

Perceptual Maps: Best Practice



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Making perceptual maps is easy - right? Probably... but using perceptual maps effectively so that they become powerful and insightful analytical tools is a little trickier.

In this guide you will find the seven rules for perceptual map best practice, to ensure that you are getting the most from this simple, yet helpful, marketing positioning tool.

1. Make several perceptual maps using different axis attributes

Make more than one map? Why?

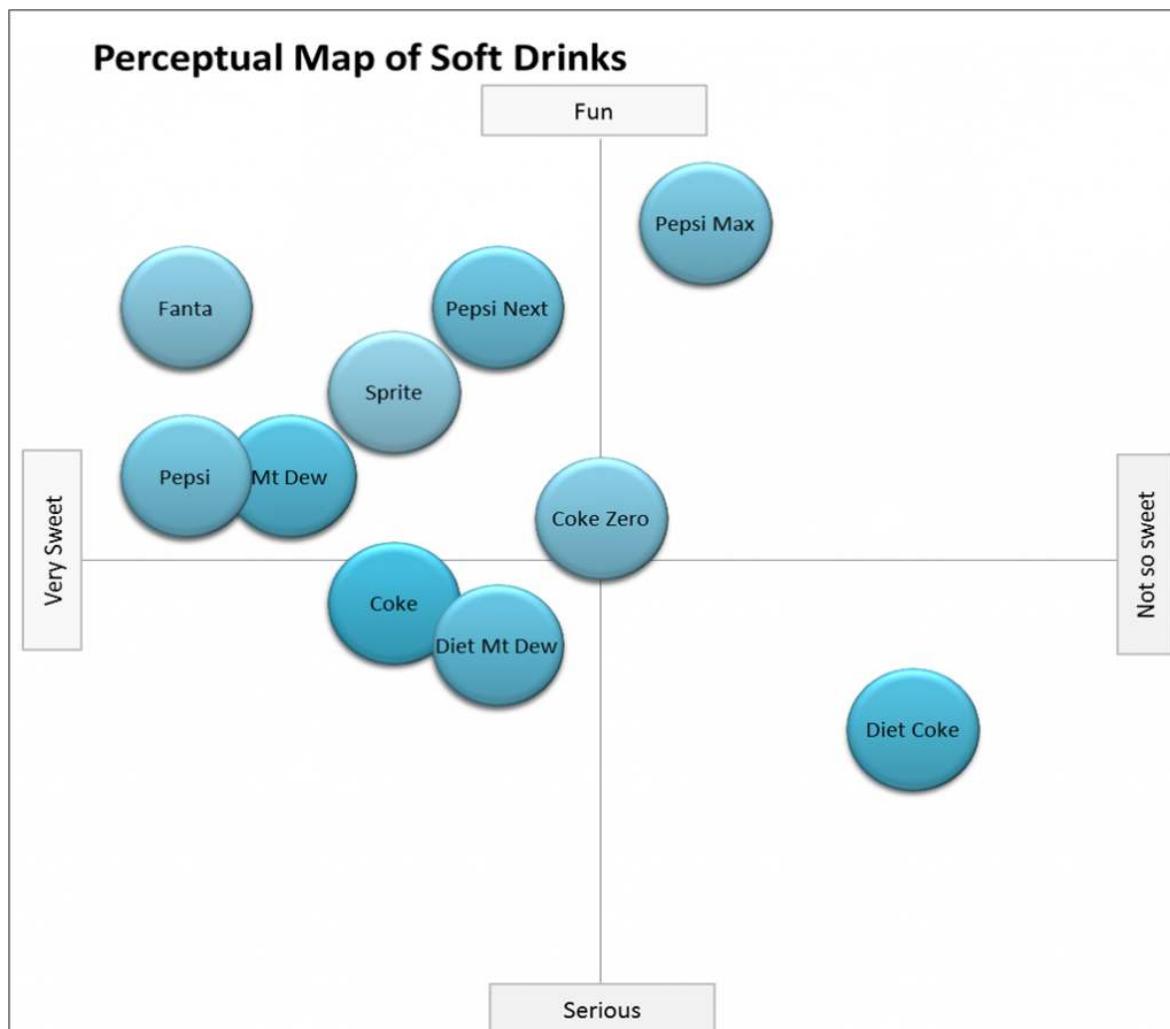
Because a key aspect of perceptual map is to analyze and understand the market. If we pick two attributes and only have one map, then we are imposing **our view** of the market onto the final map and we are not guided by the perception of consumers.

