

The foundational elements of B2B positioning



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Why positioning matters



Tech companies compete in crowded markets among a sea of undifferentiated vendors chasing fewer deals.

When software in any given category sounds the same, it's no wonder buyers are bewildered by their options or stick with the status quo (do nothing). Executive buyers do not want yet another tool. They're seeking solutions.

How do you earn your buyers' limited attention and win in a tight selling market?

By articulating a clear story about the costly problem your buyers face, what's required to solve it, and why buyers should choose you.

But, to be clear: Positioning is not messaging. And it isn't merely a story you tell the market.

Your positioning narrative aligns your team behind a cohesive strategy that defines your company's differentiated place in a crowded market. And this narrative cascades down into all your actions – your product strategy, messaging, sales pitch, and more.

If you don't position yourself, the market will position you

Every campaign and asset you distribute should flow from (and reinforce) your positioning. Unclear positioning undermines all your GTM investments.

Symptoms of a positioning problem

- You blend into the undifferentiated middle of the market and sound just like competitors.
- Stronger competitors set the buying criteria, boxing you into unfavorable corners.
- Buyers place you in the wrong category with the wrong set of competitors.
- Your sellers struggle to explain what you do and sales cycles get longer.
- Every sales rep uses a different deck, and sales and marketing are using different messaging, confusing the market.

Your products become harder to buy, harder to sell, and easier to forget.

Strong positioning claims a distinct corner of the room, asserts a new point of view on the market, and shapes your company's narrative on your terms.

Position for senior-level decision makers

B2B tech positioning must target the most senior-level decision maker. Why?

With large and complex B2B buying groups, you want to focus on the person who controls the budget and sets the buying and success criteria. Their “yes” overrides everyone else’s “no.”

Many sales teams struggle to reach executive buyers and operate too low in sales cycles. They're bogged down in feature-function conversations.

But, moving from lower- to higher-value deals requires an executive-level narrative that gets them to care about a painful, expensive (unsolved) problem. Big problems unlock bigger budgets. Even without access to senior decision makers, other members of the buying group need an argument/message to make the business case for you.



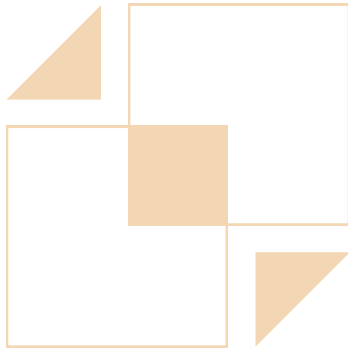
Moving from lower- to higher-value deals requires a narrative that gets executive buyers to care about a painful, expensive (unsolved) problem.

Your goal is to frame a problem and a value proposition that:

- Arms other members of the buying group with an executive conversation that creates an urgent need to fix the big, expensive problem.
- Get senior decision makers to care about solving the problem.
- Influences how the buying group and decision makers evaluate potential solutions.

Position for your next set of buyers

You've sold to a certain type of customer for years, but as your business grows and the market changes, you may have an opportunity to sell to a new set of buyers with different needs and objectives. Or maybe your personas' needs have evolved and they face different challenges.



When companies can't move on from the old narrative, they miss the chance to capture revenue growth from future buyers.

As you think through your positioning, you need to answer: *What problems and solutions matter to our next set of buyers?*

That's why, when starting your positioning process, you should give more weight to interviews with newer customers and current prospects than your great reference customer from five years ago.

And your positioning should be refreshed periodically to remain responsive to the buyer struggles and market dynamics influencing decisions *today*.

What's your category strategy?

When B2B buyers search for solutions, they often look for common category names such as a CRM for X, human capital management, marketing automation, and so on. These categories help buyers anchor and orient their searches.

Every good positioning strategy should include a category strategy that defines where you fit and puts your company in a context that buyers are familiar with.

There are three common paths to take with your category strategy:

1. Carve out a specific corner of the room in an existing category.
2. Change an existing category by redefining the buying criteria.
3. Create an entirely new category.

Most likely, you're entering an existing category and need to differentiate your company by carving out a distinct corner of the room. Often, the best way to do that is by adding descriptors to your solution name. For example, calling yourself an "e-commerce marketing automation platform" distinguishes your solution from other types of marketing automation platforms.

