



# Pick a Prime Positioning

**Q:** What is a “brand positioning,” and do I need one for my restaurant?

**A:** A brand positioning is a strategy statement that explains whom you are selling to, what your business scope is, and what you do to create value for your customers. A clear, definitive, and competitive brand positioning is essential to developing a great brand. So, yes, you need one.

A competitive brand positioning is part of your strategic brand platform. Like a political platform, a brand platform outlines what the brand stands for and what it is trying to accomplish. But, unlike with politics, your brand platform is primarily for internal use only. It's a strategy to guide you and your people. Your brand positioning articulates why customers should choose your brand and how your brand differs from others. As such, it helps ensure your brand stands out from your competition and stands up to competitive attacks.

The brand positioning framework that I use with my clients is a common one: For (target customer), Brand is the (competitive frame of reference) that (differentiating benefit) because (reasons to believe). It's a familiar and simple framework, but it's how you fill in the framework that makes the difference. Here's how to complete the framework.

Your first decision is your target customer. You should determine the distinct group of people or type of people that you want to be engaged with your brand. Many brands define their target by age, gender, or life stage, but your strategy won't be very informative if you only classify people by their demographics. Brands have the most success when they define their target by a “needs state,” or a combination of purchasing attitude (wanting low prices, liking to try new things, looking for healthy choices, etc.) and their visit occasion (a quick meal on the run, time to hang out with friends, etc.). I've written a few other *QSR* columns about targeting, so refer to those to learn more about selecting a target customer.

The next blank to fill in the framework is your competitive frame of reference. In other words, the mental file folder that you want your target to put your brand in. This is the most critical choice; if you define your competition too narrowly, you won't appeal broadly enough to generate volume, but if you define it too broadly, you end up having to position your brand on the benefits of the category instead of on what makes your brand unique.

I suggest looking beyond your competitive set and even your cuisine type and base your competitive frame of reference on the primary motivations of your target customers. For example, a burger joint might not only compete with other burger joints. It may also compete with sandwich shops, steakhouses,

and even a backyard barbecue. Its customers are likely looking for a hearty, classic treat, and it should use that motivation as its competitive frame of reference.

You should determine your frame of reference in conjunction with choosing your differentiating benefit. These two decisions are related because your positioning should explain how your brand is different from others in your competitive frame of reference.

When Frances Allen, executive vice president and chief brand officer for Denny's, spoke at the National Restaurant Association's recent Marketing Executives Group meeting, she explained how her company thought about its competitive frame of reference. “Our competitors are everyone, but we are in a category of one: a national diner—no other chain would be considered as authentically as a diner as Denny's.” That's a great example of identifying a unique position within a broad competitive frame.

To determine the differentiating benefit of your brand, think about its defining attribute. Is your brand modern? Old-fashioned? Fun? Simple? Surprising? Your defining attribute should be an aspect of your offering that no one else is talking about or that constitutes a serious weakness for your main competitors.

Next, consider what the benefit of that defining attribute is to your customer. For example, feeling fuller and not being hungry is the benefit of having whole grains (an attribute). Helping make life a little easier is a benefit of speedy service. Once you've identified your differentiating benefit, you need to give customers reasons to believe that you deliver it. Reasons to believe provide substantiation to your claim when customers can see, touch, feel, and understand them.

Perhaps your menu incorporates a proprietary cooking technology, or experts endorse you. Or maybe your company has longevity and history. Put several reasons to believe in your positioning framework, and be sure they stand up to the scrutiny of today's consumers, who are equipped with the tools and access to verify them.

Here's an example of a burger chain's competitive brand positioning: For everyone who chooses to do something good for himself (target customer), our brand is the place for classic hearty meals (competitive frame of reference) that make you feel great about treating yourself (differentiating benefit), because our burgers are big but not heavy, they're made of 100 percent grass-fed beef, and you can choose from an array of fresh and light toppings (reasons to believe).

With a competitive brand positioning in place, your brand can use it to make decisions on product development, pricing, messaging, and more—and ensure your brand establishes and maintains a clear competitive advantage. 