

To Many It's the Bible on Strategy—the Most Influential Advertising Book Ever Written

POSITIONING: **The Battle for Your Mind**

THE 20TH
ANNIVERSARY EDITION
WITH COMMENTS
BY THE AUTHORS

AL RIES • JACK TROUT



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The New Positioning

The Power of Simplicity

Differentiate or Die

**With Laura Ries*

Positioning : The Battle for Your Mind

Twentieth Anniversary Edition

By

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Ries & Ries**

and

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**Dedicated to the second best
advertising agency in the whole world.**

Whoever ther might be.

Positioning became a roaring success, the buzzword of advertising and marketing people around the world.

Yet the success of the concept had the unintended consequences of pushing Trout & Ries out of the advertising business and into the marketing strategy business.

As it turned out, clients didn't want their advertising agencies to be "strategic"; they wanted them to be "creative." The clients would do their own positioning.

So be it. We became marketing strategists and never looked back.

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Introduction

"What we have here is a failure to communicate."

How often have you heard that bromide? "Failure to communicate" is the single, most common, most universal reason given for problems that develop.

Business problems, government problems, labor problems, marriage problems.

If only people took the time to communicate their feelings, to explain their reasons, the assumption is that many of the problems of the world would somehow disappear. People seem to believe any problem can be solved if only the parties sit down and talk

Unlikely

Today, communication itself is the problem. We have become the world's first overcommunicated society. Each year, we send more and receive less.

A New Approach to Communication

This book has been written about a new approach to communication called "positioning." And most of the examples are from the most difficult of all forms of communication

Advertising. A form of communication that, from the point of view of the recipient, is held in low esteem. For the most part, advertising is unwanted and unliked. In some cases, detested

To many intellectuals, advertising is selling your soul to corporate America. Not worthy of serious study

In spite of its reputation, or perhaps because of it, the field of advertising is a superb testing ground for theories of communication. If it works in advertising, most likely it will work in politics, religion or any activity that requires mass communication

So the examples in this book could just as well have been taken from the field of politics, war, business or even the science of chasing the opposite sex. Or any form of human activity which involves influencing the minds of other people. Whether you want to promote a car, a cola, a computer, a candidate or your own career

Positioning is a concept that has changed the nature of advertising. A concept so simple people have difficulty understanding how powerful it is.

Adolf Hitler practiced positioning. So does Procter & Gamble as well as every successful politician.

We got carried away. The "big lie" was never a part of positioning thinking. On the other hand, we got many calls from Washington political strategists for more information about our positioning concepts.

Positioning Defined

Positioning starts with a product. A piece of merchandise, a service, a company, an institution, or even a person. Perhaps yourself.

But positioning is not what you do to a product. Positioning is what you do to the mind of the prospect. That is, you position the product in the mind of the prospect.

A newer definition: "How you differentiate yourself in the mind of your prospect."

~~So it's incorrect to call the concept "product positioning." As if you were doing something to the product itself.~~

Not that positioning doesn't involve change. It does. But changes made in the name, the price and the package are really not changes in the product at all.

They're basically cosmetic changes done for the purpose of securing a worthwhile position in the prospect's mind.

Positioning is also the first body of thought that comes to grips with the problems of getting heard in our overcommunicated society.



Thanks to the personal interest of Rance Crain, editorial director of *Advertising Age*, the magazine ran a three-part series on "positioning" in its April 24, May 1, and May 8, 1972 issues. More than any other single event, this series made positioning famous. It also made a deep impression in our minds about the power of publicity.

How Positioning Got Started

If one word can be said to have marked the course of advertising in the past decade, the word is "positioning."

Positioning has become the buzzword of advertising and marketing people. Not only in America, but around the world.

Most people think positioning got started in 1972 when we wrote a series of articles entitled "The Positioning Era" for the trade paper *Advertising Age*.

Since then, we have given more than 500 speeches on positioning to advertising groups in 16 different countries around the world. And we have given away more than 120,000 copies of our "little orange booklet" which reprints the *Advertising Age* articles.

Positioning has changed the way the advertising game is being played today

Unfortunately, "vagueness" is becoming more prevalent today than "positioning."

"We're the third largest-selling coffee in America," say the Sanka radio commercials.

The third largest? Whatever happened to those good old advertising words like "first" and "best" and "finest"?



