which brings us to the Simon Sinek quote at the start of this week's DISPATCHES. His TED talk is popular, with many, many views on youtube. And we have quoted from that "golden circle" talk before. More to the point, we have found in our positioning work with clients that sharing Simon Sinek's golden circle talk makes for really helpful stimulus—towards expressing a potential Brand Idea.

Of course, in his golden circle talk and in this week's quote, Mr. Sinek is not speaking about brands per se; rather, he is referring to organizations and inspired leaders...more precisely, organizations such as Apple and inspired leaders like Martin Luther King and Orville and Wilbur Wright. But his fundamental model, with the concentric WHY, HOW, and WHAT circles, readily applies to "inspired Brands" as well as to inspired organizations

and leaders. We particularly like his notion of the WHY bulls-eye because we believe therein lies a particularly close analogy to the Brand Idea. To take his quote and adjust it, then, we might ask, *“Why does your Brand exist? Why do you get up in the morning to keep building and advancing it? And why should any of your ideal Target Customers/Consumers care?”*

Answering these questions may not guarantee a perfectly constructed Brand Idea. Nor will answering them necessarily serve as a “paint-by-numbers” approach to expressing the Brand Idea. Most likely, there will be more than one or two good answers—especially to the last question. But that’s a good thing: for then you have some options to check out with your Target...some research to back up your chosen Brand Idea Strategy. However, because determining the optimal Brand Idea is more art than science, we’ll leave you with a Brand Idea mini-checklist—some characteristics to check for as you and your team aim to give some ultimate meaning to your Brand.

#### **BOATS & HELICOPTERS—A Brand Idea Checklist**

1.  **The Brand Idea is one sentence in length; no more than two.**
2.  **It clearly contains the brand’s meaningful differentiation versus other options (in fact, you can highlight or circle those words).**
3.  **It does not merely identify “categoric” or “class-effect” functional features and benefits.**
4.  **The Brand Idea is emotive: it expresses how the intended Target *feels* about the Brand (not just the product)...what it means to them.**
5.  **It is not simply a “tagline” from some communication campaign.**
6.  **If another brand were substituted in the Brand Idea, it would not work—or, at the very least, not be as credible as our Brand.**

Richard Czerniawski & Mike Maloney