You can also morph an existing category by emphasizing emerging buying criteria that are more important than current ones (where the emerging criteria give you advantages). For example, with their "compliance automation platform," Vanta changed the buying criteria within the heavily manual governance, risk, and compliance (GRC) category.

Creating a new category isn't a decision to take lightly, as it requires identifying a genuinely new and unmet need in the market. Only try to create a new category if your product doesn't fit into existing categories and you offer something truly novel that buyers will instantly understand. For example, Gainsight coined the term "customer success" which turned "service" into a focus on positive outcomes.

The rewards of category creation can be high, but so are the risks.

It takes significant time and resources to educate the market and prospects struggle to get the budget for new products in unknown categories. Can your sales cycles wait?

The truth is, few companies merit a new category or should consider creating one. It's highly likely you can fit into or refresh an existing category buyers already understand.



Categories help buyers orient their search and put your company in a context they are familiar with.

The fundamental inputs to positioning

Your positioning should be the outcome of a discovery process that involves gathering market research and input from relevant internal and external stakeholders. The goal is to deeply (and honestly) understand your business, its place in the competitive landscape, and your advantages, differentiators, and key positioning challenges.

In the following section, we cover the recommended components of this discovery process:

Stakeholder interviews and surveys

Start with a structured questionnaire sent to key stakeholders from every internal team (C-suite, product leaders, product marketing, customer success, key sales AEs, and sales engineers). Then, follow up with interviews to probe their answers further based on their roles and functions.

By asking consistent questions, you'll learn from your team's perspectives and identify areas of internal alignment and misalignment.



Current messaging

Ask your team what they like and dislike about your current messaging and positioning. This provides a snapshot of internal sentiment about your company's strengths and can reveal gaps in how you talk about your company and what makes you stand out. Ask questions like: "What are your top 2-3 favorite messages about [your company], and why?"



ICP and personas

You must define who your positioning is for. Is your team aligned on the type of organization you target and the specific roles within it? Ask questions like: What are the attributes of [your company's] ideal customer profile (ICP) organization/account? Who is the most important senior-level persona we need to reach?



Drivers and trends

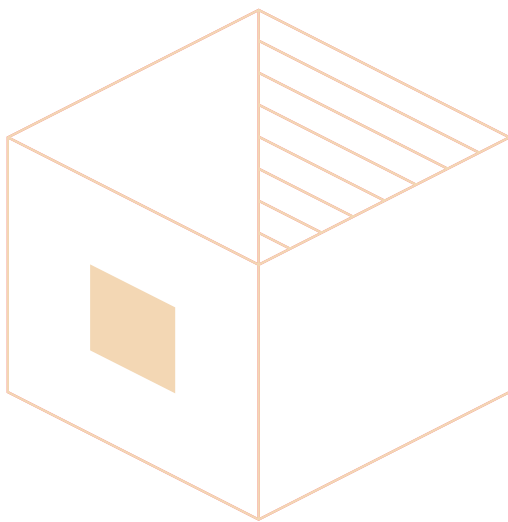
Seek your team's perspective on how they see the company relative to the market. Is there recognition of where the market is going? Do they believe your company is staying ahead of those dynamics and trends, or diverging from important market forces?

These internal perspectives (accurate or not) shape how your company sees itself and communicates to potential buyers. Ask: What about the current market climate creates opportunities for [your company]? What obstacles does our positioning need to address?

Honest product portfolio assessment

A clear-eyed assessment of your product offerings is an essential input to positioning, though it can be challenging to conduct internally.

When we run positioning processes for companies, we start by learning their product's capabilities and roadmap. However, companies often have a different problem. They are too close to their product(s), have blind spots and biases, and get fixated on certain strengths or limitations. It's hard to read the label from inside the bottle.



Good positioning should focus your product roadmap(s) and priorities, giving the product team direction on which capabilities to invest in long-term.

As you assess your product portfolio and roadmap, take a global view of your portfolio and each product's advantages to connect those attributes to a larger story.

- Go beyond features and functions to identify other points of differentiation, such as architectural differences or service models that create unique value (more on this later).
- Consider what's on your roadmap over the next 12-18 months that should be incorporated into your positioning.
- Identify non-obvious product strengths that competitors can't easily replicate.
- Identify the product capabilities that align to where the market is going.
- Ask: Are we too shy and downplaying features and capabilities? Conversely, are we over-inflating them? Are there features that could tell a bigger story if we grouped them together?

Good positioning should focus your product roadmap(s) and priorities, giving the product team direction on which capabilities to invest in long-term.

