



By Richard D. Czerniawski

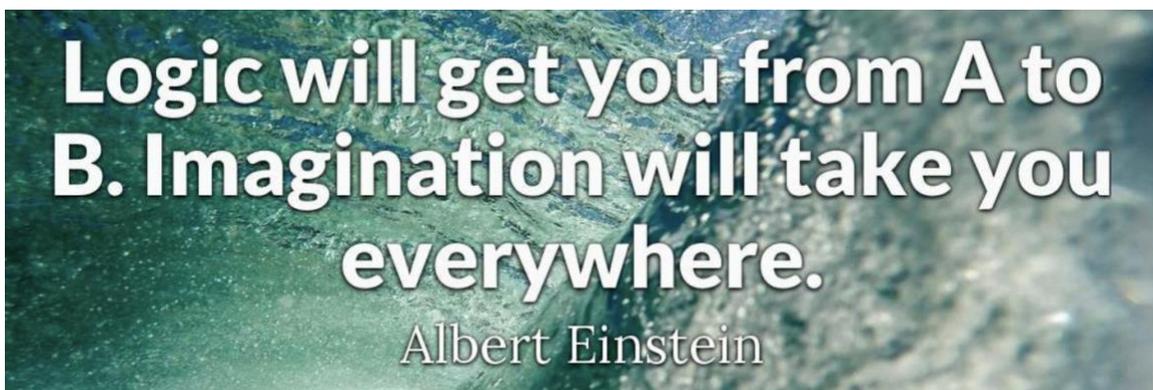
THE KEY BARRIER TO DIFFERENTIATING BRAND POSITIONING STRATEGY

Lukasz Murawski interviewed me for the podcast he hosts, Let's Talk Brands. He focused on asking me questions about "Positioning." You can find the podcast here: <https://youtu.be/yDAG9xAAjPw>

One of the many questions Lukasz asks me is, "What are the barriers to differentiating positioning from competitors?" I think my answer surprised him and, perhaps, it will surprise you. He probably expected me to answer "regulations" or some such excuse. However, I took him and, hopefully, you in a different direction with my answer.

The key barrier to differentiating positioning from competitors is "lack of imagination." Yes, regulatory bodies such as the FDA and FTC certainly define the boundaries placing restrictions on what we do and how we do it. However, the boundaries are the same for all competitors within a sector and category.

Regulatory bodies keep us and our competitors honest. So, what is there for us to fear? We deal honestly and ethically. So, those boundaries should not be overly restricting. Moreover, the playing field is level for all.



How then do we differentiate? We must use and stretch our imagination. We must be ambitious but realistic in creating a differentiated brand positioning strategy. We must be able to prove its validity.

Given “strategic freedom,” we’d build differentiation into our products, services, and compounds. We’d address unmet or latent needs as Steve Jobs did when Apple introduced the iPod—A thousand songs in your pocket. We would choose to build differentiation into the entity upstream, based upon unmet customer physical and/or psychological needs.

However, we, marketers, are often assigned to make something out of something already developed. Not something out of nothing. So, to differentiate, we need to think of the “whole product.” Where can we add value to that which already exists? Intangibles! I’ve referred to this in many of the articles we publish as DISPATCHES and Marketing Matters. The whole product consists of tangibles (those physical properties) and intangibles (added-value services).

Again, Apple provides an excellent example of innovating with intangibles. We value the physical properties of the MacBook Pro (processor, screen size, weight, etc.). However, intangibles, such as the Genius Bar, instruction, and Apple Care, create additional value for customers and differentiate it from competitors.

Moreover, as valuable as this whole product offering may be, we need to get beyond the product we sell and think about the experience we deliver. My wife has been trying to reach a kitchen supply company via a phone call for the last two days. Consequently, she will need to make a trip to retail to get service. It’s not a pleasant experience. Instead, it’s a hassle! When (physical) products (services, compounds, devices, etc.) are basically the same, work in the same way, and get the same basic results, the experience can provide critically important differentiation.

This brings us to the “brand.” ***The brand is a mark that connotes a special bond and relationship with the customer based upon shared values and experience.*** A brand satisfies both physical and psychological needs and desires. The brand is a more significant and valuable entity than the product—regardless of whether we refer to the whole product. Indeed, we can find a way to differentiate with the broad canvas the brand entity presents to us marketers.

Mercedes satisfies a physical need for dependable, luxurious transportation. It also meets the psychological desire for prestige and belonging. Robotics may fulfill the surgeon's physical need for control and precision. It also satisfies the surgeon's psychological need to feel s/he is an elite surgeon at the top of her game.

Each of the positioning elements provides an opportunity to differentiate. We can differentiate with:

- The Brand Idea
- Target Customer Selection and Profile
- The Literal Competitive Framework—namely, who we choose to compete against for customer preference.
- The Perceptual Competitive Framework—a label that transports target customers to perceive us as something other than our standard of identity or class of drug.
- Our Benefit—choosing from product, customer, and emotional benefit and how we express it.
- Reason-Why Support—where we add credibility to the benefit.
- Brand Character—the personality we create for the brand.

We can differentiate with one or more of the positioning strategy elements. I like to differentiate in as many places as possible. Perhaps, I’ll take this up in another Marketing Matters or DISPATCHES article.

When we fail to differentiate, we lead target customers to genericize our entity and the category. Genericizing leads to price competition and a race to the bottom. Accordingly, we must differentiate in a way that is relevant and meaningful to our target customer. It takes a heaping tablespoon of imagination.

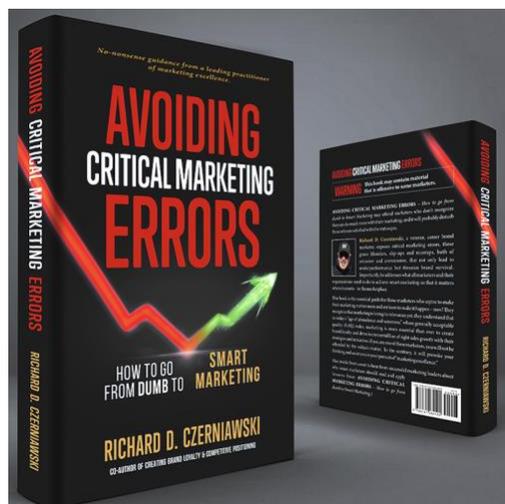
As the legendary adman, Leo Burnett, said, "When you reach for the stars, you might not quite get them, but you won't come up with a handful of mud either."

Proposed Action(s) for Implementation (*Crossing the chasm from learning to impact*):

S-t-r-e-t-c-h your imagination!

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Are you interested in making your marketing matter even more? Please read my most recent book, **AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing**. Learn more here: <http://bdn-intl.com/avoiding-critical-marketing-errors>. It will help you avoid critical marketing errors and, importantly, suggest actions you can take to make your marketing matter even more.



Peace and best wishes,

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