



Repositioning

Marketing in an Era of Competition, Change, and Crisis

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Times have changed. Competition is fiercer. Consumers are savvier. Communications are faster. And once-successful companies are in crisis mode.

Repositioning shows you how to adapt, compete — and succeed — in the current overcrowded marketplace. Global marketing expert Jack Trout provides an arsenal of proven marketing techniques specifically redesigned to help conquer today's "3 Cs" of business: competition, change and crisis:

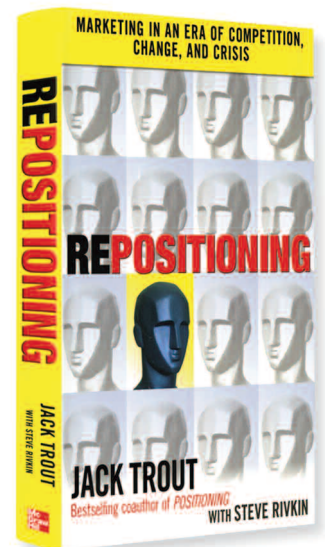
1. **Beat the competition:** Challenge your rivals, differentiate your product, increase your value, and stand out in the crowd.
2. **Change with the times:** Use the latest technologies, communications and multimedia resources to connect with your consumers.
3. **Manage a crisis:** Cope with everything from profit losses and rising costs to bad press and public relations nightmares.

Even if your company is doing well, the cutting-edge marketing observations in *Repositioning* can help keep you on top of your game and ahead of the pack.

Understanding the mindset of our consumers is half the battle. Winning in today's world is often a matter of repositioning; it's how you rethink the strategies you've always relied on; it's how you win the new battle of the mind.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How expanding product lines may decrease your overall sales.
- Why new brand names often outsell established brands.
- Why slashing prices is usually a bad idea.
- Why it's dangerous to attack your competitors head-on.
- Why it's valuable to emphasize value.
- How to make consumers pick your brand.



by Jack Trout with Steve Rivkin

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: REPOSITIONING

by Jack Trout with Steve Rivkin

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The Foundation

It's important that we review the essence of positioning, as it is also the foundation of repositioning.

Positioning is how you differentiate yourself in the mind of your prospect. *Repositioning* is how you adjust perceptions, whether those perceptions are about you or about your competition. In both cases, in order for your strategy to work, you must understand how the mind works or how people think.

The Power of Simplicity

The basic concept of some products predicts their failure — not because they don't work but because they don't make sense.

The best way to really enter minds that hate complexity and confusion is to oversimplify your message. Some of the most powerful programs are those that focus on a single word. Just focus on one powerful differentiating idea and drive it into your prospect's mind.

Be ruthless about how you edit the story you want to tell. Anything that others could claim just as well as you can, eliminate. Anything that requires a complex analysis to prove, forget. Anything that doesn't fit with your customers' perceptions, avoid. ●

The Rise of the Competition

Every repositioning program has to start with the competition in the mind. It's not what you *want* to do; it's what your competition will *let* you do.

What has changed in business in recent decades is the amazing proliferation of product choices in just about

every category. Consumer psychologists say that this sea of choices is driving us bonkers. The typical argument is that extensive choice is appealing. But it can actually be a turnoff. Choice can hinder the motivation to buy.

If you ignore your uniqueness and try to be everything for everybody, you quickly undermine what makes you different. If you ignore changes in the market, your difference can become less important. If you stay in the shadow of your larger competitors and never establish your differentness, you will always be weak. This is why you must learn the art of repositioning as a way to deal with your competitors. ●

Repositioning the Competition

Repositioning a competitor often comes down to finding a weakness in the leader's strength and attacking that point.

Sometimes leaders have weak points that are just weak points and not an inherent part of their strength. But there is another kind of weakness, a weakness that grows out of strength. As the Avis ads used to say, "Rent from Avis. The line at our counter is shorter." It's hard to see how Hertz could counter this repositioning strategy. This is a weakness that's inherent in Hertz's position as the largest rent-a-car company, as it is for most leaders.

But good competitive repositioning ideas are extremely difficult to sell because they are negative in nature. They go against the "positive thinking" grain of most management people.