The goal is to rediscover your overall solution, see it with fresh eyes, and assess it honestly.

Independent market research

External market research provides validation, insight, and context for your positioning strategy.

Read analyst reports from firms like Gartner and Forrester, and meet or brief them to assess the factors impacting your market. Also, read research from consulting firms like Accenture, Deloitte, and BCG to understand broader market trends, costs, and risks. Independent analyst firms, industry experts, or any trade media in your category can provide further insight and intelligence, too. And don't neglect role-based research focused on your target buyer's needs either.

Compiling relevant information is time-consuming but essential for creating positioning that resonates with your buyers.

When analyzing this market research, focus on:

- 1. Quantifying the pain:** Put hard numbers around the painful problem your market faces. What is it costing businesses? What risks do professionals face?
Quantifying the problem helps create urgency with executive buyers.
- 2. Analyst consensus:** Identify points of agreement or inconsistency about industry trends and future developments.
- 3. Alignment with your offering:** Assess how your company's capabilities relate to market trends. Do your value propositions align with what the market thinks is important? This research will inform which features or capabilities to prioritize and promote.

Then, pair external research with your internal perspectives to assess how perceptions align or diverge. The goal is to connect your positioning narrative to where the market is headed.



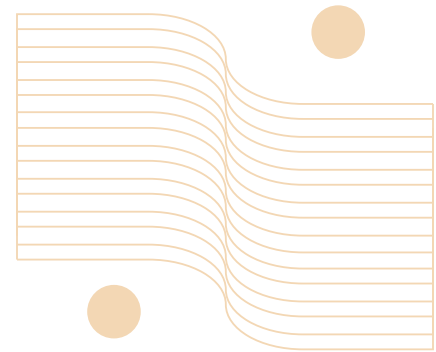
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Customer interviews

As we mentioned earlier, during discovery you'll want to speak with new customers and potential buyers, not just older customers. Those who recently invested in solving today's problem bring a timely perspective and help you position to your next buyers. Ask questions like:

- What problem were you trying to solve?
- What would be the consequences of not solving that problem?
- Why did you choose our company?
- Who was responsible for setting the decision criteria for the solutions you evaluated?
- Which other alternatives did you consider? Where did you feel we were stronger than those options?

Customer interviews help reveal your buyers' pains and challenges, but if the pain isn't fresh in mind, they may offer more noise than signal.



Map the competitive landscape

You can't identify the open space to claim in your market until you've mapped the competitive landscape.

For positioning, this isn't about technical comparison – it's about the story everyone is telling and how that shapes the buying criteria.

Select a focused list of competitors that you most often encounter in sales cycles. Analyze their websites, messaging, content themes, third-party analyst views, and product reviews to identify the market positions they're claiming, their GTM strategies, and how others perceive them.

- Which messages have a lot of competition and are hard to distinguish?
- What buyer personas and ICP does each competitor seem to speak to?
- Where is the white space (little to no other messaging "noise" and/or minimal solution proof offered by competitors)?
- Within that white space, what territory can you claim that's both valuable to buyers and defensible based on your capabilities?

Several factors will inform which competitors to prioritize in your review, but here are a few key considerations:

- Who the buyer perceives as your competitor is more important than your perception. Understand the top three alternatives customers consider when solving the problem you address.
- Ask your sales team: Which competitors do customers most frequently compare you to? Which competitors are most problematic in sales cycles, and why? Identify the 1-2 who consistently appear in your win/loss analysis.
- Who do you really want to compete against? Maybe your vision is a lot bigger than others in your market.



Who the buyer perceives as your competitor is more important than your perception.

As you digest these inputs, this competitive intelligence will help you create a distinct point of view on what makes a solution good and turn your competitor's weaknesses into vulnerabilities.

Assess your strengths, challenges, and misalignments

After the discovery process, assess all the inputs you've collected and identify 3-5 key themes and positioning challenges. These themes/challenges clarify what your positioning strategy must solve for and focus your narrative-building.

Your assessment should answer questions such as:

- Where are internal perceptions misaligned?
- Do we agree on who our positioning is for?
- How do external perceptions (from customers, prospects, analysts) differ from internal perceptions? What perceptions do we need to overcome?
- Is there consensus on our competitive set?

- Where is the white space in the category?
- Which of our differentiators/advantages does the market care about?

