



About Lenati

Lenati is an award-winning boutique consulting firm that designs, implements, and optimizes marketing and sales solutions for companies that want to build stronger customer connection. Based in the Pacific Northwest, Lenati is well-known for intellectual rigor, expertise, and an uncanny ability to perceive and meet clients' needs.



About the Author

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Developing Strategic Positioning in a Tight Timeframe

THE CHALLENGE

The marketing teams we work with often find themselves in a quandary: they've been tasked with quickly rolling out a campaign, but they lack sufficient time to develop an underlying positioning strategy. Or – worse – the campaign is already underway, and its positioning has been left to be developed after the fact.

Teams in this situation face a challenge. Positioning – an articulation of your product's unique benefits and how these meet the needs of your target customer segment(s) – is essential for a successful marketing campaign. Without it, the campaign is at risk of failure. But how can you develop an effective positioning campaign when there simply isn't enough time allocated in the overall schedule?

APPROACH

The key to success in these (unfortunately all-too-common) scenarios is smart prioritization. If you're focusing on the right areas, you can quickly iron out the core elements of your positioning strategy, and develop the rest as time allows. We recommend a straightforward approach: do a quick audit, build a draft, validate it internally and externally, and make sure that it sticks.

Do a quick audit

First, start with a thorough audit of what your marketing team already has at its disposal. The question to answer here is: how far along this path have we already progressed? Often, we find that many of the necessary ingredients already exist. Look for the following:

- **Value props** – generally high-level matrices or bulleted lists that connect customer needs with your benefits.
- **Brand strategy** – Thinking around your brand (what should it represent) may have been developed, at least to some extent. Check to see if this has been handled by an external agency.
- **Segmentation research** – This may have been done on a simple level (by internal teams) or in a more in-depth fashion, by a research firm. What has been discovered so far about the customer segments most inclined to purchase your product or service?
- **PR talking points** – For either an in-house PR team or on the agency side, chances are that a spokespersons' guide or talking points have been developed.
- **Feature / benefits analysis** – Engineering and/or product management may be a source here.
- **Competitive analysis** – Documentation on other firms developing similar products / features.
- **Sales presentations** – Members of the sales team may have developed their own material focusing on core benefits. Check to see if anything has been prepared for exploratory meetings with potential partners.



Lenati Point Of View

Any of these elements can be mined for material to construct your positioning strategy. Whereas you may have thought that you were operating in a vacuum, finishing this exercise may produce a pleasant surprise. The positioning elements may well already exist, and now your job is to stitch them together into an actionable strategy.

Build a draft

The next step is to build a draft framework. The graphic below shows the basic structure for a positioning framework.

Positioning Statement	For <i>[target customer segment]</i> , the <i>[product / service]</i> is the <i>[frame of reference]</i> that provides <i>[unique benefit]</i> .		
Customer Issues	Customer issue #1	Customer issue #2	Customer issue #3
Benefit Pillars	Benefit pillar #1	Benefit pillar #2	Benefit pillar #3
Proof Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proof point • Proof point • Proof point 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proof point • Proof point • Proof point 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proof point • Proof point • Proof point

Often, positioning frameworks include much more than this, but these are the key components that you should start with, if you're pressed for time:

- **Positioning Statement** – The core of your strategy, this statement identifies the target customer segment; the product or service you're selling; the frame of reference (how customers will mentally categorize your product – for example: mobile productivity apps); and the unique benefit your product provides to meet your target customer's needs.
- **Customer Issues** – What customer problems or needs does your product meet? With a mobile app, for example, the customer issue might be difficulty with managing to-do lists.
- **Benefit Pillars** – How your product meets the needs listed above, in terms of benefits provided – *not* features that the product includes. To continue the mobile app example: it reduces the target customer group's anxiety by simplifying management of their to-do lists.
- **Proof Points** – Product features that enable the benefits in each pillar. For example: to-do list reminder features, seamless syncing capabilities.

Depending on the size of your company, there may well exist an "umbrella framework" that serves as a template and shows how positioning for product lines fits together. Make sure to seek this out and work within this over-arching framework (it could save you time). If you're in a smaller firm, ensure that your positioning is scalable – think about how future products and features will "snap in" to the existing framework.

Circulate internally

After you've developed a draft of the positioning framework, you'll need to circulate it with key members of the company – both on and off the marketing team. Every company is different, but make sure to include the right people in

these discussions. If possible, try to get representation from PR, Sales, Customer Service, Legal, Product Management, Engineering, Market Research, and UE/UX (User Experience). Also, make sure that there is executive buy-in. Face-to-face meetings are best, and in our experience, small groups of 3 – 4 are an optimal size for healthy interaction and brainstorming without excessive conversational chaos.

In these meetings, keep the focus of the conversation on the *benefits* that your product provides. Discussion will naturally flow to the features, but steer the focus back to the question of how these features will translate into positive experiences for your customer segment.

If a competitor matrix has been developed, that is a good piece of contextual material to share in these discussions. This information provides the backdrop that you are positioning against. Customers will compare your product to your competitors', and it's essential that they understand your points of differentiation. Make sure, however, that you are not simply replicating competitor positioning. Put thought into what separates your product and makes it unique.

Validate Externally

After you've refined your draft positioning based on internal discussions, the next step is to check for how customers perceive your product. Ideally, consumer focus groups will help you to get a sense of customers' qualitative take on your product, its competitive set (how do customers refer to your product; what do they perceive it to be?), and most importantly, the key benefits that your product provides.

However, if you're pressed for time, full-fledged focus groups may not be a possibility for you. In this case, seek out proxies for the customer. If you're operating in a large company, employees in another division may be able to provide a perspective that is sufficiently removed. If you're working with PR or creative agencies, check to see if you can set up quick interviews with their employees. Alternatively, you can set up informal meetings with appropriate members of your professional network.

Make it stick

The validation process is crucial, but make sure not to let it continue indefinitely. Eventually (especially under a tight schedule), you'll need to put a stake in the ground and present the final version of the positioning strategy for the product.

In this final step, identify parties responsible for creative delivery and ensure that the positioning strategy is shared with the team. Also, make sure to decide on a process for checking in and ensuring creative is on track and reflecting the positioning strategy in their campaign material. If you have not yet developed a messaging framework (example text, based on the positioning framework, that can be easily repurposed and expanded on), target this as a natural next step, and communicate when this will be shared with the team.

A variety of employees in your company will be responsible for customer perceptions of this product. Most likely, you included these internal stakeholders – from marketing, PR, customer service, etc., – in your internal validation sessions. Make sure that they are familiar with the agreed-on positioning statement and benefit pillars.

Finally, establish a schedule for ongoing assessments of your positioning implementation. Periodically, you'll want to get a sense for how well all your customer touchpoints – including web, social media, advertising, and customer support scripts – are reflecting your positioning strategy.

SUMMARY

When you're pressed for time to develop strategic positioning for a marketing campaign, the key to success is smart prioritization. We recommend a straightforward approach: do a quick audit, build a draft, validate it internally and externally, and make sure that it sticks.