An Attack Must Resonate

Any time you hang a negative, it must quickly make



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sense to your prospect. When you've presented your idea, your prospect should agree almost instantly, without further explanation or argument. If an idea doesn't "explode" or needs more explanation, it is not a good repositioning-the-competition idea.

Trying to reposition the competition as being more expensive is usually not a very good strategy to pursue. Price is often the enemy of differentiation. When price becomes the focus of a message or a company's marketing activities, you are beginning to undermine your chances to be perceived as being unique. What you're doing is making price the main consideration in picking you over your competition. That's not a healthy way to go.

The Key to Attacking Is Setting Up a Positive

The purpose of hanging a negative on your competitor is to set up a positive idea. Some years ago, Stolichnaya vodka hung "American made" on its U.S. competitors who were "making believe they were Russian." It was setting up "the Russian vodka" as its positive idea. ●

Change Happens; Evolution Is Reality

After the rise of competition in recent decades, the acceleration of change is the next big problem that has made business life more difficult. And what's driving this change is technology.

The most popular way to evolve is to use new ideas to update your brand. Finding new uses for existing products has sustained many brands. For example, Scotch tape began life with a list of 300 unduplicated uses, courtesy of its manufacturer 3M. Every day, consumers dreamed up hundreds more.

Another way to keep a product relevant is to add a service. You might want to look into automating a straightforward transaction. substituting speedy machinery for clerks also frees up your people for more scintillating work.

How to Evolve

The key decision you'll have to make in repositioning your product as markets evolve is to brand or not to brand. Do you stay with your base brand, do you launch a subbrand, or do you start a new brand?

Sometimes your decision is based on what market you want to evolve into. If you're going down-market, chances are you'll want a subbrand so as to not undermine your base brand's perceived value. If you're going upmarket, it gets a little tricky. Cadillac had little success

Repositioning Commodities

Successful repositioning strategies can be summed up in five ways:

1. *Identify.* Ordinary bananas became better bananas when a small Chiquita label was added to the fruit. Of course, you then have to communicate why people should look for these labels.
2. *Personify.* The Green Giant character became the difference in a family of vegetables in many forms.
3. *Create a new generic.* Tyson wanted to sell miniature chickens, which doesn't sound very appetizing. So it introduced Cornish game hens.
4. *Change the name.* When the name "Chinese gooseberry" was changed to kiwi fruit, the world suddenly had a new favorite fruit.
5. *Reposition the category.* Pork was just pig for many years. Then the industry jumped on the chicken bandwagon and became "the other white meat." That was a very good move when red meat became a perceptual problem.

with its \$50,000 Allante because the brand had no prestige. GM, in this case, needed a new brand and a great deal of money to launch it.

Evolving distribution also can be problematic, but you can find new ways to distribute as long as you don't upset your existing distribution arrangements or your image. There can always be another way to physically distribute whatever you're selling. Direct mail, online, kiosks in malls, kiosks in airports, door to door — think about what else you could use.

The Problem of Inside Thinking

Enterprises that are successful often develop a "we know best" culture. Over time, pride can lead to overconfidence or arrogance. When people think that they have the answers and others don't, they tend not to pay much attention to those others — especially outsiders — because it seems like a waste of time.

Success in repositioning must come from outside thinking. That's where the market is located. ●

The Bigger They Are, the Harder They Are to Change

Big is the enemy of change. With size comes a large degree of inflexibility, ego, vested interests and other

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bad things that hamstring a company in this age of the unpredictable. Repositioning requires a certain degree of flexibility that size makes very difficult, if not impossible.

Market leaders have to be willing to attach themselves with a better idea. If they don't reposition themselves, someone else will do it by hanging a negative on them.

Personal Agenda

What advanced primates all have is called a reflex personal agenda. It goes like this: When faced with a decision that could be best for the company versus one that could be best for the individual, a large percentage of the time a human primate will opt for the decision that betters his or her career. Another expression of this is "making your mark."

When a company has offices full of people, you've got to expect endless tinkering with a brand. It's how people keep from getting bored. It's also how brands get in trouble. The more people you have, the more difficult it is to manage them.