This process should resolve misalignment on who your positioning is for, uncover your core advantages/differentiators, and help clarify your company's long-term vision. With these elements, you can start shaping your positioning narrative.

Why it's important to sell the problem (not the product)

B2B tech companies are often enamored with their technology, and the product is the first thing they want to talk about.

But executive buyers don't want to hear about your product's features and functions—not at first, anyway. They want to know how well you solve their costly problem. Problems trigger category entry points, not products.

And buyers won't care to learn more about your solution until they know you understand their problem.



Problems
trigger
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So, when you're positioning to the highest level, it's important to own a problem they deeply care about. You need to shift from product-centric to buyer-centric positioning.

Buyer-centric positioning answers the buyer's #1 question:
Can you solve my problem?

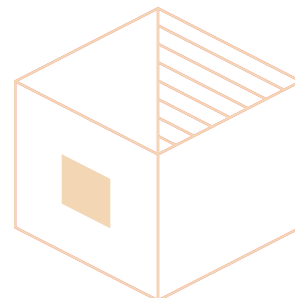
And when you articulate someone's problem well, you show that you understand their struggles, build trust, and build belief that your company is the best solution.

Framing and naming the problem

Since selling the problem is more important than selling your product, building a buyer-centric narrative starts with defining the costly problem you solve for your buyer.

There's no exact formula for framing the problem. It's a creative, strategic process of identifying the intersection of your differentiators, advantages, and insights from your customer and market research:

- Customer research on how they articulate their pain/problem
- Category entry points (trigger events/situations/challenges)
- Market dynamics and trends reshaping buyer needs
- Sales insights on how you win and what motivates purchase
- Competitive opportunities



The problem will have many contours, but positioning is about making choices. You have to prioritize both what matters to your buyer and maps to the capabilities that set you apart.

As you develop a problem statement, you'll answer questions like:

- What urgent problem do your buyers have?
- Why does this problem exist?
- What are the costs and consequences of this problem? What's at stake if it's not solved?
- Why don't other solutions adequately address it?

Framing the costly, painful problem that buyers understand and identify with builds context and urgency to find a solution.

Ultimately, you want to come out of this exercise with a name for the problem: a descriptive phrase that resonates with the buyer, invokes fear or worry, and helps motivate them to want to learn more.

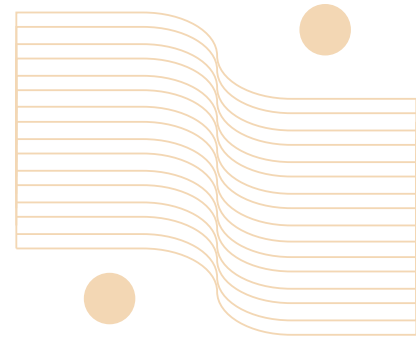


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Defining the buying criteria

After framing a problem that maps to your differentiators, you have to articulate the capabilities buyers actually need to solve the problem effectively.

When buyers enter a market, they have preconceived criteria for what makes a solution good, shaped largely by category leaders. So, when a prospective client gives you an RFP with conventional criteria, you've already lost.



To get into your buyer's consideration set, you want to reshape the RFP in your favor by redefining the criteria for solving the problem.

Imagine your executive buyer going to their board and saying, "We've got X problem; here are the five things we need to do to solve it (buying criteria); and this company provides the best solution."



Your goal is to give buyers a blueprint for solving the problem in clear business language. This arms your champion and influencers with a compelling business argument for why they should choose you—and why other solutions fall short.

This isn't a tech conversation with feature comparison charts.

Your goal is to give buyers a blueprint for solving the problem in clear business language. This arms your champion and influencers with a compelling business argument for why they should choose you - and why other solutions fall short. From there, you have the technical proof points to back up your claims as the sales engagement progresses.

Well-defined buying criteria also position sales as knowledgeable and consultative about the market, help them articulate your company's point of view, and build context around your company's value.

Differentiation in crowded tech markets

If your company has unique IP, great! Then your differentiator is obvious. But, that's rare.

Instead, differentiation usually comes from a combination of core strengths or advantages that you have over competitors.

The question is, what will you make the fight about in your category? More specifically, what do you want to make the buying criteria about? And if those criteria were based on the areas where you'd always win, what would they be?

The internal perspectives and data you collect during discovery help uncover your differentiators.