That's not the intention of a map. Nobody really cares what we think as an individual (or as a marketer), but they do care what the market thinks. By looking at different maps by using a variety of attributes, we will discover a lot more about the marketplace and its consumers.

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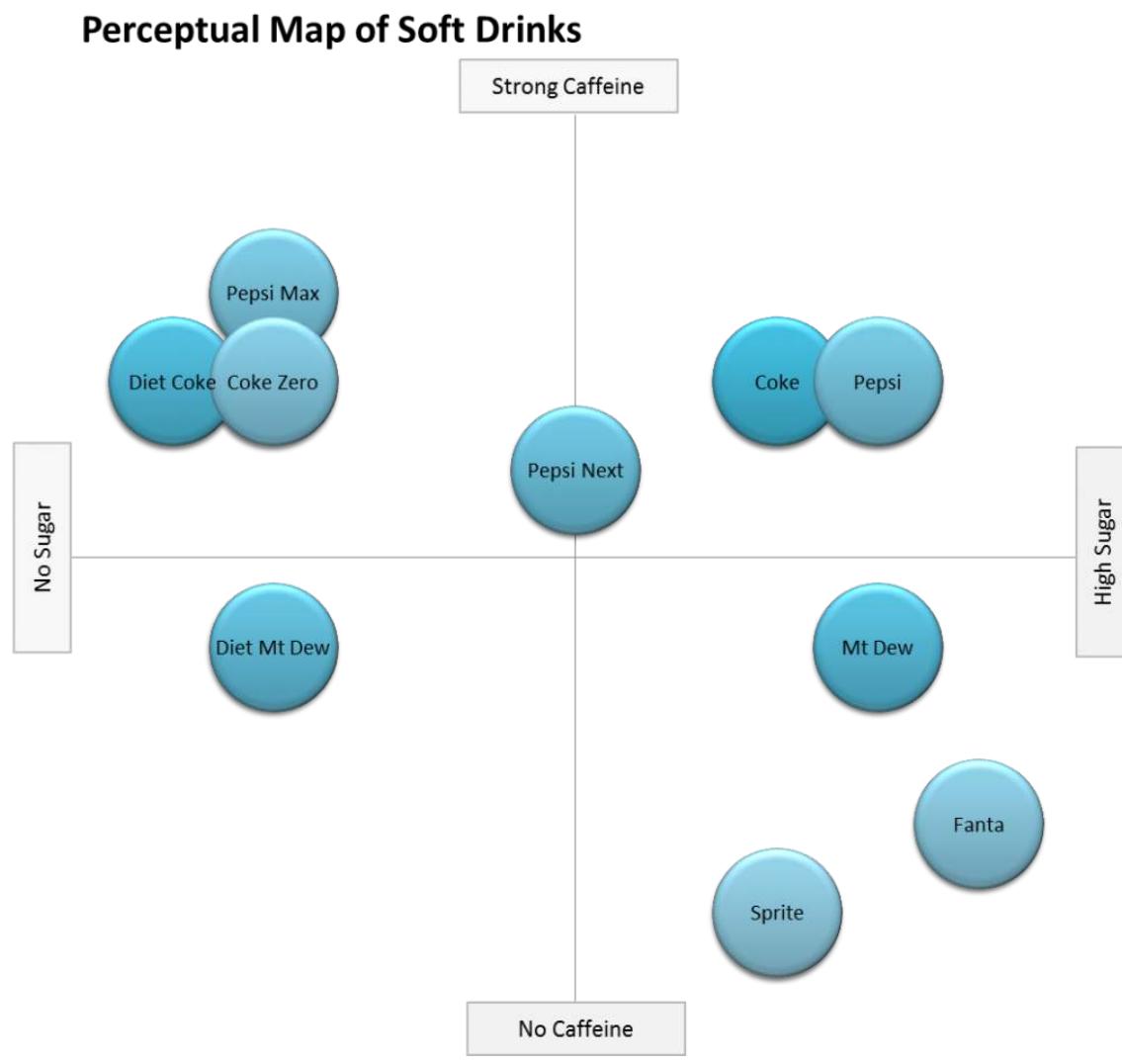
Let's compare the following two perceptual maps – they are both for the soft drink market. The first map uses the attributes of fun/serious image and sweet/not sweet taste, while the second map (on the next page) uses the attributes of high/no sugar content and strong/no caffeine.