Why Things Go Wrong

Studies have shown that a large percentage of mergers underperform their grand predictions of success. Two large companies that join together spend so much time on operational integration that they end up running on the fumes of their past glory and brand names. What you rarely see are new ideas or innovation.

Immense resources and big brand names hardly ever guarantee innovation. More often, tradition and bureaucracy get in the way of any repositioning thinking.

It's easy to make management mistakes with giant corporations — the bigger they are, the harder they are to manage. ●

When Not to Evolve

Should every brand and every company evolve?

The simple answer is no. Growth just for the sake of growth can be a trap. Evolving just to keep up with the other guy can be a mistake. Trying to be the latest or the next-generation something can kill your existing business.

And about the worst thing you can do to yourself is fuzz up your identity, as this opens the door for a well-focused, specialized competitor.

The desire for growth is at the heart of what can go wrong for many companies. Growth is the byproduct of doing things right. But, in itself, it is not a worthy goal. In fact, growth is the culprit behind impossible goals. When you consider that people do damaging things to

force unnecessary growth, you can say that it's a crime against the brand.

The 'Latest' Trap

One of the better evolution strategies is to come up with the latest or next generation of product in a category. But the latest doesn't always work, and there are some pitfalls in the next-generation game that you must avoid at all costs. If you don't, you could have real problems. Here's what to avoid:

- *Don't solve a nonexistent problem.* Your next-generation product must solve a real problem, not one that's unimportant.
- *Don't mess with tradition.* There are real problems that people don't want solved. They like the old-fashioned way.
- *It must be better.* Why go for the next thing if it isn't a better thing?

Minds Can Lose Focus

Evolving a brand is a tricky piece of work because you can fuzz up your identity.

In days gone by, most big brands were clearly perceived by their customers. The mind, like a camera, had a very clear picture of what its favorite brands were all about.

The difference in views on this subject is essentially a perspective. Companies look at their brands from an economic point of view. To gain cost efficiencies and trade acceptance, they are quite willing to turn a highly focused brand, one that stands for a certain type of product or idea, into an unfocused brand that represents two or more types of products or ideas.

We look at the issue of line extension from the point of view of the mind. The more variations you attach to the brand, the more the mind loses focus. ●

A Crisis Can Change the Game

Recent times have certainly educated us to the fact that we live in a time of uncertainty or crisis. And these crises come in two forms: macro and micro.

The macro variety would be the financial crisis that has swept the world, affecting just about everything. A micro crisis would be one that threatens an entire company. In either case, you wake up one day and find that your world has changed for the worse.

The End of Long-Term Planning

Suddenly, we are faced with the fact that the concept of long-term planning has finally been put to rest. A

long-term strategic plan is useless unless you include your competitors' plans as well. Yet many CEOs think that complex long-term planning is critical if a company is going to fulfill its mission statement.

The fatal flaw in all of this long-term planning is the simple fact that you can't predict the future. History is filled with bold forecasts that didn't pan out. So if you can't plan long term or predict the future, what do you do? You have to stay flexible and seize the opportunity.

Yes, a crisis can change the game, but there are some underlying guidelines that can always be of help. The key to survival is to start every marketing plan with your competition in mind. It's not what you want to do; it's what your competition will let you do.

Avoid a Competitor's Strength and Exploit Its Weakness

When a competitor is known for one thing, you have to be known for something else. Quite often, a competitor's built-in weakness is the something else that you can exploit.

But remember, we're talking strength and weakness in the minds of the marketplace. Marketing is a battle of perceptions. What you're really doing is exploiting perceptions.

You also have to realize that at least one of your competitors is probably in a meeting right now figuring out how to nail you in one way or another. You must constantly be gathering information on what your competitors are planning. This can come from an astute sales force, from a friendly customer or from some research.

Never underestimate your competitors. In fact, you're safer if you overestimate them.

Competitors Usually Get Better if Pushed

Companies that figure that they can exploit a sloppy competitor are making a big mistake. They ridicule the competitor's product or service and say that they can do things better. Then, lo and behold, their big competitor suddenly improves and that so-called advantage melts away.

