

THE MARKETING SHELF · BOOK 1 OF 11

Be the Obvious Choice

Positioning and a brand people remember



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How every chapter works

The idea → Why it matters → The method → An example
→ Your worksheet → 3-line summary

Included with this book

Printable worksheets: **one for each chapter, the one-page positioning sheet, the brand consistency checklist**, in your download.

1

Why “good quality, best service” wins nobody

If your promise is the same as everyone else's, customers can compare only one thing: your price.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- The five promises everyone makes
- How customers choose when everyone looks alike
- Example: Kalpa Interiors, busy and discounting
- What positioning is, and what it is not
- The four questions this book answers
- Ten signs you are being compared on price
- Your worksheet: a sameness check

By the end, you will be able to

- Spot the empty promises in your own marketing
- Explain why sameness pushes prices down
- Name the four questions your position must answer

Reading time: about 15 minutes · 1 worksheet

THE IDEA

The five promises everyone makes

Walk down any market street, read ten websites in one trade, or ask five firms why you should choose them. You will hear the same five promises, in almost the same words.

What businesses say	What the customer hears
“Best quality”	Everyone says that. Show me.
“Excellent service”	Until something goes wrong.
“Competitive prices”	So I should bargain.
“Years of experience”	Experience at what, and for whom?
“Customer satisfaction is our priority”	Whose isn't?

These promises are not lies. Most businesses do try to give good quality and service. The trouble is that customers expect them. A promise every competitor makes cannot be the reason a customer chooses you.

The name test

Cover your name on your website, brochure or visiting card. If a competitor could put their name there and nothing would become untrue, you have not yet told customers why they should choose you.

Where these promises hide: the “About us” page, the back of the visiting card, the first line of a quotation, the WhatsApp Business description and the board outside the shop.

WHY IT MATTERS

How customers choose when everyone looks alike

Customers rarely study every option. They think of two or three names, ask a friend, search online and compare what they find. When nothing separates the names on their shortlist, they fall back on whatever is easiest to compare.

When customers can't tell you apart, they choose on...	What it costs you
Price	Discounts, thinner margins, bargaining on every order
Who replied first	You must answer every enquiry instantly, even poor ones
Convenience: nearest, quickest	You compete only in your own neighbourhood
A friend's word	Growth depends on luck and on old customers

Positioning gives customers a better reason: a difference that matters to them. You want people to finish the sentence “They're the ones who...” in the same way, even when you are not in the room.

Where the idea comes from

Al Ries and Jack Trout popularised positioning in the 1970s and 1980s. Their point still holds: the real contest is for a place in the customer's mind, not only a place on the shelf or the search page.

Your sentence to finish: when people talk about your business, what do you want them to say after “They're the ones who...”? By the end of Chapter 4 you will have your answer.

EXAMPLE

Kalpa Interiors: busy, and discounting

Kalpa Interiors (an invented firm) designs and builds home and office interiors in Pune. Ritu Deshpande, an architect, started it in 2014. It has 22 staff: designers, site supervisors and a small office team, with carpentry, electrical and painting done by trusted contractors.

Kalpa Interiors, last year	
Enquiries	600, about 50 a month
Projects won	60, or 10% of enquiries
Revenue	₹5.4 crore
Average project	₹9.0 lakh, after an average 12% discount on the quoted price
Gross margin	25%
Kinds of client	New flats, old-flat renovations, villas, offices and shops, rental fit-outs

Ritu's website promised “quality interiors, on-time delivery, competitive prices and 10 years of experience”. So did the websites of the six firms her customers most often compared her with. Her sales team heard the same line every week: “Your designs are nice, but so are theirs. Can you match their price?”

What was going on

Kalpa was not losing because its work was poor. It was losing because nothing in its marketing gave a customer a reason to choose it, or to pay a little more. Over the next seven chapters Ritu works through this book's method, and Chapter 8 shows what changed a year later.

THE METHOD

What positioning is, and what it is not

Positioning is the place your business holds in customers' minds compared with the alternatives: the one thing they think of when they think of you. You choose it on purpose, then make everything you say and do support it.

Word	What it means	Kalpa example
Positioning	The choice of who you serve and the one thing you stand for	“The interiors firm that hands over on the promised date”
Brand	Everything people remember and feel about you: name, look, experience, reputation	Kalpa's name, colours, site boards and how the team behaves
Tagline	A short customer-facing line written from the positioning	“Move in on the date we promise.”
Advertising	Paying to put your message in front of people	An Instagram ad, a society notice board

Positioning comes first. A tagline, logo or ad campaign built without it is decoration: it may look good, but it gives nobody a reason to choose you.

