

OWNING IT:

Three Requirements for Distinct Positioning with the Power to Change Behavior in Healthcare

An Ipsos White Paper

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GAME CHANGERS



At its most basic, brand positioning is the place you want to occupy in the hearts and minds of customers. It is what your brand stands for and promises to unfailingly deliver. But it's much more than that, because effective positioning has the power to change behavior. When done well, it **connects with target customers in such a deeply compelling way that people begin to think and feel differently**—and this drives them to act differently.

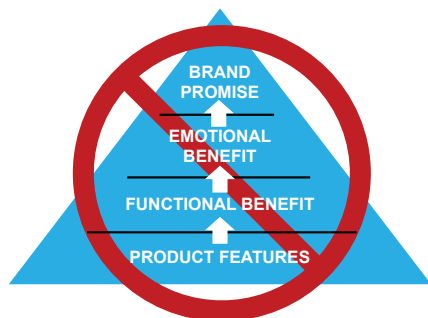
Positioning is the single most important strategic decision for brand leaders, informing all subsequent marketing, communication and brand experience strategies. So, it's imperative to get it right. "Owning it" requires that positioning be:

1. **Human needs-driven**
2. **Crafted with primary target in mind**
3. **Pressure-tested against strategic filters**

#1: Human Needs-Driven

Brand positioning essentially involves a promise about what the brand will unfailingly deliver to the target, thereby creating exceptional customer experience. While the evolution from product-centric to human-centric positioning happened decades ago in packaged goods marketing, pharmaceutical manufacturers were generally slower to undertake this shift in orientation.

A product-centric approach generally misses the opportunity to spark an emotional connection. Beginning with product attributes and laddering up to brand promise risks taking positioning to predictable and undifferentiated spaces. In healthcare there are many examples of brands across various therapeutic areas vying for the same generic-sounding spaces—think freedom from limitations, or getting closer to pre-disease enjoyment of life, or regaining a sense of control—that are neither differentiating nor motivating.





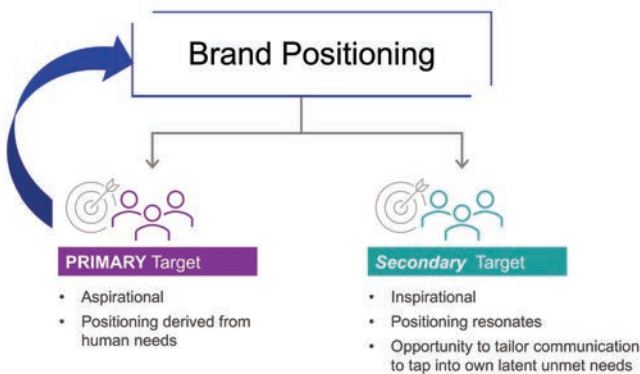
To identify and then own distinct positioning, marketers must take a top-down, human needs-driven approach.



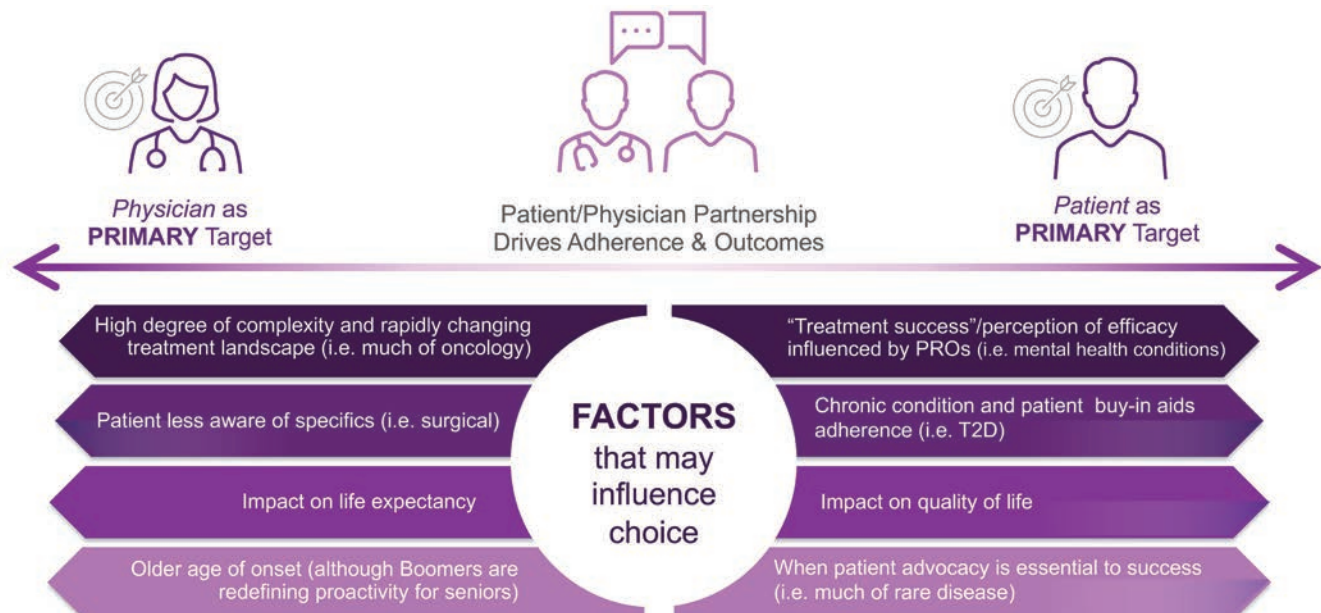
Success requires deep human-centric understanding of the lived reality, tensions and unmet needs of the primary target. Begin by imagining the product as a response to a core need of the target audience (top-down). Then explore how to support the brand promise with functional attributes and functional/emotional benefits (bottom-up). These magical areas of overlap unlock powerful opportunities for meaningful, differentiated positioning territories. The intent is to set up the brand as **uniquely positioned to deliver against a core need of the primary target**—which then motivates behavior toward the brand.