Never build your program around your competitors' mistakes. They will correct those mistakes in short order. ●

Value Is the Name of the Game

When you are talking about value, it is not about price unless you have built a price advantage. If that's the case, you are always talking about price as your differentiator.

Getting Around Price

Market leaders will always be attacked on price as their competitors try to reposition them as expensive. So what do you do? Do you have to match all the moves that are made against you?

Here are some tried-and-true methods of getting around a price attack:

1. *Do something special.* The leader can go to its biggest customers and offer something special.
2. *Shift the argument.* Another good value strategy in a pricing battle is to introduce the concept of total cost as opposed to initial cost. In some categories, the costs you incur after you buy a product can be substantial. If your product performs better after the purchase, you might be able to build a cost-of-ownership rather than a cost-of-purchase argument. A variation on this is the concept of longevity.
3. *Add more.* There are times when value is a sum total game. If you can add items to your offer, people will begin to feel that they are getting more for their money.
4. *Be nice and helpful.* When you are in a retail, consumer-centric business, service can be a powerful value story. Yes, it takes a lot of effort and cost and training to make your staff nice and helpful, but you'll get it back by being able to charge a little more even in a time of crisis.

Southwest Airlines has used low price to differentiate itself. In CEO Herb Kelleher's words, it has done so by "being different." By using only one kind of airplane, Southwest saved on training and maintenance costs. By offering no reserved seats, it avoided expensive reservation systems. By offering no food, it eliminated expense and time. By avoiding expensive hub airports and using less expensive smaller airports, it avoided high gate charges. (Southwest has recently moved to a reserved section and bigger hubs, but they are evolving carefully.)

By being different, Southwest has been able to construct a system with the lowest cost per air mile of any airline. Unfortunately, this has turned it into a bit of a cattle car. But to offset this, it works very hard at making the trip more fun. (The attendants do stand-up comedy.)

Southwest has differentiated itself as the low-fare airline. And it has become big enough that it can't be forced out of a market by a bigger airline lowering its prices. Many airlines have tried to imitate Southwest — most have failed.

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Prestige Is Out; Value Is In

These are hard times for expensive brands. What is a brand to do when its customers feel that it is necessary to cut back and save? Or when products that were sold on prestige are not socially acceptable?

Do you cut your prices and thus tell your customers that you were overcharging them? Companies all over the globe are facing this dilemma.

About Promotions

Do price promotions add much value for a brand? Some extensive international work has shown that sales generally go back to where they were once a short-term price promotion is over. The promotion lasts while it lasts. Management has often harbored the hope that there might be a positive after-effect, at least in a particular case.

It is now known that this is not so, and why: A promotion is taken up almost exclusively by the brand's long-term or "loyal" customers. The evidence shows that people seldom buy a strange brand just because its price is cut.

This is why there are no aftereffects from sales: A promoted brand does not hang on to those new customers who might have first bought it during the sales blip because there were virtually no such "new customers."

Large-scale promotions now occur even though management has traditionally sought to stop its salespeople from cutting the price. Marketing management itself now cuts the price and even seems proud of it. Nonetheless, price promotions must generally be run at a loss.

So why is so much spent on price promotions? Senior management would like to cut its promotional budget but usually does not know how to do so or what will happen if it does. ●

Repositioning Takes Time

Repositioning is about readjusting people's perceptions, not changing their perceptions. The marketplace is littered with failed efforts to change people's minds.

There's always been a general feeling in the marketing industry that new-product advertising should generate higher interest than advertising for established brands.

But it turns out that we're actually more impressed by what we already know (or buy) than what's "new."

What 'Readjusting' Entails

Matching or fitting with perceptions is what effective

repositioning is all about. Trying to change a person's mind is the opposite, as you are going against that person's existing perceptions. It is a total mismatch.

Considering the amount of time it takes to readjust perceptions, starting early on figuring things out can be a big advantage.

Repositioning Needs Publicity

Another reason that this process takes time is that you need others to write about your efforts. And, as you would expect, this will not happen overnight. You can claim that you are changing, but no one will believe you as it is just a claim. When others report that you are changing, it is a different story. But these kinds of stories are hard to come by, so our advice is that PR should become a critical part of your marketing efforts.

