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Product Messaging and Differentiation Primer for 2019



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To cut through the noise and clutter, messaging must articulate clear differentiation and project a relevant sense of urgency. To that end, technology product marketers must develop positioning that imparts the strategy, devise a portfolio marketing plan and tell compelling stories.

Scope

This initiative provides guidance and best practices for creating differentiated positioning, messaging and storylines for both individual products and entire portfolios.

The topics covered in this initiative include:

- Develop differentiated positioning
- Devise a portfolio marketing strategy
- Create compelling stories

Analysis

Figure 1. Product Messaging and Differentiation Overview



Source: Gartner (February 2019)

An increasingly dynamic and noisy market, coupled with the technology buyer's self-service approach, means that messaging must be relevant, strong and compelling to capture and retain attention. Rather than perusing a long list of features and capabilities, buyers want to see quantifiable business outcomes to quickly grasp and understand how your product can address their needs. (Note: In this document, the term "product" is used to refer to traditional products as well as services and offerings that combine both products and services.) The messaging must communicate what makes your product different from or better than other options and the value it provides. Today's technology buyers do not have the time nor the patience to figure out if, how or why your products fit their needs. Technology product marketers must approach messaging in a more directed way to better relate to them.

To ensure that all audiences, including buyers, partners and market influencers, hear and retain key messages, truly understand the differentiation and are motivated to engage, technology product marketers need to start with clear positioning that captures their strategy. Positioning is the cornerstone for messaging, reflected across all types of written and verbal communication. The messaging must be relevant to key segments and roles, answer the key questions that buyers want

addressed, and align to their specific situation. And to have impact, the messaging must be delivered through authentic, compelling stories that communicate the value of the product.

For product marketing teams responsible for large portfolios, which often include acquired products with overlapping capabilities, technology product marketers must tell a story that reflects the entire collection. Buyers need to understand the relationship between products in the portfolio to know what is best-suited to their needs. Market influencers must grasp and be able to articulate the value of the collection.

Top Challenges and How Gartner Can Help

Creating effective messaging, content and communications is a mainstay for product marketing. Driven by an incessant need to produce more and varied content, many technology providers have taken a piecemeal bottom-up approach. New messages and assets are created for each discrete need, without an eye toward the larger communication strategy. Consequently, technology product marketers looking to increase awareness and interest in the entire product portfolio now ask how they can focus their efforts to drive more demand and conversions. Through best-practice research and guidance, Gartner advises to take a more structured approach to messaging and communications that is rooted in establishing and clearly communicating differentiation. Through best-practice research and guidance, Gartner helps by addressing the most pressing questions facing the role:

- How do I create compelling, memorable messaging that clearly articulates why my product is the best solution?
- How do I craft a story that encompasses my full portfolio, while conveying the value of individual products?
- How do I use storytelling to capture attention and prompt buyers to engage?

The topics covered within this initiative include:

- **Develop differentiated positioning:** Articulate an offering's ability to address a need in a compelling, unique way.
- **Devise a portfolio marketing strategy:** Compose a marketing strategy that clarifies the value of an entire offering — a suite of modules, consulting services, architecture and technology partner ecosystems — for both external audiences as well as internal market-facing teams.
- **Create compelling stories:** Engage buyers in a way that demonstrates domain expertise, proves value and builds trust.

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Our research addresses the following common client questions:

How do I create compelling, memorable messaging that clearly articulates why my product is the best solution?

Technology providers must capture and retain the attention of prospective buyers, communicating the value that can be obtained through its solutions. But in today's noisy market, where those buyers are continuously bombarded with messages across multiple channels, the window in which to show relevance is small. Consequently, technology product marketers struggle to create messaging that resonates and clearly conveys what makes their products and services the best option. To address this pressing need, Gartner recommends a messaging approach that is grounded in positioning and provides the context and frame of reference to understand the value the solution provides.

Planned Research

- Connecting Technical Strengths to Business Value
- Effective Case Studies — How to Quantify Business Impact That Is Compelling and Believable
- Creating Differentiation Through Disruption

How do I craft a story that encompasses my full portfolio, while conveying the value of individual products?

Large technology providers possess a portfolio of products and services, which may have grown organically and through merger and acquisition (M&A) activity. Each individual product may be at different stages of its life cycle, and some may even have overlapping purposes or capabilities. Technology product marketers often struggle to tell an overarching story for the entire collection, while supporting individual messaging for each product and service. Ultimately, buyers must be able to identify which products are best-suited to their specific needs. Meanwhile, partners, sales and customer success teams must be able to identify *which* products to sell to *which* target audiences *when*, and also spot cross-selling opportunities. Gartner research focuses on the considerations and best practices for developing and executing a portfolio marketing strategy.

