

3.9: Brand Positioning and Alignment

Building Strong Brands: Consistency Matters

In order to make an impression in a market, brands need to stand for something. Inconsistent brands and messages fail to make a lasting impression because it is difficult for customers to trust them or register what these brands represent. On the other hand, when a brand is both consistent and relevant to customers, it builds recognition, credibility, trust, and ultimately loyalty. And loyalty, as you've learned, translates into sales.



Figure 3.9.1: Gummi Bears. **Provided by:** Pixabay. **Located at:** pixabay.com/en/giant-rubber-bear-gummib%C3%A4r-1089618/.
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Consistency is also important when it comes to differentiating a product. Brands simplify decisions for customers. When a brand consistently communicates how and why it is distinct from competitors, it reminds customers why they prefer this brand over others—and why they may be willing to pay more for it.

Finally, consistency is an imperative in the globalized economy in which virtually every business operates today. Brand-related messages and communications circulate around the world at astonishing speed: Just ask any company that has seen a major story break on social media. While it does make sense to target specific messages to different global markets according to consumer needs, those messages should all be aligned to a consistent, centralized brand identity. A brand manager—the marketer responsible for directing and managing brand strategy—must think of herself as an ambassador, advocating and communicating on behalf of that common brand in the various markets where the brand is represented.

Brand Positioning: A Tool for Achieving Consistency

The Brand Platform

As you learned in the previous module, product positioning is an important strategic tool that helps organizations focus their messages and marketing activities around a consistent, differentiating message aimed at a target segment. Brand positioning works on the same principle. The goal of brand positioning—like the positioning for any product or service—is to explain why that brand is different and better for its target customers, and why the differences matter.

At the same time, brands need a consistent, universal identity that is the same regardless of whom you communicate with. For this reason, brand positioning starts with defining precisely what the brand stands for. This is called the *brand platform*. The brand platform may include a variety of descriptive elements to paint a clear picture of what a brand represents. Some brand platform models are very complex, with ten or more inputs. Others are simpler and more streamlined.

The brand platform begins with the organization's mission statement, since the ultimate purpose of a brand is to help the organization achieve its mission. It also incorporates the value proposition for whatever the brand promotes. Remember that brands may operate at the company level (needing a company-level value proposition) or at the product or service level (needing an offering-specific value proposition). In addition to the mission statement and value proposition, the basic elements of any brand platform are a brand promise, core values, a brand voice or personality, and a brand-positioning statement. These are discussed below.

The Brand Promise

The brand promise is, in effect, the singular experience your brand promises to provide to your customers. It expresses what you want them to feel when they interact with your products and services. Year in, year out, the brand promise is what your customers count on and, ideally, it's the reason they keep coming back to you. The brand promise should be unique and linked to your competitive advantage: something other brands do not and cannot deliver in the way you do. It describes the most salient benefits your brand provides, including benefits that create an emotional connection with customers.

The brand promise is important not only for customers, but also for employees and other internal audiences. It sets the tone for how the company operates and for the experience the brand provides to customers across all segments and all points of contact.

Finally, the brand promise should be simple and easily understood, so it's easy to communicate and reinforce. Some marketers equate the marketing tagline, or advertising slogan, with the brand promise. While there are some exceptions, most brand-promise statements do not use the same marketing language that's used in ad slogans. For instance, Nike's "Just Do It" slogan works very well as part of an ad campaign, but it's not very illuminating as a brand promise. Similarly, fast-food chain Taco Bell never intended its catchy "Make a Run for the Border" tagline to be interpreted as a brand promise. Also, taglines, which are part of marketing communications, may need to be updated more frequently than the brand promise. In contrast, the brand promise should be the global, enduring commitment you stand for over time.

The following are examples of effective brand promises:

- **The Coca-Cola Company:** to refresh the world in mind, body, and spirit, and inspire moments of optimism^[1]
- **TOMS Shoes:** Through your purchases, TOMS helps provide shoes, sight, water, safe birth and bullying prevention services to people in need. Learn more about what we give.^[2]
- **Target:** expect more, pay less^[3]

Core (Brand) Values

Core values are guiding principles for how an organization does business. These values express a perspective on the world, and they govern both internal conduct and external behavior. While the brand promise explains *what* consistent experience a brand will deliver, the core values describe *how* the company will behave as it delivers that experience.

✓ ✓ Zappos' Values

An excellent example of core values infusing a strong brand comes from online retailer Zappos. The company's ten "Family Core Values," listed below, are written for current and prospective employees and describe Zappos' operating principles. At the same time, these values also set the tone for what customers can expect from Zappos and how they interact with the Zappos brand.

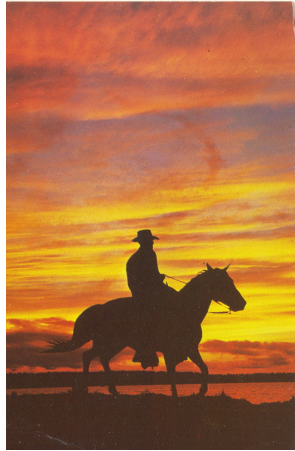
Zappos Family Core Values^[4]

1. Deliver WOW through Service
2. Embrace and Drive Change
3. Create Fun and a Little Weirdness
4. Be Adventurous, Creative, and Open-Minded
5. Pursue Growth and Learning
6. Build Open and Honest Relationships with Communication
7. Build a Positive Team and Family Spirit
8. Do More with Less
9. Be Passionate and Determined
10. Be Humble

Even if you are unfamiliar with Zappos, these core values give you a strong sense of what the company must be like, either to work for or to do business with.