The general rule is: publicity first, advertising second. A great way to remember this rule is to think of this analogy: PR plants the seed. Advertising harvests the crop.

The truth is, advertising cannot start a fire. It can only fan a fire that has already been started. The first stage of any new campaign ought to be public relations.

When a company is using repositioning as its basic advertising strategy, then it just makes sense to use a repositioning strategy in PR. Especially since the PR ought to precede the advertising.

Too often, this doesn't happen. Advertising agencies and public relations agencies see themselves as competitors — for the client's ear and dollar.

What's needed is a basic change in the way advertising and public relations programs are planned. Programs must be developed that are linear rather than spatial.

Quick Bang vs. Slow Buildup

In a spatial program, the elements start together, but in different spaces (public relations, advertising, sales promotion, etc.). This is the typical way most programs are conceived. The quick bang, if you will. But when the smoke clears, when the excitement of the initial launch is over, usually nothing has been changed. The prospect's attitude is the same as it was before.

In a linear program, the elements unfold over a period of time. The advantage, of course, is that they can be designed to work together to reinforce each other. The slow buildup leads to a big change in the prospect's mind. More than anything else, successful repositioning requires consistency. A linear program helps you achieve this consistency.

There is a tendency on the part of the publicist to

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shoot for the moon — to try to place a story first in the biggest, most massive media. But this overlooks the linear nature of good public relations strategy.

What works best is starting with your core group and then rolling it out. If you can win the battle with the core group first, your future success is almost automatically assured.

What's happening in the PR world is that a group of bloggers and Twitterers are becoming the focus of early PR. The online pundits are useful, as they can add a level of credibility to any start-up. This group will eventually lead your story into the trade press and, if you're lucky, on to the business press.

Rules for PR Success

Here are four rules for success:

1. Find out what position you already have in your public's mind.
2. Adopt a repositioning strategy that you want to own. Zero in on the specific concept that you want to achieve through public relations and advertising.
3. Convince everyone to concentrate exclusively on this one repositioning approach.
4. From time to time, evaluate your PR efforts along with your advertising, merchandising and overall marketing positions.

Remember, readjusting perceptions takes time and patience. ●

Repositioning Is Not for the Meek

Someone has to be in charge of repositioning. And that type of leadership takes a lot of courage. The role of the CEO is to lead the charge. Strategy, vision and mission statements are dependent on the simple premise that you must know where you're going. No one can follow you if you don't know where you're headed.

First, how do you find the proper direction? You have to find your inspiration down at the front, in the ebb and flow of the great marketing battles that are taking place in the mind of the prospect.

The bigger the company, the more likely it is that the chief executive has lost touch with the front lines. This might be the single most important factor limiting such companies' ability to deal with competition, change and crisis. Top management's disconnection from the marketplace is the biggest problem facing big business.

If you're a busy CEO how do you gather objective information on what is really happening? How do you get the bad news as well as the good?

One possibility of finding out what's really going on is "going in disguise," or poking around unannounced. This would be especially useful at the distributor or retailer level. Thomas Stemberg, the founder of Staples, believed in seeing the world from the ground level. He shopped his stores like a customer.

In many ways this is analogous to the king who dresses up as a commoner and mingles with his subjects. The reason: to get honest opinions on what's happening.

Change Inside

You have to be willing to make changes inside the organization in order to exploit the opportunities on the outside. And you must be a doer.

The way to spot a non-leader quickly is to watch for "should." When a viable suggestion is presented, the would-be leader says, "We should do that." Usually, those "shoulds" pile up and little gets done.

The best leaders know that direction alone is no longer enough. The best leaders are storytellers, cheerleaders and facilitators. They reinforce their sense of direction or vision with words and action.

A visible leader is a very powerful weapon with customers and prospects. This kind of leader offers unique credentials for a company. Also, the troops are proud to follow this kind of leader into battle. They trust him or her instinctively. Without trust, there won't be any followers. And without followers, you won't have much of a charge.