And, as you can see, the positioning of the brands differs in both maps.



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Which one is better? Well, they are both useful and give you some insight into the market, consumer perception, and competitor intent – but the more helpful map is the one that uses the key attributes that we are positioning our brand upon (provided that these attributes are important to consumers in their decision-making and purchase choice).



2. Use determinant attributes for the map – not the most important attributes

A determinant attribute is the product feature or benefit that determines the final choice between competing brands – and it may not be a significant attribute.

For example, we may choose an airline for a long flight because they have more in-flight food choices. This then becomes the determinant attribute.

Check out this ad for Air New Zealand – they are promoting the quality of their in-flight food. How do you choose between competing and similar priced airlines?



3. Make different maps for different market segments

Market segments have their own needs, preferences, and perceptions – that is why we have undertaken the segmentation process. So, where possible, it is a great idea to construct a perceptual map which shows each segment's view of the market and the competitors.

Marketing plans are typically built around target markets – so our perceptual maps should take the same view. Whatever your segmentation approach, make sure that you produce maps that reflect the perception of your target markets – not the view of the overall market (or average consumer).

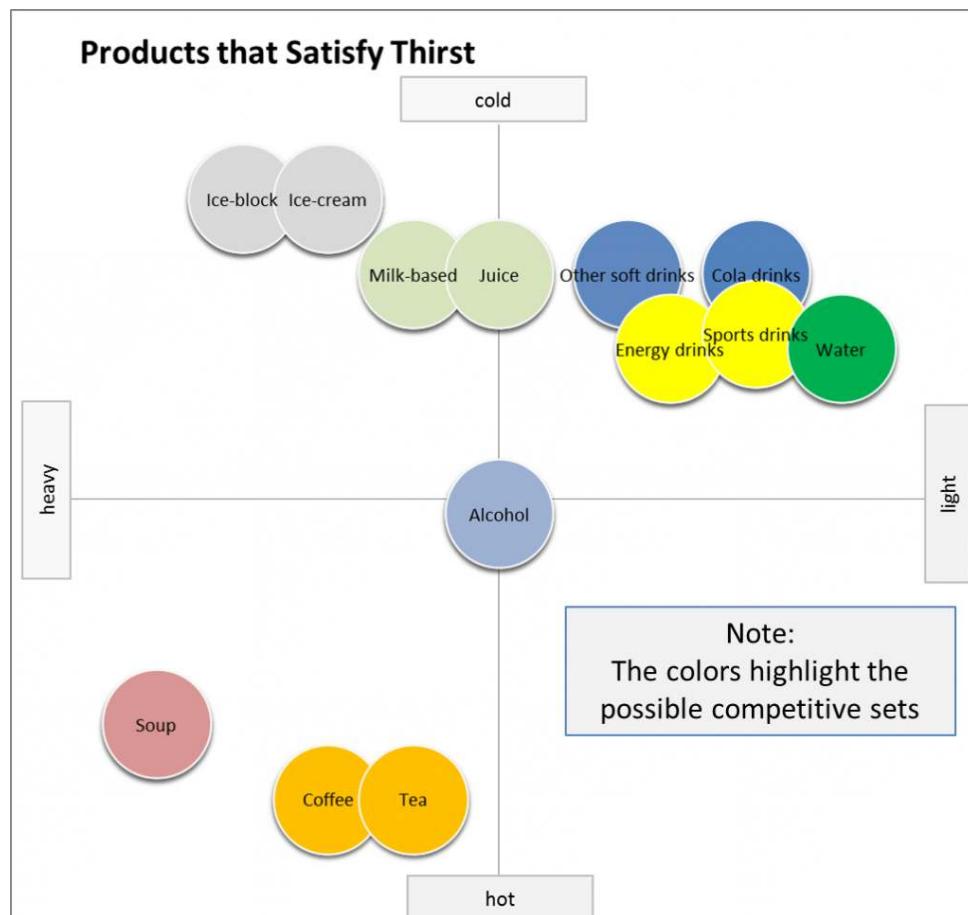
4. Include both key and indirect competitors

We tend to usually only include our direct competitors in our maps. This is because they are top-of-mind to us as marketers.