Sales should help you understand the reasons you won recent deals and can highlight the few capabilities in demos that prospects consistently love. Engineering should explain what your product "moats" are and why what you're offering would be difficult for others to build or catch up to quickly.

Patterns always emerge, and it's usually evident what your top 3-5 differentiators are.

There are several sources of differentiation you can win with, including:

- **Product:** Unique capabilities or IP that solve customer problems in ways competitors can't match. This could include innovative technology, functionality, or superior performance.
- **Services:** Specialized expertise, support capabilities, professional services, ease of engagement, or delivery models that competitors can't easily replicate.
- **Data:** Proprietary datasets, data models, or capabilities that create differentiated value. Your unique data then enables AI/ML models to deliver better insights.
- **Architecture:** This could be AI-native versus cloud-native, or a different technical approach offering advantages in scalability, performance, or flexibility.

- **Company:** A category leadership position (largest market share, highest ranking in analyst assessments, etc.) or challenger position is a provable source of differentiation. Or, having unique corporate characteristics (like B-Corp status) that align with customer values.
- **Ecosystem:** A network of integrated partners, APIs, and value-added services that allow customers to access more capabilities through your platform that extend and complement the value you deliver.

When you've mapped your differentiators to your problem statement, you've laid the narrative groundwork to reframe the conversation in your market.

Naming your solution

Like any good story, your positioning narrative should follow an uplifting arc, moving the buyer from a problematic state to an aspirational future state.

The work you've done to describe the problem – and the new capabilities needed to solve it – reframes the old market narrative with a story built around your advantages.

That story creates the context and argument for your company as the natural solution to deliver that desirable future state.

As we mentioned earlier, typically you'll name your solution by adding a distinctive descriptor or adjective that differentiates it from products in your category, while keeping it anchored in the category.



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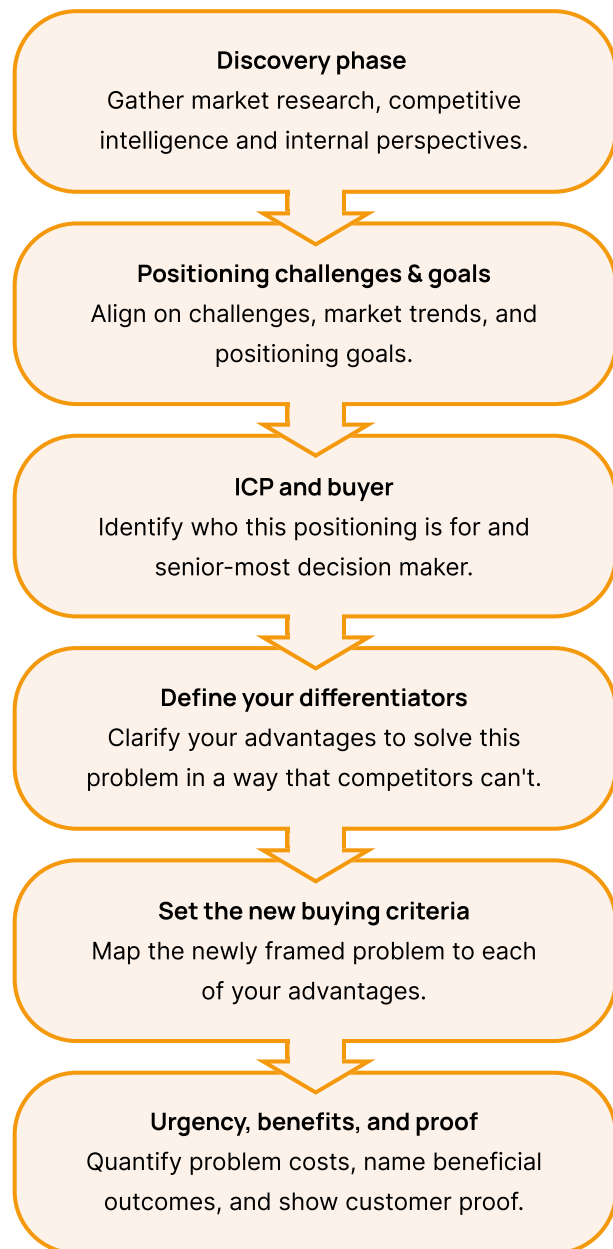
You're not a typical CRM designed for managing sales records. You're an XYZ CRM designed for today's challenges. For example, Attio redefined "CRM" to mean "customer relationship magic," rejecting the traditional CRM category story that created a false choice between power and simplicity.