The original Avis positioning ad with the most famous last line in advertising history: "The line at our counter is shorter."

Well, the good old advertising days are gone forever and so are the words. Today you find comparatives, not superlatives.

"Avis is only No. 2 in rent-a-cars, so why go with us? We try harder."

"Honeywell, the other computer company."

"Seven-Up: the uncola."

Along Madison Avenue, these are called positioning slogans. And the advertising people who write them spend their time and research money looking for positions, or holes, in the marketplace.

But positioning has stirred up interest well beyond Madison Avenue. With good reason.

Anyone can use positioning strategy to get ahead in the game of life. And look at it this way: If you don't understand and use the principles, your competitors undoubtedly will.

1 What Positioning Is All About

How did a hard-sell concept like positioning become so popular in a business noted for its creativity?

In truth, the past decade might well be characterized as a "return to reality." White knights and black eye patches gave way to such positioning concepts as Lite Beer's "Everything you've always wanted in a great beer. And less."

Poetic? Yes. Artful? Yes. But also a straightforward, clearly defined explanation of the basic positioning premise.

To be successful today, you must touch base with reality. And the reality that really counts is what's already in the prospect's mind.

To be creative, to create something that doesn't already exist in the mind, is becoming more and more difficult. If not impossible.

The basic approach of positioning is not to create something new and different. But to manipulate what's already up there in the mind. To retie the connections that already exist.

Today's marketplace is no longer responsive to the strategies that worked in the past. There are just too many products, too many companies, and too much marketing noise.

We had no idea what "too many" really meant. Average supermarket now has 40,000 SKUs or stock keeping units.

The question most frequently asked is why. Why do we need a new approach to advertising and marketing?

The Overcommunicated Society

The answer is that we have become an overcommunicated society. The per-capita consumption of advertising in America today is about \$200 a year.

The \$200 per-capita figure was based on a broad definition of advertising. If you count "media expenditures" only, the actual 1972 number was about \$110 per person. Today, the comparable number is \$880. Truly we live in an overcommunicated society and it's not getting any better.

If you spend \$1 million a year on advertising, you are bombarding the average consumer with less than a half-cent of advertising, spread out over 365 days. A consumer already exposed to \$200 worth of advertising from other companies

In our overcommunicated society, to talk about the impact of your advertising is to seriously overstate the potential effectiveness of your message. It's an egocentric view that bears no relationship to the realities of the marketplace.

In the communication jungle out there, the only hope to score big is to be selective, to concentrate on narrow targets, to practice segmentation. In a word, "positioning."

The mind, as a defense against the volume of today's communications, screens and rejects much of the information offered it. In general, the mind accepts only that which matches prior knowledge or experience.

Millions of dollars have been wasted trying to change minds with advertising. Once a mind is made up, it's almost impossible to change it. Certainly not with a weak force like advertising. "Don't confuse me with the facts, my mind's made up." That's a way of life for most people.

The average person can tolerate being told something which he or she knows nothing about. (Which is why "news" is an effective advertising approach.) But the average person cannot tolerate being told he or she is wrong. Mind-changing is the road to advertising disaster.



The folly of trying to change a human mind became one of the most important tenets of the positioning concept. This is the one principle most often violated by marketing people. Literally millions of dollars are wasted every day by companies trying to change the minds of their prospect

The Oversimplified Mind

The only defense a person has in our overcommunicated society is an oversimplified mind.

Not unless they repeal the law of nature that gives us only 24 hours in a day will they find a way to stuff more into the mind.

The average mind is already a dripping sponge that can only soak up more information at the expense of what's already there. Yet we continue to pour more information into that supersaturated sponge and are disappointed when our messages fail to get through.

Advertising, of course, is only the tip of the communication iceberg. We communicate with each other in a wide variety of bewildering ways. And in a geometrically increasing volume.

The medium may not be the message, but it does seriously affect the message. Instead of a transmission system, the medium acts like a filter. Only a tiny fraction of the original material ends up in the mind of the receiver

Furthermore, what we receive is influenced by the nature of our overcommunicated society. "Glittering generalities" have become a way of life in our over-communicated society. Not to mention that they work.

Technically, we are capable of increasing the volume of communication at least tenfold. Already there's talk of direct television broadcasting from satellites. Every home would have 50 channels or so to choose from.