Not every organization defines ten core values; in fact, most keep the number to six or fewer in order to retain a better focus on defining and expressing the organization's identity. What does matter is to find ways for the brand to deliver these values, so that they become real for employees and customers. For example, Zappos empowers individual employees to make judgment calls about how they deliver WOW-worthy customer service; every decision doesn't have to go through manager approval. By encouraging personal initiative in this way, the company also invites creativity, learning, and passion from its employees.

Brand Voice and Personality



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Just like people, strong brands have an outlook, tone, and personality that help reinforce the consistency of what and how brand gets communicated to customers, employees, and other stakeholders. The brand voice and personality are rooted in the brand promise and values, but they help flesh out the brand's distinctive image and presence. A useful template for defining brand voice and personality is the “is/is never” template. Using this template, marketers define the voice and personality attributes of the brand, almost as if it were a person. For example:

- Brand X **is** strong, authentic, independent, resourceful, and classic.
- Brand X **is never** frivolous, trendy, or fake.

A well-defined brand voice is a window into the personality of the brand. Together, the brand voice and personality set the linguistic tone for all brand-related communications and promotions. They also guide the choice of visual design, logo, and the look and feel of the brand, ensuring that the overall visual representation is a good match for what the organization wants the brand to convey.

As a short exercise, take a moment and see if you can construct “is/is never” statements for a couple well-known brands. What are the brand voice and personality of, say, GAP clothing compared with another well-known clothing brand, such as Guess?

Brand-Positioning Statement

Brand positioning follows the same process for product and service positioning outlined in the positioning module: understanding market and competitive dynamics, confirming competitive advantages, defining the market niche and positioning strategy, and delivering on that strategy. Fortunately, the brand promise should provide strong guidance around the competitive advantages and market niche that should be represented in the positioning statement.

Brand managers may develop brand-positioning statements according to the same formula used for product positioning (discussed in the positioning module):

To [target audience], Brand X is the only [category or frame of reference] that [points of differentiation/benefits delivered] because [reasons to believe].^[5]

Note that the target audience for the brand-positioning statement should include all the audiences for the brand, not just the specific, narrowly defined target segment you'd expect in a product- or service-positioning statement. The brand needs to be relevant to every conceivable audience you are trying to reach (which may include multiple target segments). For that reason, the brand-positioning statement needs to be written in such a way that it has a broad enough appeal to speak to that “larger” audience.

As with a product- or service-positioning statement, the brand-positioning statement becomes a guiding document for decisions about the key messages the organization should communicate about the brand, as well as other marketing activities.

Aligning to Deliver the Brand

It takes strong focus and hard work to get through the brand-positioning process and build a brand platform. But once this work is done, brand managers and marketers have a basis for deciding what they want to achieve with the brand. Next, the fun of brand building can begin.

Because brand encompasses much more than just marketing, it is important for the entire organization to understand the brand and each person's role in delivering the brand promise to customers. Every employee in every department, from Accounting and Finance to Product Development and Technology (and everyone in between) plays a part. Organizations with great brands look for ways to educate all internal stakeholders about what the brand means and how it connects with their way of doing business. Company leaders provide incentives for employees to innovate and excel at delivering the brand effectively.

Of course, organizations also communicate about their brands to external audiences—to current and future customers, investors, thought leaders, and influencers, for instance. Brand is embedded in every strategy, tactic, and activity associated with a marketing mix for a given target segment. The brand platform is like a filter that lets through the kinds of communication that an organization needs to reach its audience, but it keeps out the distracting noise and chatter that might confuse or alienate that audience. The brand platform gives a brand coherence and helps the company stay on track.

Figure 1, below, illustrates the tools and artifacts marketers use to deliver strong alignment between brand, messaging, and other marketing activities. The brand strategy and positioning are very consistent from year to year, and they rely on the tools and artifacts we've discussed in this reading. Market-specific positioning and messaging are designed to reinforce the brand while promoting the organization's products and services to target segments. The positioning tools and process discussed in the previous positioning module work at this level of marketing alignment. They remain relatively consistent, with marketers reviewing and refining positioning strategy every twelve to twenty-four months in alignment with company strategy, priorities, and performance.

Brand, Messaging, and Marketing Alignment



At the bottom of the alignment pyramid are the day-to-day marketing activities associated with executing the marketing mix to reach target segments. These include marketing campaigns and the tactics, messaging, promotions, and other activities that accompany these campaigns. We'll explore this dimension of marketing activity in much more detail when we turn to integrated marketing communications (IMC).

1. "Workplace Culture." The Coca-Cola Company. Accessed March 01, 2019. www.coca-colacompany.com/our-company/diversity/workplace-culture/
2. Toms. "Improving Lives." TOMS® Official Site. Accessed March 01, 2019. www.toms.com/improving-lives.

3. "A Bullseye View. Behind the Scenes at Target." Target Corporate. Accessed March 01, 2019. corporate.target.com/about/purpose-values. ↵
 4. "Zappos 10 Core Values." Zappos Insights. Accessed March 01, 2019. <https://www.zapposinsights.com/about/core-values>. ↵
 5. "Brand Positioning Template | Brand Consultant | Brand Strategy Consultant." EquiBrand | Marketing Consulting | Branding | Digital | Innovation. Accessed March 01, 2019. <http://equibrandconsulting.com/templates/positioning-templates>. ↵
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