For larger companies with a diverse portfolio of products, it may not be easy to encapsulate that in a 2- to 4-word descriptor. Instead, you might focus on formulating a broader value statement, a succinct description of the benefits/outcomes you deliver to your buyer.

For example, Wiser, a retail intelligence platform, grew their portfolio through a number of acquisitions to include offerings for both retailers and CPG buyers. Their unifying theme became that they help their customers "win the decision moment" when shoppers are looking to make a purchase, whether that's online or in-store.

Most importantly, your solution name should clearly communicate the distinct and elevated value you deliver (or promise to deliver) in terms your buyer can understand.

Positioning Process Flow



Positioning for your vision

Companies often hesitate to position themselves around capabilities they haven't fully built yet.

But, positioning should contain an element of vision—balancing current capabilities and long-term direction.

As we mentioned earlier, positioning should focus (and can change) your product roadmap and company vision. At its best, the process compels alignment and commitment to a vision for where you're going, what you need to build, and where you'll take your customers.

You don't want to mislead the market, but you shouldn't hesitate to position around a vision you're committed to realizing.

Should you do this alone?

Positioning isn't a marketing exercise—it's a company-wide, CEO-sponsored initiative.

Done right, the process should drive company-wide alignment behind a strategic narrative that shapes your company's direction.

This narrative clarifies why buyers should choose you, clarifies your long-term focus, and is the foundational input to your entire go-to-market effort.

Marketing can run point on the initiative, but, without an outside perspective to facilitate, it can become "marketing's project." As such, other teams see it as just another campaign versus an entire positioning shift.

Having a facilitator depoliticizes the process and builds engagement and buy-in.



At its best, the positioning process compels alignment and commitment to a company vision.

A positioning expert can ask tough questions, push back, challenge assumptions, and drive honest conversations. They can bring a fresh perspective to help you see past internal biases and baggage. And facilitators surface non-obvious insights and advantages that might be taken for granted internally.

The reality is, you're often too close to your own company and product to see it clearly. Whether it's a positioning firm, an investor, or even an unbiased member of your board, bring in outside facilitators to help.

Taking your positioning to market

Once you have your positioning narrative done, you should roll it out immediately. When companies delay this process, the initial excitement fades, and fear and uncertainty can set in. Suddenly, sales is falling back on the old story.

Just as positioning is a CEO-level initiative, so is roll-out.

Having a team of enthusiastic executive champions leading implementation ensures that the new positioning isn't just words on a website, but a story that everyone can consistently deliver with conviction.



Planning and preparation help. Be ready to act:

- Update your homepage and assess any new user behavior.
- Enable and train the sales team. Record and practice your narrative.
- Test your story at a tradeshow or field event with prospects and customers.
- Present it to your customer advisory board along with your roadmap as evidence of your strong point of view.

Throughout the rollout, take stock of the positive and negative feedback along the way and make any needed adjustments. Use testing and website UX research tools to collect quantitative and qualitative feedback.

As you gather feedback, try to stay neutral and consider the context of that feedback. Who gave it? Was the positioning accurately articulated?

Remember, rolling out your positioning takes time, not only to implement but to measure its impact. How do you know it's working? Go back to the symptoms of poor positioning. Are you losing less and winning more? Are meetings set and held faster? Are sales cycles shorter? Anecdotally, your sales team knows a win when they see one.

Lastly, great positioning has great payoffs, but it doesn't have an unlimited shelf life. Be sure to revisit your positioning every 12-18 months to determine if it's time for a refresh or larger revamp. A lot can change, not just with your own company's portfolio but with the market itself—and adapting your story when needed helps you maintain a distinct market position and sustain your competitive advantage.

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About Firebrick Consulting

Firebrick is a strategic consultancy exclusively focused on positioning strategies that accelerate revenue, valuation, and category leadership for B2B tech companies. Our unique positioning process delivers a fresh narrative that wakes up the market, meaningfully connects your value with buyers, and drives clear differentiation. We help you stand out and show why you matter.



About Trusted CMO

Trusted CMO is a B2B marketing consultancy that specializes in strategy, positioning, and operations. With executive-level thinking and SWAT-team like tactics, we lay the foundation for a GTM function that expands your market share and drives revenue. Our team identifies your gaps, solves the problems we find, and helps you build for sustainable growth.