However, is that how consumers think? For example, is a consumer considering going to McDonalds for lunch only choosing between fast food options, or are they thinking about grabbing a snack, a coffee, or even making food at home?

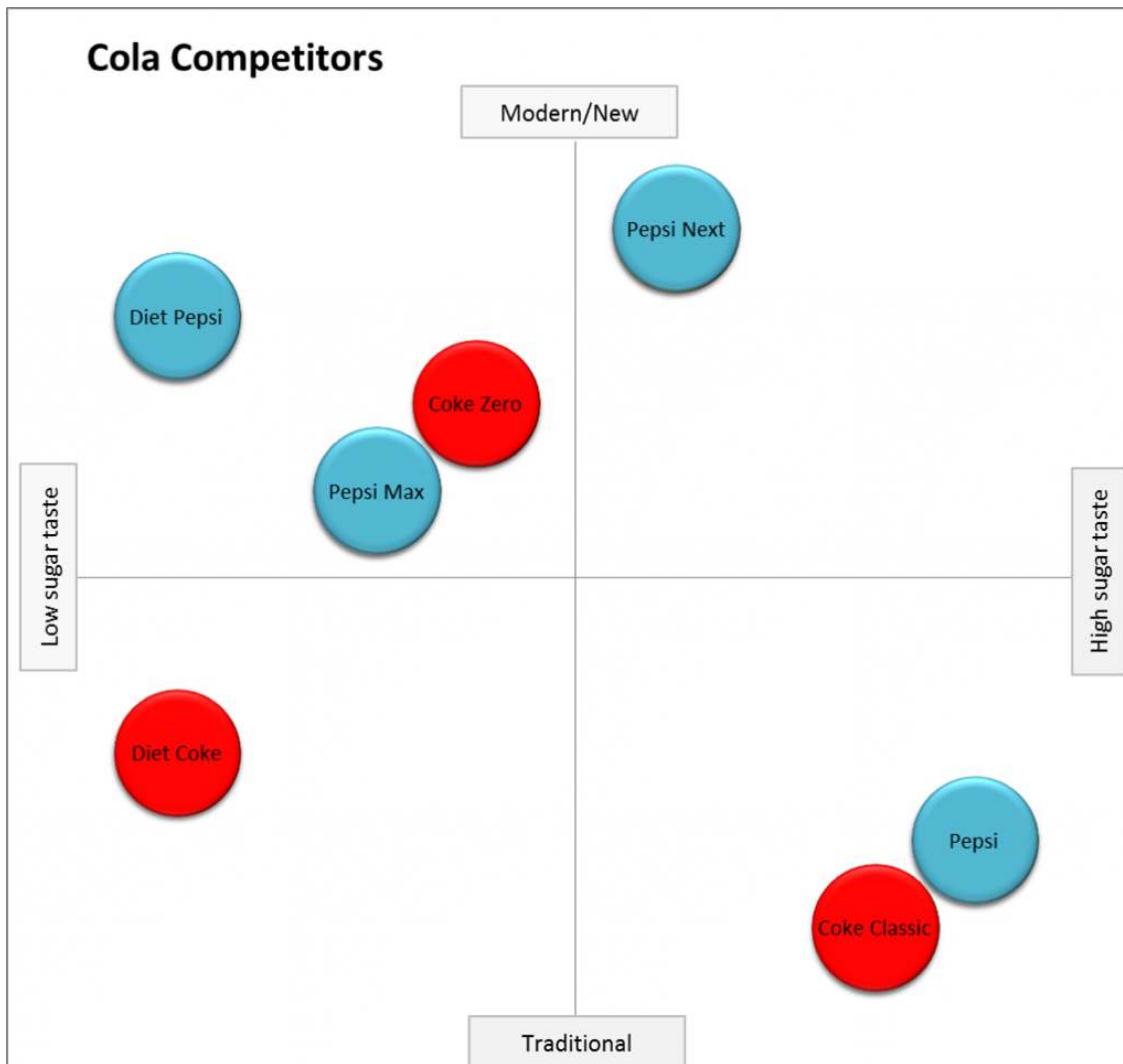
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Check out the next two perceptual maps – the first one shows indirect competitors (or substitute products). The color codes show the direct competitors and we can also drill down to those brands in the second map (shown on the next page).



Looking at indirect competitors is extremely useful, as often these alternate product categories pose the biggest competitive risk.