Satellite television, of course, has become a big deal and most consumers already have their 50 channels to choose from. Today the talk is about 500 channels in the future. We're not too sure about this prediction. Who needs 500 channels when the average consumer watches no more than 5 or 6 channels?

500 channels? By the time you find something to look at, the show will be over.

And there's more to come. Texas Instruments has announced a "magnetic bubble" memory device which can store 92,000 bits of information on a single chip. Six times as much as the largest semiconductor memory device now on the market.

Terrific. But who is working on a magnetic bubble for the mind? Who is trying to help the prospect cope with complexity that so overwhelms the mind that the average reaction to the wealth of information today is to tighten the intake valve? To accept less and less of what is so freely available? Communication itself is the communication problem.

The Oversimplified Message

The best approach to take in our overcommunicated society is the oversimplified message.

In communication, as in architecture, less is more. You have to sharpen your message to cut into the mind. You have to jettison the ambiguities, simplify the message, and then simplify it some more if you want to make a long-lasting impression.

People who depend on communication for their livelihood know the necessity of oversimplification.



The positioning concept of the oversimplified message was further developed into our theory of "owning a word in the mind." Volvo owns "safety." BMW owns "driving," FedEx owns "overnight," Crest owns "cavities."

Once you own a word in the mind, you have to use it or lose it.

Let's say you are meeting with a politician whom you are trying to get elected. In the first five minutes, you'll learn more about your political product than the average voter is going to learn in the next five years.

Since so little material about your candidate is ever going to get into the mind of the voter, your job is really not a "communication" project in the ordinary meaning of the word.

It's a selection project. You have to select the material that has the best chance of getting through.

The enemy that is keeping your messages from hitting pay dirt is the volume of communication. Only when you appreciate the nature of the problem can you understand the solution.

When you want to communicate the advantages of a political candidate or a product or even yourself, you must turn things inside out.

You look for the solution to your problem not inside the product, not even inside your own mind.

You look for the solution to your problem inside the prospect's mind.

In other words, since so little of your message is going to get through anyway, you ignore the sending side and concentrate on the receiving end. You concentrate on the perceptions of the prospect. Not the reality of the product.

"In politics," says John Lindsay, "the perception is the reality." So, too, in advertising, in business and in life.

But what about truth? What about the facts of the situation?

What is truth? What is objective reality? Every human being seems to believe intuitively that he or she alone holds the key to universal truth. When we talk about truth, what truth are we talking about? The view from the inside or the view from the outside?



Truth is irrelevant. What matters are the perceptions that exist in the mind. The essence of positioning thinking is to accept the perceptions as reality and then restructure those perceptions to create the position you desire. We later called this process "out-side-in" thinking.

It does make a difference. In the words of another era, "The customer is always right." And by extension, the seller or communicator is always wrong.

The study of psychology is very useful in understanding how minds work. Advertising is "psychology in practice."

It may be cynical to accept the premise that the sender is wrong and the receiver is right. But you really have no other choice. Not if you want to get your message accepted by another human mind.

Besides, who's to say that the view from the inside looking out is any more accurate than the view from the outside looking in?

By turning the process around, by focusing on the prospect rather than the product, you simplify the selection process. You also learn principles and concepts that can greatly increase your communication effectiveness.

2 The Assault on the Mind

As a nation we have fallen in love with the concept of "communication." (In some progressive grade schools even "show and tell" is now being called "communication.") We don't always appreciate the damage being done by our overcommunicated society.

In communication, more is less. Our extravagant use of communication to solve a host of business and social problems has so jammed our channels that only a tiny fraction of all messages actually get through. And not the most important ones either.

The Transmission Traffic Jam

Take advertising, for example. With only 6 percent of the world's population, America consumes 57 percent of the world's advertising. (And you thought our use of energy was extravagant. Actually, we consume only 33 percent of the world's energy.)



One of the remarkable developments in the last 20 years has been the spread of marketing thinking around the world. In many of the developed countries, advertising volume is approaching U.S. levels. Today, America accounts for less than one-third of the world's advertising volume.

Advertising, of course, is only a small channel in the communication river.

It's now 1,000 books a day. The Library of Congress alone adds 300,000 volumes to its collection each year.

Take books. Each year some 30,000 books are published in America. Every year another 30,000. Which doesn't sound like a lot until you realize it would take 17 years of reading 24 hours a day just finish one year's output.