#2: Crafted with Primary Target in Mind

Brands must first define the target customer because tensions/unmet needs/motivators must be understood from the perspective of that target. While choosing a segment of the patient population can feel like reducing the size of the possible market, trying to be all things to all people means meaningfully connecting with no one.



Complicating matters in healthcare is the debate over who the primary target should be, given multiple “customers.” Over time, the pharmaceutical industry has evolved toward greater patient-centricity, with less tendency to default to the prescribing physician as gatekeeper. Growth of healthcare consumerism—accelerated by the Affordable Care Act and then by COVID-19—has meant a pronounced increase in the degree of involvement of patients in their own healthcare decisions, which has reinforced the shift toward patient-centricity in pharma marketing. But the strategic choice between patient and physician as primary target depends upon therapeutic area and brand-specific considerations, as outlined below.



The choice of primary target determines prioritization when setting strategy, and both targets are considered to ensure positioning strategy will be inspirational to both.

For example:

- Strategic choice of patient as primary target puts patients at the center, with positioning crafted based on patients' unmet human needs.
- Focus for the secondary target, physicians, involves assessing the motivational power of alternate ways of talking about how the brand could help them address patient needs.
- Upon launch, communication will be visible to both targets and must stay true to positioning strategy; tailoring messaging within that umbrella will increase the degree of meaningful connection. So there is opportunity to tailor communication to tap into physicians' own latent unmet needs in the space, thereby enhancing the ability to disrupt the current treatment algorithm and motivate behavior change toward the new entrant.
- It also becomes important to arm physicians, as secondary target, with understanding of the patients' unmet needs in the particular therapeutic area and a way to frame the treatment to drive patient receptivity.
 - Or to address the questions of increasingly well-informed patients who may arrive at their appointment with a strong viewpoint about their preferred treatment options.

#3: Pressure-Tested Against Strategic Filters

Once positioning territories or concepts are crafted, they must be pressure-tested with target customers to ensure that they are not merely interesting, but also powerfully resonant, credible, differentiating and, ultimately, motivating.



MOTIVATING Filter

Through the lens of the customer, assess the extent to which the positioning concept resonates. To motivate, the positioning concept must reflect authentic understanding of keenly felt needs and get to the heart of what really matters. While both rational and emotional resonance contribute, much human decision-making is driven by underlying emotions, so striking an emotional chord is key to motivating action.

The desired behavior change may be inspiring patients to ask their doctor about the brand, or motivating physicians to disrupt their current prescribing and try this new option with suitable patients in their practice.

CREDIBLE Filter

Then consider whether it is credible that the product/brand can deliver the benefit conveyed in the positioning concept, based on the data/claims/reasons to believe (RTBs). While positioning must be aspirational, some concepts go too far and defy credibility. For this strategic filter, connection back to the product is key. If customers do not find the brand promise believable, next explore what **would be** required, including (beyond the product) how branding might enhance credibility.

OWNABLE Filter

Finally, consider two components of ownability: how differentiating the brand value proposition is at launch, and sustainability over time.

Differentiation requires a clear point-of-difference (POD). The ideal situation is when a human needs-based insight aligns with a product-based POD that can strongly support the brand's ability to uniquely deliver against the need. But a product-based POD is not required for ownable positioning. Differentiation can be achieved via deep insight, enabling a brand to identify and then position against a need and brand promise that has not yet been considered by any competitor.

Assessing sustainability relies primarily on the business knowledge of the brand team. Consider the shifting competitive landscape and any risk it may pose, and ways to firmly stake a claim on the chosen positioning to dissuade new entrants from perceiving it as available (or vulnerable) whitespace.



Conclusion

Positioning is the single most important strategic decision for brand leaders, and these three requirements help put healthcare brands on the path to successfully “owning it.” When done well, brand positioning has the power to change behavior—driving business results as well as better health outcomes, and ultimately improving the lived experience of patients and the physicians who treat them.

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brand can “own it,”
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