In mature markets, market shares tend to be relatively stable due to brand loyalty and established and somewhat repetitive consumer behavior. But new players and substitute products can have a major, and sometime disruptive impact on the market and change consumer behavior.



5. Use time-based perceptual maps

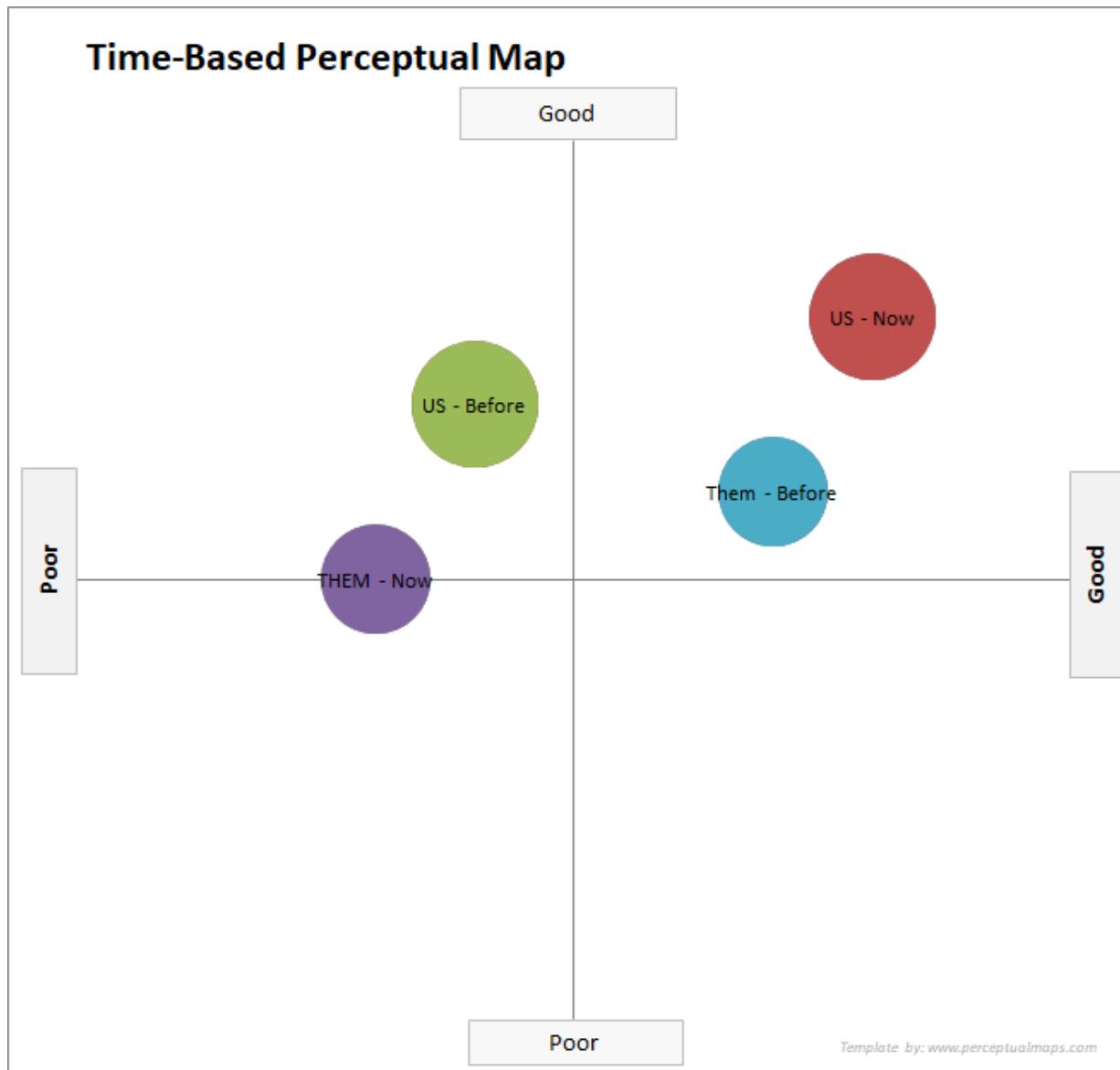
Perceptions change over time because brands develop, competitors evolve, new players enter the market, and even consumer needs change in the long-term.

That's why, where possible, we should also map the position of key brands last year to see how they have evolved. This approach will provide valuable insight into competitors and their likely marketing strategy.

