

Turning Market Information Into Strategic Marketing

Market knowledge is the key to market success. We've written and reinforced this message over and over. And now you've got that market knowledge. You've got predictive research to help you understand your current and potential market. You've got reams of tantalizing information. So, how do you turn all this information into market success?

Begin by defining success. Remember the great line "begin with the end in mind." Given your organizational mission, your strategic goals and your resources, what outcome do you seek?

Realistically, what desired **market position** do you believe you can and should have, both in the short and long term? Realistically, what is your major audience **stronghold**, and how can you grow that? What are the one or two new and **most likely** audiences you can afford to reach? How can you **slowly and steadily work** to get and keep these, while maintaining your stronghold?

Let's first take a look at **market position**. Many organizations refer to their implicit desired market position in their mission or goals. And often, these inferences are intended to guide programming and organizational scale, but in reality, may not. What if your organization is a

small ballet company, and your work is wonderful for the budget and artistic resources you have at hand. In the context of long-range planning, motivating your artistic team and board and winning funding, it can be very useful to aim to be the best major ballet company in the state, region or beyond. In fact, setting these kinds of achievement goals is important to every business. But does this translate directly into positioning your organization in your market?

What is market position? It's a combination of many factors, including these important elements:

Target Audience(s)

This is, in part, about who you want to come in the door. It is also about what kind of relationship you want them to have. Sometimes the two facets of this actually contradict in determining potential audience size and your market position. (Depth of experience may be more what you want for your audience, rather than hundreds of additional visits.) Maybe it is actually more important to have a smaller but completely involved audience and group of supporters than it is to have that larger general public audience. To use the three audience



development classifications codified by the Wallace Readers-Digest Fund, you can *expand*, *diversify* and/or *deepen* audiences to realize net increased audience impact. Sometimes the best way to secure market position is to deepen audiences. If that's the goal, it might also require some new thinking: many younger audiences don't want the same type of traditional subscription or membership relationship long held as standard by the field.

Image

Image is the way you want people to think of your organization, in the context of your market as well as the larger universe of arts and cultural organizations that give context to what you do. The "positioning" in image has as much to do with giving context as creating a unique impression. You'd expect visitors to your historical museum to be historical museum visitors elsewhere, and to use their context of what is appealing and good in mentally assessing your image, from the first impression of a brochure or sign on through the entire visitor experience. What image do you want them to form, given this context they bring with them, even when they first see your logo? There may be tension and contradiction here as well: you may want them to think of your organization as being on par artistically with something they saw in London or New York, but at the same time think of it as a comfortable, local, accessible place to drop by. Your job is to create the image that encompasses both. A vast amount goes into shaping the right image, not just when designing a logo, but in living out the marketing plan day by day, throughout the organization.

Message and Communications

How you talk about the experience you offer to your target audience, and what means, also determines your market position. This obviously has to do with how broadly you disseminate information, as well as how aggressively you

prospect new target audience members. It also has to do with style and tone, and links back directly to the image you want. Note, too, that it is far better to talk about the experience from the vantage point of the target audience member than the product and program from your perspective. Messages have to answer the "what's in it for me" questions asked by those who you target as audiences. Good work here makes sure that the message speaks eloquently and easily to the targeted audience, and that the communications work from the inside out and outside in. Great communications with all audiences and target audiences are essential, with as much reinforcement as is possible given the resources you have. At the same time, getting the message out far beyond your local or existing audience, and then using that to reinforce your local communications, builds momentum and reinforces your position. Do you want your potential audience to think of buying tickets for a great family experience? They need to hear about that experience directly from you, and also from the area, regional and national family magazines that rank your organization as a great family destination.

These market position components are pretty substantial, and working through them is a terrific exercise for any organization. (Added bonus: if your organization doesn't have a strategic plan, or is anticipating doing a new strategic plan, working through these components will help you make many planning decisions.)