Finally, if you're acting like a general, it's important that you adopt the qualities of a good general:

- You must be flexible to adjust the strategy to the situation, not vice versa.
- You must have mental courage. A good general reaches deep inside to find the strength of will and mental courage to prevail.
- You must be bold. When the time is right, you must strike quickly and decisively.
- You must know the facts.
- You need to be lucky. ●

Repositioning Begins and Ends With the CEO

Brilliant thinking never wins the day on its own merits. If you don't have the right people in the room, effective positioning or repositioning becomes a long shot at best.

The first type of obstacle a repositioning idea will

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often encounter is an old cash cow. New ideas tend to be built on new opportunities, which can sometimes challenge old businesses. The result is a reluctance to foster the new ideas. Peter Drucker called it “slaughtering tomorrow’s opportunity on the altar of yesterday.”

Another problem with not having the right people in the room is the ghost of bad decisions. New strategies often clash with prior decisions. Unfortunately, no one in a large corporation wants to admit to making a bad decision. Especially a bad *big* decision. As a result, it goes against almost all middle-level managers’ instincts to embrace any new idea that could cause them embarrassment about their old decisions.

Another problem you may encounter is the “corporate ego” of your immediate superiors or the people at your advertising agency. They may have a problem with an outsider doing their job. The higher you are presenting in an organization, the less likely you are to come across this kind of ego problem.

Advice for the Cautious

If, for some reason, getting the right people in the room isn’t feasible, you’ll have to find a way to get the CEO involved in the process. Without that involvement, your strategy will never be implemented properly. So the trick is to carefully construct a case that your hearers’ superiors can be comfortable with as they carry it upward to the CEO.

Chances are the CEO isn’t a marketing person by training, so you’ll have to find a way to bring him or her up to speed.

There are two effective ways to do this. The first is to set up a lecture on the subject and invite the top management. Bring in an outside expert, but make sure that part of the session deals with your firm’s current problems or opportunities.

The other way is to send your CEO a book or two on the subject, pointing out why it is apropos to the problems the company faces.

Implement Slowly

Implement any difficult strategy slowly, especially if it’s of the “repositioning” kind.

People need time to adjust to change. By making changes slowly, you reduce the anxiety that comes with a dramatic shift of strategy.

This all points to the inescapable fact that repositioning is serious stuff. It sets a new direction for a company’s business strategy. And when serious decisions are being made, top management must be in the room. ●

Repositioning Is Obvious

When it’s time for you to reposition, the problem you face will be obvious, and the solution to the problem will be obvious. But people tend not to see the obvious.

With many big, obvious problems, either hope springs eternal or people want to kick the problem down the road for someone else to handle. This is known as the “psychology of avoidance.”

Threats get our attention when they are imminent, while our brain circuitry is often cavalier about the future. We’re far more sensitive to changes that are instantaneous than to those that are gradual.

The antidote for the way we are wired against risk is a heavy dose of reality from an outside observer and a willingness to have an open mind. The biggest problem you’ll face is a decision in which people are already invested.

In Search of the Obvious

If they are to work, positioning and repositioning ideas must be obvious ideas. That’s because they are evident ideas. And if they are evident to you, they will be evident to your customers, which is why they will work.

In 1916, Robert R. Updegraff laid out five tests of obviousness:

- 1) This problem, when solved, will be simple.
- 2) Does it check with human nature? The obvious matches existing perceptions.
- 3) Put it on paper. If the explanation becomes long, involved or ingenious, then very likely it is not obvious.
- 4) Does it explode in people’s minds? Do people say, “Now why didn’t we think of that before?”
- 5) Is the time ripe? Checking the timeliness is often just as important as checking the idea or plan itself.

The final advice is: Try not to overresearch or overthink your positioning or repositioning strategy. Simple and obvious will do the trick. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Repositioning*, you’ll also like:

1. ***The Brand Bubble* by John Gerzema and Ed Lebar.** Led by data from Young & Rubicam, the authors guide readers through a five-stage process for reorganization to achieve sustainable brand performance.
2. ***Differentiate or Die* by Jack Trout with Steve Rivkin.** A great companion read to *Repositioning* is this classic about how to be meaningful and stand out to your customers.
3. ***Outside Innovation* by Patricia B. Seybold.** Innovation is what keeps your brand at its best. Seybold shows the best ways possible to involve passionate customers in keeping your brand vital and forward-thinking.