



The power to lure customers: why messaging is important

MANY VOICES, ONE SONG

Messaging is the identification and documentation of major company or product themes that you want your customers to understand. A marketing message is typically a one or two sentence expression of how your product or company:

- Provides an important customer need
- Differs from the competition

Everyone in your company should then consistently include these messages in every customer communication they create, such as collateral, websites, e-mails, press releases, and sales presentations.

Multiple sets of messages

Marketing messages are created at the company, product line, and individual product level. For any given level, you should only establish about three major messages (each based on a separate customer need).

While they're easy to quickly cut-and-paste into documents, marketing messages are rarely used verbatim. It's their key concepts and words that are repeated.

WHY IS MESSAGING IMPORTANT?

Research has revealed that consumers do not remember a marketing message until they've heard it about seven times (depending on the medium). Delivering consistent marketing messages enables you to build customer awareness and preference more quickly than a scattershot approach.

Documented messaging also offers a number of organizational efficiencies:

- Ensures consistency and integration across multiple communications vehicles
- Simplifies direction for copywriters and other creative staff
- Speeds reviews of draft and final copy content accuracy
- Saves time and money by minimizing rework

ANATOMY OF A MESSAGING DOCUMENT

A messaging document is typically organized into a four-level hierarchical message map. The four types of message map content include:

1. **Single net impression**, which is the overall sense or feeling you want your customers to be left with once they've been exposed to your messages. Success doesn't mean your customers actually remember any of your specific messages; but rather that they leave feeling something (e.g. reassured, energized, sense of quality, or sense of affordability) that they associate with your brand.
2. **Differentiating (or major) messages** help win sales by communicating important benefits that set you apart from your competition. There should be no more than three or four, and each should be based on meeting a critical customer need. Differentiating messages may be weighted in importance and should combine to build the single net impression.
3. **Substantiating messages** highlight the product features and capabilities that deliver the benefits touted in the differentiating message. Each differentiating message should have several substantiating messages/proof points.
4. **Qualifying messages** contain information that establishes you as a viable vendor. They do not, however, differentiate you from the competition. For example, all computer manufacturers must state their compliance with current industry standards to even be considered in the market.

Example message map table

The following table may be used to structure and present your messages. Remember, each differentiating and qualifying message cell should contain only one or two sentences. Substantiating messages should list product features and capabilities. All messages should build to, and support, the net impression.

Net impression	The desired feeling that customers should take away after hearing the differentiating, substantiating, and qualifying messages.		
Customer need	Customer need #1 (weight %)	Customer need #2 (weight %)	Customer need #3 (weight %)
Differentiating messages (DM)	DM #1 based on customer need #1	DM #2 based on customer need #2	DM #3 based on customer need #3
Substantiating messages	1. through 3.	1. through 3.	1. through 3.
Qualifying messages (QM)	QM #1 for customer need #1	QM #2 for customer need #2	QM #3 for customer need #3

What makes a good differentiating or qualifying message?

Messages should to be:

- **Single-minded:** they must convey just one message at a time
- **Meaningful:** they must connect with the target audience
- **Differentiating:** they must contrast your strengths against the competition (only required for differentiating messages, not qualifying messages)
- **Important:** they must be pertinent and significant to the target audience
- **Sustainable:** they must resonate with the target audience well into the future
- **Believable:** they must ring true to the target audience
- **Credible:** they must be substantiated

Example messages for the Acme Drill Bits Company

Net impression	Acme tools make me look like a professional.		
Customer need	Ability to consistently produce high-quality work. [75%]	Customer need #2 (weight %)	Customer need #3 (weight %)
Differentiating messages (DM)	Acme drill bits drill straighter, cleaner holes.	DM #2 based on customer need #2	DM #3 based on customer need #3
Substantiating messages	1. Acme drill bits have a built-in guide to help maintain a consistent angle of attack. 2. Acme drill bits are made of laser-sharpened, ionized steel for cleaner cuts.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.
Qualifying messages (QM)	Acme drill bits come with a one-year, no-excuses warranty.	QM #2 for customer need #2	QM #3 for customer need #3

ADVICE

- Don't steal messages from competitors. The idea is to *differentiate* yourself.
- Benefits belong in differentiating messages, not features. Don't focus on features. Differentiating messages must communicate customer benefits. Address features in the substantiating messages.
- Don't conduct messaging in a vacuum. Test your messages on your target audience and other industry/business experts to ensure they resonate.
- Leave your messages in place as long as reasonable. You'll know you've *just started* to repeat your messages enough when you're sick of hearing them. Messages will only be heard and internalized by your target audience after an extended period of communications. Don't change them just because you are tired of them.
- Use your target audience profiles (TAP) to get inside your customers' minds. Read the article about *Target audience profiling* for more information.
- Consumers tend to make emotion-based purchasing decisions more often than businesses do, so emphasize psychographics when you're messaging for them.

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- **Envisioning possibilities:** Super-smart, competent marketing consultants
- **Raising the bar:** Experienced leaders that continuously deliver innovative yet meaningful business impact
- **Making it happen:** Driven, accountable marketing experts that are focused on results...not our egos

On The Mark's full-time and part-time consultants strategize, plan, and execute a wide range of business-to-business marketing programs. Our conscientious, can-do approach combined with our extensive marketing expertise make us smart and fast on our feet. Clients rave about our results and how easy and hassle-free it is to do business with us. If you'd like to learn more, please contact us at Connect@OTMmarketing.com.