

Messaging Demystified: More than Just Words

If you have ever been the victim of a replacement window salesman's pitch, you know all too well the plague of botched marketing messaging. Going into the quoting process, you wanted to regulate the temperature inside your house. After a data-stuffed, hour long slide deck, topped off by a nauseatingly corny heat lamp demonstration, you still found yourself asking—*but, will my house be more comfortable?*

This *Window Salesman Plight* isn't industry specific—it's a common and innocent byproduct of passionate businesspeople. We see it in many technology companies where getting to the value derived is even more of a challenge. It's easy to fall into the trap of focusing on what your product or service does, not the value your company brings. After spending countless hours refining real-time dashboards and feature-rich toolsets, of course you want to share every detail of your "baby." While yes, the details and the *how* you solve problems has its place, it shouldn't be the main message.

It's hard to arrive at concise, compelling messaging. If your existing messaging isn't resonating or you are starting from scratch, always begin by fully understanding your audience in conjunction with the market situation and your true competitive differentiators.

Start from the "Other Side of the Table"

Messaging is the make or break point in the marketing foundation. Often confused with copy or content (the actual words used in marketing material), in reality, it is a guidepost and framework for brands to articulate a centralized and clear strategic story.

To inspire profitable relationships with customers, brands must focus on the WIIFM—the *what's in it for me* value proposition that elicits an emotional response from the audience. Put yourself in their shoes. Customers and prospects have everyday problems that impede their work success. No one wants to feel alone in their struggle—being able to evoke the satisfying "they get my pain *and* can fix it," is a powerful place to start.

That's why we say—messaging is more than just words. If your message reaches your target audience, but isn't tight enough to precipitate the intended response, there will be cascading issues since everything (both externally and internally) relies on it.

Executing the Strategy Behind the Words

Achieving a harmonious point in messaging doesn't preclude you from experiencing future dissonance. The *right* messaging isn't stagnant. A variety of factors can influence and change messaging, including:

1. New lines of business from products or services
2. Competitive landscape changes

3. Trying to penetrate new market segments with different audiences
4. Repositioning (company growth and expansion has created new opportunities)
5. After mergers or acquisitions

These inflection points can be applied to analyze past, current, and future messaging. By predicting changes, it allows companies to complete proactive maintenance of messaging to ensure continual bulletproof marketing.

After identifying a need to change or create messaging, companies should embark on an exhaustive, but worthwhile process of analyzing and synthesizing questions around six areas before moving towards a messaging “conclusion.”

1. Market Landscape – Where does my company stand in the market?
2. Competitive Landscape – What are my competitors using for messaging?
3. Path to Market – How does our company align with partners and alliances?
4. External Stakeholders – What are customers, prospects, analysts and external influencers saying?
5. Past/Present/Future State of Products and Services – What is the evolutionary direction of my product or service?
6. Internal Environment – What are we communicating on our website vs. the annual report? Is everyone centered around the same message?

Building Out a Messaging Framework

Once you have your strategic direction, it is time to build out a messaging framework. Think of it as a clean canvas where you can explode all of your strategic concepts. Using a framework, you’ll have clarity on the “right” message to deploy across all communications, internally and externally.

So where do you start? Most messaging frameworks include:

- A few paragraphs about the company, incorporating both visionary and “what we do and who we help” content, in a tone/voice that captures the essence of how the company wants the customer to perceive them.
- Taglines to quickly convey value.
- Unique value propositions—the 3-4 points that set the company and product or service apart.
- Audiences and pain points, as well as industry proof points that support the message.

The Many Applications of Messaging

There’s a powerful feeling when you have identified all the answers and end up with a strong messaging framework that captures the uniqueness of your company and its offerings. Now

you no longer have to belabor every facet of your product or service to prospects and customers as they calculate their escape.

With a repeatable message that articulates the real heart and soul of your company and product or service, you can apply it to just about anything, and to any audience—advertisements, web content, annual reports, sales and analyst presentations, articles...you name it.

So there you have it—messaging is much more powerful than a few captivating words. Even with the best writers in-house, consider if your team can roll up their sleeves and get elbow-deep into the strategic work required to get the message “right.”