Planned Research

- Architect Customer-Centric Product Portfolio Messaging
- Ecosystem Messaging — Surfacing the Value of Interoperability
- Toolkit: Plan for a Successful Technology Product Launch
- Using Gartner Hype Cycles to Refine Portfolio Marketing Strategies and Tactics

How do I use storytelling to capture attention and prompt buyers to engage?

Buyers seek out content and information that will help them understand what solutions are available to help achieve their objectives. In a dynamic market, with a growing number of options, the attention span of the buyer diminishes, providing a more limited window for technology providers to show relevance. Technology product marketers suspect that espousing the merits of their products

often fall flat, and they strive to create more compelling content. Gartner recommends using storytelling as a technique to engage the prospects, while speaking to their interests and addressing their questions.

Planned Research

- Using Past Customer Success to Build Trust and Credibility
- Critical Success Factors for Effective Thought Leadership Marketing
- Making the Case for a Challenger Messaging Capability Toolkit

Related Priorities

Table 1. Related Priorities

Priority	Focus
Product Promotion and Awareness	This initiative covers approaches to creating awareness, generating demand and accelerating high-quality leads through the funnel that marketing should apply to improve promotion efforts.
Product Marketing Leadership	This initiative provides best practices for optimizing the budget, resources, technology, intra- and intercompany collaboration, and KPIs to drive an agile and impactful product marketing function.
Product Marketing Impact	This initiative covers product marketing contribution into critical functions and programs that drive customer interest and engagement throughout both the buying and owning cycles.
Planning and Segmentation	This initiative covers insights about the markets, competitive environments, targeting approaches and customer profiles that you should incorporate to improve planning and segmentation efforts.

Source: Gartner

Suggested First Steps

- Read “4 Steps to a Differentiated Messaging Foundation,” and learn how to create a structured messaging approach that emphasizes your offering’s strengths and uniqueness.
- Read “Positioning Revisited” so that you can capture and communicate product positioning using our proven framework.
- Read “Embrace Storytelling Techniques to Communicate Value Across the B2B Customer Life Cycle,” and explore how to capture the attention of buyers and build credibility through stories.
- Attend [Gartner Tech Growth & Innovation Conference 2019](#) to gain firsthand insight and pragmatic advice to help you develop and execute your go-to-market strategies.

Essential Reading

- “10 Steps for Improved Differentiation.” Follow these steps to uncover and better communicate competitive differentiation.
- “Use ‘Questions to Answer’ to Drive a Customer-Centric Content Strategy That Accelerates Buying Decisions.” Create and manage a standard list of questions your prospects have to answer to make a technology purchase, and map it to content assets to make buying easier.
- “Narrative Design: How to Connect Brand Story and Content With Customer Experience.” Use this narrative design framework to connect brand stories with specific customer context to drive engagement, inform the development of messaging themes and support the overall brand story.
- “Trust Drives the B2B Technology Customer Life Cycle.” Establish a go-to-market approach that includes engaging with the trusted sources that prospects rely on throughout their buying process.
- “Tech Go-to-Market: Use Situational Messaging to Improve Customer Engagement.” Help sales align the right messages for specific buying situations to drive context and business relevance.
- “5 Success Factors of Effective Thought Leadership Marketing.” Differentiate and establish credibility in competitive markets by using these five critical success factors to evaluate readiness for and execute on a thought leadership strategy.
- “How to Create the Path From Features to Value.” Identify both technical benefits and business values for products and services to differentiate and engage buyers.
- “Lead With Business Outcome Messaging to Capture Buyer Attention and Inspire New Opportunities.” Emphasize business outcomes to clarify messaging and emphasize business relevance.
- “4 Steps for Vendors to Differentiate Through Organizational Culture.” Leverage your organizational culture by demonstrating how it parlays into stronger offerings, better business practices, and ultimately customer value and success.

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Gartner helps technology providers make the right product, marketing and sales decisions by providing insight into markets, customers, competitors and technologies.

Product and Service Innovation

- Drive innovation through your business model, products and services
- Inform your decision life cycle, prioritize investments and identify new opportunities (product, geography or market)
- Anticipate and manage economic boom/bust cycles, and identify and leverage disruptive technology trends

Go-to-Market Strategy

- Identify how to meet your business goals
- Position marketing operations and campaigns by properly positioning solutions competitively for the right target segment
- Drive increased sales effectiveness by better positioning your solutions

Positioning and Messaging

- Differentiate your messaging and enhance your unique story for your customers
- Get visibility into what your customers care about and where they are struggling
- Get visibility into where your competitors are succeeding and where they are falling behind through Gartner Magic Quadrants®
- Access Vendor Ratings for profiles of key competitors

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