**Internet
Television
Radio
Magazines
Newspaper
Books**

Each new medium did not replace an existing medium. Rather, each medium changed and modified all the previous media. Radio used to be an entertainment medium. Today radio is a news, music and talk medium. Houston alone has 185 channels. There are now 12,458 radio stations. There's no sign that this communication assault on the mind is not going to continue far into the future. The average Sunday issue of *The New York Times* still contains some 500,000 words.

Who can keep up?

Take newspapers. Each year American newspapers use more than 10 million tons of newsprint. Which means that the average person consumes 94 pounds of newsprint a year. (Roughly the same as their annual consumption of beef.)

There's some question whether the average person can digest all this information. The Sunday edition of a large metropolitan newspaper like *The New York Times* might contain some 500,000 words. To read it all, at an average reading speed of 300 words per minute, would take almost 28 hours. Not only would your Sunday be shot, but also a good part of the rest of the week too.

How much is getting through?

Take television. A medium barely 30 years old. A powerful and pervasive medium, television didn't replace radio or newspapers or magazines. Each of the three older media is bigger and stronger than it ever was.

Television is an additive medium. And the amount of communication added by television is awesome.

Ninety-eight percent of all American homes have at least one television set. (A third have two or more.)

Ninety-six percent of all television households can receive four or more TV stations. (A third can receive ten or more.)

The average American family watches television 7 hours and 22 minutes a day. (More than 51 hours a week.)

Like motion pictures, the TV picture is really a still picture which changes 30 times a second. Which means the average American family is exposed to some 795,000 television pictures a day.

Not only are we being pictured to death, we are being formed to death. Take that Xerox machine down the hall. American business currently has more than 324 billion documents on hand. Each year another 72 billion are added to the pile. (Just to print the forms costs more than \$4 billion a year.)

Down the halls at the Pentagon, copy machines crank out 350,000 pages a day for distribution throughout the Defense Department. Equal to 1,000 good-sized novels.

"World War II will end," said Field Marshal Montgomery, "when the warring nations run out-of-paper."



In spite of the rapid adoption of the personal computer by U.S. businesses, we're still drowning in paper. The average office worker uses 250 pounds of copy paper a year. The "paperless office" seems a long way off.

Take packaging. An 8-ounce package of Total breakfast cereal contains 1,268 words of copy on the box. Plus an offer for a free booklet on nutrition. (Which contains another 3,200 words.)

The assault on the mind takes place in many different ways. The U.S. Congress passes some 500 laws a year (that's bad enough), but regulatory agencies promulgate some 10,000 new rules and regulations in the same amount of time.

The Code of Federal Regulations now contains more than 80,000 pages. And is growing by 5,000 pages a year.

At the state level, over 250,000 bills are introduced each year. And 25,000 pass the legislatures to disappear into the labyrinths of the law.

Ignorance of the law is no excuse. Ignorance of the lawmakers apparently is. Our legislators continue to pass thousands of laws that you can't possibly keep track of. And even if you could, you couldn't possibly remember how a law might differ from one state to another.

Who reads, sees or listens to all this outpouring of communication?

There's a traffic jam on the turnpikes of the mind. Engines are overheating. Tempers as well as temperatures are rising.

In 20 years, most people have learned just one more thing about Jerry Brown. He's now mayor of Oakland, California.

Brown, Connally and Chevrolet

How much do you know about Governor Jerry Brown of California?

Most people know just four things. (1) He's young. (2) He's good-looking. (3) He's dated Linda Ronstadt. (4) He's against big government.

Not very much residual effect for the enormous press coverage given a chief executive of the state of California. A man who had four books written about him in a single year.

Aside from the governor of your own state, do you know the names of any of the governors of the other 49 states?

In the 1980 primaries, Big John Connally of Texas spent \$11 million and wound up with one delegate. Whereas virtual unknowns like John Anderson and George Bush wound up with hundreds of delegates.

Connally's problem? He was too well known as a wheeler-dealer. "That perception was so deep," said his campaign strategist, "we couldn't have changed it."

At best, communication in an overcommunicated society is difficult. Yet you are often better off if communication doesn't take place. At least until you are ready to position yourself for the long term. You never get a second chance to make a first impression.

