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THE GET REAL GUIDE TO
B2B DIFFERENTIATION

YOU HAVE 3 SECONDS, YOUR TIME STARTS NOW

EVERY CUSTOMER HAS A LIMITED ATTENTION SPAN. IN FACT, TODAY, ATTENTION IS PROBABLY THE MOST VALUABLE COMMODITY IN BUSINESS

Gaining a few minutes or even seconds of somebody's time is challenging to say the least. And it's getting worse – the 12-story elevator pitch is now two seconds in a revolving door.

So while we may want to believe that our customers and prospects spend their days thinking about our product or sector, in the real world they don't. In the real world we're likely to be very far down their list (if we're lucky to get on there at all).

BUSINESSES NOW FACE MORE COMPETITORS THAN EVER.

THE INTERNET HAS OPENED UP OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALMOST ANYONE WITH A GREAT IDEA TO TAKE ON PRETTY MUCH ANYONE ELSE

But the first flush of truly disruptive ideas is probably, for the most part, over. Many of today's offerings are (or at least appear to be) incremental improvements on what already exists.

The 'go big, go niche or go home' framework still applies. It's why so many of the 'success stories' we hear so much about are so focused on scale. They know they have a limited time to become a dominant force in both the market at large and, more importantly, in their customers' minds.

OH, YOU'RE THE X GUYS

DESPITE THINKING OF OURSELVES AS RATIONAL CREATURES (ESPECIALLY IN B2B) MOST OF US MAKE SNAP JUDGEMENTS ON THE BRANDS WE CHOOSE TO WORK WITH

These decisions are predominantly emotional (though we're fantastic at post-rationalising them). This creates significant knock-on effects for our marketing.

In any category, we'll only hold so many companies in our heads for immediate retrieval. Often, it'll be just one or two – name a CRM provider, mobile phone manufacturer, networking business.

Thing is, we're all hard-wired to assume that if something comes to mind easily, it is probably the best bet. It's a version of a cognitive bias called the *availability heuristic* – we tend to give greater weight to things that are more immediately available in our minds.

LOOKING FROM THE OUTSIDE IN

THIS IS WHY BRAND AND PRODUCT POSITIONING IS A CRITICAL FACTOR IN MARKETING SUCCESS. IT'S ALSO WHERE WE SEE MORE BUSINESSES STRUGGLE THAN PRETTY MUCH ANYWHERE ELSE

On the one hand, this is somewhat perplexing. After all, they should know what they're about – they live it every single day. On the other, it's completely understandable (partly because they live it every single day).

The problem comes from the fact that most marketers and salespeople find it difficult to see the world from the outside in. They understand their products inside out of course. They are rightly proud of their offering. But the internal group-think and confirmation biases make it challenging to really take a customer-centric view.

It's why we still get technology that lists endless features no one cares about or will ever use. It's why we get websites that need an engineering degree to navigate. It's why you can look at so many home pages only to come away with 'but what do you actually do?'

WHO'S YOUR FAVOURITE CHILD?



POSITIONING IS FUNDAMENTALLY ABOUT TRADE-OFFS. IF YOU TRY TO STAND FOR EVERYTHING YOU END UP STANDING FOR NOTHING (THE AVAILABILITY HEURISTIC AGAIN)

It's about understanding the intersection between what matters to your customers and your unique strengths as a business.

So, if I'm a prospect, what's the one thing I should remember about you that also matters to me? What sets you apart from your competitors in a meaningful way? Why should I care?

FOUR MEASURES OF A GOOD POSITIONING

IT SHOULD BE IMPORTANT TO CUSTOMERS – NOT SIMPLY WHAT YOU WISH WAS IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT NEATLY FITS WITH YOUR OFFERING

IT SHOULD BE BELIEVABLE COMING FROM THE BRAND – YOUR BRAND MAY DESIRE WORLD PEACE BUT, CHANCES ARE YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO DELIVER ON IT

IT SHOULD BE DELIVERABLE – YOU MUST BE ABLE TO MAKE GOOD ON YOUR PROMISES (SEE WORLD PEACE ABOVE)

IT SHOULD BE DIFFERENT FROM YOUR COMPETITORS – ME-TOO IS NOT AN OPTION

FAIL ON ANY ONE OF THESE AND YOU WILL BE SADDLED WITH A SUB-PAR POSITIONING LEADING TO SUB-PAR RESULTS IN THE MARKET

KICKING THE TYRES

OF COURSE, ONCE YOU HAVE A POSITIONING YOU'RE HAPPY WITH, YOU NEED TO SEE HOW IT'LL WORK IN PRACTICE

Too many positions seem great on a post-it note in a small airless room where everybody's high on caffeine and marker fumes, only to die when applied to any kind of real-life scenario.

In our workshops, we bring positioning down to a word, a line, 100 words and 200 words. It enables us to both gain a radical focus (what's the single differentiating word that best represents your brand?) as well as ensure we road-test the approach into a longer story.

We also do this for the competition, reverse engineering their core positions to ensure we're sufficiently differentiated.

Of course, getting feedback before going too far down the line is also key – sharing your positioning with trusted customers, resellers and more widely across the business will help you sanity check your approach. Just be careful not to fall prey to adopting each and every new 'suggestion' — that way lies madness.

However you choose to do it, adopting some rapid prototyping will help ensure you end up with something that works both for customers and for your business.

GET REAL OR GO HOME



ALL THE HARD THINKING IS DONE. THE POSITIONING IS GOOD TO GO. NOW WHAT?

It's still distressingly common that all the bravery and energy seen in positioning workshops fails to materialise in the real world. Or only finds its way into existence as a tagline while everything else is business as usual. Or is swiftly back-peddled at the first sign of a negative reaction.

Sometimes this is due to a failure in planning (especially in setting aside budget for implementation). Sometimes it's a result of underestimating what will need to change to begin to embed the new positioning. And sometimes it's a courage thing.

Ultimately, being different and distinctive means being brave enough to set a new course. This will, by its very nature, mean taking some risks. Because the alternative is to be anonymous and bland. And in our world of ultra-short attention, that's the direct route to commercial suicide.

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WE SHOULD TALK

If you're already investing in B2B content but not seeing the return you need, the good news is there are a ton of ways to improve its performance. Of course, sometimes it can be difficult knowing where to begin.

We start with coffee and a chat (or tea if you prefer). Your place or ours, no PowerPoint, no big sales pitch – just an open conversation about the challenges you face. Then, if we can help and there's a good fit, we'll go from there.

Drop us a line at hello@consideredcontent.com and we'll set up a time.