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In this simple perceptual map, you can see that our firm (US) is now in a much stronger place than our key competitor (THEM) on a before and after position.

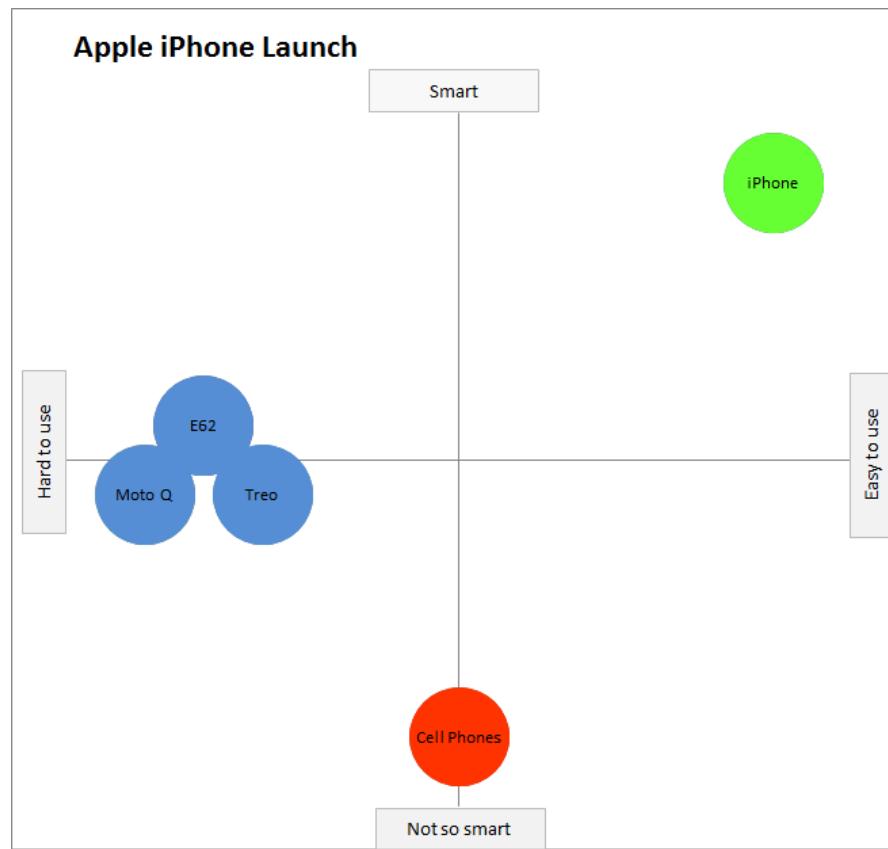
Although this is quite a simple map, it is a powerful piece of communication to demonstrate that our positioning strategies are working well.



6. Be realistic about positioning goals

The top-right corner of the map is not always the best positioning approach, nor it is always achievable. When setting long-term positioning goals, be realistic about what is possible, especially if our competitors have similar plans!

Here is the map that Steve Jobs used when launching the first iPhone in 2007. Apple went straight for the top right hand corner as a later entrant into



the smart phone market. And, for them, it was a huge success and transformed Apple into one of the most successful firms in the world.

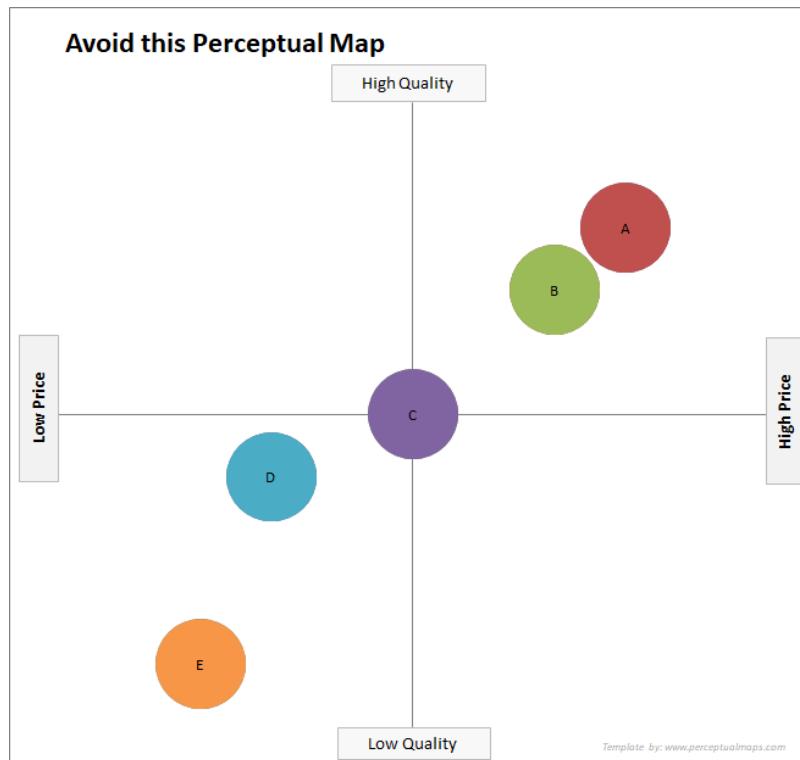
But... most firms are not Apple. They do not have their level of innovation,