What do the following names mean to you: Ca-maró, Caprice, Chevette, Concours, Corvette, Impala, Malibu, Monte Carlo, Monza and Vega?

Automobile model names, right? Would you be surprised to learn that these are all Chevrolet models?

Chevrolet is the most heavily advertised product in the world. In a recent year, General Motors spent more than \$130 million to promote Chevrolet in the United States. That's \$356,000 a day, \$15,000 an hour.

What do you know about Chevrolet? About Chevrolet engines, transmissions, tires? About the seats, upholstery, steering?

Be honest. How many Chevrolet models are you familiar with? And do you know the differences between them?

**Camaro
Cavalier
Corvette
Impala
Lumina
Malibu
Metro
Monte Carlo
Prizm**

These nine Chevrolet models for the year 2000 are probably no better known today than the 10 Chevrolet models were in 1972. Because of all this confusion, Chevrolet is now in second place behind Ford.

"Baseball, hot dogs, apple pie and Chevrolet." The only answer to the problems of an overcommunicated society is the Chevrolet answer. To cut through the traffic jam in the prospect's mental highway, you must use an oversimplified approach.

What this book suggests may seem shocking and immoral to you. (Fortunately, it's not illegal or ineffective.) To cut through the transmission traffic jam, you must use Madison Avenue techniques.

Nearly half the jobs in the United States can be classified as information occupations. Virtually no one is immune from the consequences of a deep involvement in our overcommunicated society.

And virtually everyone can learn to apply the lessons of Madison Avenue to his or her own life. At home and in the office.



No one can predict the future. Add the Internet to the media list. The Internet, in our opinion, will become the greatest of all media with the most impact on our lives.

The Media Explosion

Another reason our messages keep getting lost is the number of media we have invented to serve our communication needs.

Today, someone is even trying to put ads on the doors of public bathrooms.

There is television. Commercial, cable and pay.

There's radio. AM and FM.

There's outdoor. Posters and billboards.

There are newspapers. Morning, evening, daily, weekly and Sunday.

There are magazines. Mass magazines, class magazines, enthusiast magazines, business magazine

trade magazines.

And, of course, buses, trucks, streetcars, subways and taxicabs. Generally speaking, anything that moves today is carrying a "message from our sponsor."

Even the human body has become a walking billboard for Adidas, Gucci, Pucci and Gloria Vanderbilt.

Take advertising again. Just after World War II, the per-capita consumption of advertising in the United States was about \$25 a year. Today it's eight times as much. (Inflation accounts for some of this increase, but the volume is also up substantially.)

Do you know eight times as much about the products you buy? You may be exposed to much more advertising, but your mind can't absorb anymore than it used to. There's a finite limit to how much you can take in, and advertising, even at \$25 a year, was already way over the limit. That one-quart container that sits on top of your neck can hold just so much.

At \$200 per person, the average American consumer is already exposed to twice as much advertising per year as the average Canadian. Four times as much as the average Englishman. And five times as much as the average Frenchman.

While no one doubts the advertiser's financial ability to dish it out, there's some question about the consumer's mental ability to take it all in.

Each day, thousands of advertising messages compete for a share of the prospect's mind. And make no mistake about it, the mind is the battleground. Between 6 inches of gray matter is where the advertising war takes place. And the battle is rough, with no holds barred and no quarter given.

Advertising is a brutal business where mistakes can be costly. But out of the advertising wars, principles have been developed to help you cope with our overcommunicated society.

Product development: 29% Strategic planning: 27% Public relations: 16% Research and development: 14% Financial strategies: 14% Advertising: 10% Legal: 3%

One of the consequences of this rapid increase in advertising volume is the decline in advertising effectiveness and a rise in the use of public relations as a marketing tool. A recent survey of 1,800 executives by the American Advertising Federation about the importance of various functions shows that public relations is more highly regarded than advertising.

The Product Explosion

Another reason our messages keep getting lost is the number of products we have invented to take care of our physical and mental needs.

Take food, for example. The average supermarket in the United States has some 10,000 individual products or brands on display. For the consumer, there's no relief in sight. In fact, the product explosion could get worse. Already in Europe they are building super supermarkets (called hypermarkets) with room for displaying 30,000 to 50,000 products.



Supermarkets have gotten a lot bigger in just 20 years. The average supermarket now has some 40,000

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