Next, let's take a look at implications of your stronghold and most likely new audiences as a subset of market positioning. Often, we hear that stronghold audiences aren't the most desired audience. Organizations find their audiences to be too old, too homogenous, too local, too... But that stronghold audience is an asset that has proven itself. So the smart thing to



do is ensure you are prospecting all households similar to your stronghold audience, within your market, with the right image and communications. (By the way, don't make the mistake of assuming "older" audiences need an older image.

Remember context: older audiences are experienced audiences, with enormous context. They can be the first to spot and react to an image that lacks style and freshness, savvy and excellence.) Only when you have truly tapped out all these households can you afford to put this aspect of positioning onto "maintenance." Tapping these stronghold audiences also means establishing as deep a relationship as possible with them. Some measure of increased affiliation should be a goal with these target audiences, whether that affiliation comes via membership increases, attendance at more events or some other way that you can build loyalty.

The next step is logical audience expansion and diversification. Logical expansion means identifying the next best prospects to your strongholds and aligning image and message/communications to get them. Many organizations frustrate their marketing efforts by trying to reach widely disparate new potential audiences all at once. Focus and limit your efforts, with deeper follow-through and continuous reinforcement.

Incremental positioning/repositioning, rather than radical change, should be the aim of most cultural organizations. Think of it as rolling out a continuously refined new image over the course of a couple of years, rather than all at once. Your stronghold audience should notice a fresh energy. Your prospective or target audience should suddenly become aware of your work, almost as if for the first time, and respond enthusiastically to the image they discover. Your message should hit the mark and build a buzz at home and beyond. Your tangible measures of success should indicate consistent growth

through any and all of deepened, diversified or expanded audiences. And, artistically and organizationally, you should be positioned to maintain these new relationships.

The Market Knowledge to Market Success Logic Path

All this builds on market knowledge. Getting these results means deeply reflecting and responding to everything you come to know about your audience and prospects. It requires creating a logic path that links image to target market, message and communications to image, and all of them together to their logical outcome. Logic is to a large extent the way to test your potential success. Take a blatant and fairly easy example. Let's say your target market is "Middle America." Yet with everything your organization knows about the perspectives, values and habits of these households, you want to create an image and keep offering programs that are aligned more with the style and perspective of urban High Rise Renters. It may be a great image, but it won't work in reaching those Middle America households. But let's say you decide to forget the Middle America households in your market, and concentrate on the High Rise Renters in everything you do. Even if there are only a few of them in the market, careful prospecting and targeting will speak to them, over and over, and come to create your position in the market as being "theirs." And then, gradually, you'll expand beyond their cluster and niche to reach some similar groups, both younger and older.

How long does it take to make this work? There's virtually never a one campaign, one initiative or one-shot approach that wins. As marketing guru Joe Marconi writes in his recent book *Reputation Marketing*, "Don't judge your performance or success on an hour-by-hour basis.



If an ad, a campaign or a product is a total disaster, the message will reach you loudly, clearly and quickly. But if the fall campaign is not as strong as the previous spring campaign, it is not necessary to fire the ad agency. Marketers who set unrealistic goals for sales increases – even in soft market cycles – only set themselves and their teams up for a disaster.”¹

In short, this is a multi-year venture that requires commitment from everyone in programming, services and marketing. We’ve heard from many marketers who say board members or executive management gets discouraged if the first attempt to prospect new target audiences falls short of the goal. Sometimes, the organization hasn’t yet completely demonstrated its new or evolved image and hasn’t had time to align it with its target audience. In other cases, the organization hasn’t used its market knowledge of its stronghold and target audiences to shape an effective image, much less has gotten to matching messages and communications, and everything rings a little off the mark as a result. It takes time to align everything, to match up target markets, image and message into an effective market position. Set your goals for incremental improvement, and stick to it.

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WORKSHOP

Analyzing Changes In Your Audience

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**Tuesday, February 5, 2002
9:30-11:30 a.m.**

**Durham Arts Council
120 Morris Street, Durham**

¹ Joe Marconi, *Reputation Marketing, Building and Sustaining Your Organization’s Greatest Asset* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002).