skills, resources, and brand equity – so, unfortunately, for most firms we need to be a little less ambitious and a little more realistic in most cases.

7. Never put price and quality on the same map

As a marketing lecturer, I know that this is a common map configuration provided by students. But it is a quite unhelpful map.

As you can see in this map, the brands are mapped in a diagonal pattern. This means that the two axis dimensions are strongly correlated in the mind of the consumer. When this happens, look to replace one of the attributes in the map to provide more insight.



Why? Because consumers usually connect price and quality in their minds, especially for product categories that they lack experience with. This means that you will end up with a highly correlated map, as essentially you are mapping the same attribute twice.

Tools and Resources

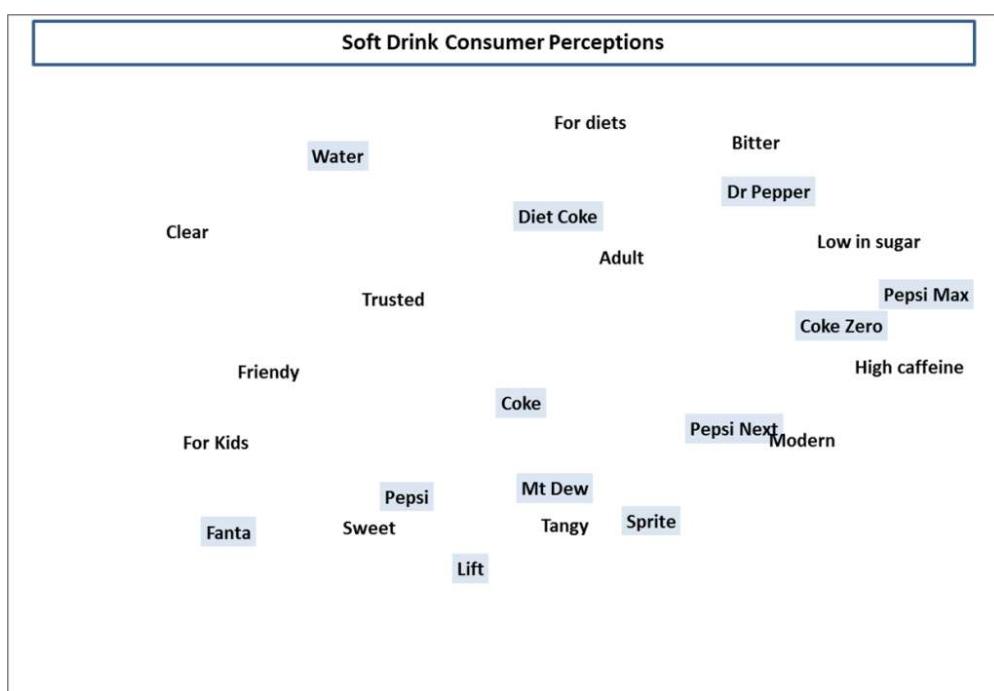
To make a map quickly and easily, get our Free Download Excel Template for Perceptual Maps - available at PerceptualMaps.com

And if you need to review and analyze dozens, or even 100's, of different maps following a brand image survey, then check out our Premium Fast Mapping Excel Template – where you can review lots of map really fast!

Also available at PerceptualMaps.com

And if you want to take your maps to the next level and map multiple

attributes
(not just two
attributes)
at the same
time, along
with all the
competing
brands (like
shown in
this map) –



then check out our Multi-Dimensional Map Excel Template.



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templates, come visit us at...

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