It is a choice

Choosing one thing means not leading with the others. That feels risky. Being forgettable is riskier.

It lives in customers' minds

You can aim for a position, but only customers' words and choices show whether you hold it. Chapter 8 shows how to check.

Not only for big brands. A clinic, a CA firm, a packaging maker and a coaching class all make this choice, whether or not they call it positioning. The difference is whether they make it on purpose.

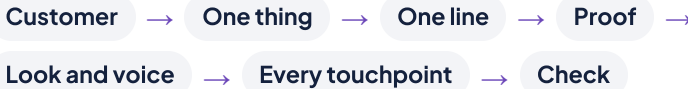
YOUR MAP

The four questions this book answers

Every strong position answers four questions. Get them right and the rest of your marketing becomes much easier to write, because you always know what to say and whom to say it to.

- 1 **Who is it for?** The customers you serve best, described as people, not statistics. Chapter 2.
- 2 **What is the one thing?** A difference they want, you can deliver every time and rivals do not claim. Chapter 3.
- 3 **How do you say it?** A one-line positioning statement, and the customer lines that come from it. Chapter 4.
- 4 **Why should they believe it?** Proof: numbers, customer words, demonstrations and written promises. Chapter 5.

Chapters 6 and 7 then carry the position into your name, look and voice, and into every place a customer meets you. Chapter 8 shows how to check that it is working.



How long it takes

A first version takes about two weeks of part-time work. Living it takes longer: it often takes three to six months of saying the same thing before customers start repeating your position back to you.

Do it as a team

Work through the worksheets with two or three people who meet customers every day: a salesperson, someone who answers the phone, someone who delivers the work. They know what customers really ask.

CHECK YOURSELF

Ten signs you are being compared on price

Tick each sign that is true for your business. Four or more ticks means a clearer position is probably the cheapest growth lever you have.

- Customers ask for a discount before they ask about the work
- You lose more quotes on price than for any other reason
- Your website or brochure would still be true with a competitor's name on it
- You describe yourself with the words quality, service, experience or trust
- Customers can't say why they chose you, beyond “someone recommended you”
- You take almost any job that comes in
- Your sales team explains the business differently from the way you do
- Your best and worst customers came in through the same message
- You are known as “good”, but not as “the ones who...”
- You change your message every time a competitor runs an offer

Why this matters for profit

A small change in price has a big effect on profit. Had Kalpa held its average discount at 6% instead of 12%, the same 60 projects would have brought in about ₹37 lakh more, and nearly all of it would have been profit.

Don't fix this with a lower price. Fix it with a clearer reason to choose you. That is what the next seven chapters build.

APPLY IT · SAMENESS CHECK

Your sameness check

Collect your website, brochure, visiting card and a recent quotation, plus the websites of two competitors.

1 The five claims you make most often about your business (copy your exact words)

2 The claims your two closest competitors make

3 Which of your claims a competitor could copy word for word

4 Your last three lost quotes, and the reason each customer gave

5 How three customers describe you, in their own words

6 Your score on the ten signs, and the two signs that worry you most

Example (invented): a CA firm in Indore

Claims: “trusted advisors, timely service, 20 years of experience”. Two rivals say almost the same. Last three lost quotes: all on fees. Clients describe the firm as “reliable”.
Score: 6 of the 10 signs.

CHAPTER 1 IN 3 LINES

What to remember

- 1** Promises every competitor makes cannot be the reason a customer chooses you.
- 2** When customers can't tell you apart, they choose on price, on who replied first or on convenience.
- 3** Positioning is the deliberate choice of who you serve and the one thing you stand for.

KEY WORDS**Positioning**

The place your business holds in customers' minds, compared with the alternatives.

Brand

Everything people remember and feel about your business.

Commodity

A product or service customers see as the same as others, so they compare only price.

Common mistakes

- Leading with quality, service and experience
- Designing a logo or tagline before choosing a position
- Trying to appeal to every customer equally

Try this week

- Do the name test on your website
- Ask three customers why they chose you
- Note the reason for every lost quote this month

Quick self-check: A coaching institute's poster says “Experienced faculty, proven results, affordable fees.” Name two problems with it, and the question you would start from instead. Model answers are in the toolkit.

Next: **Chapter 2 · Choose the customer you serve best**

You've just read Chapter 1 of Be the Obvious Choice.

The full book has 8 chapters, 10 worksheets and 87 pages. It is Book 1 of The Marketing Shelf: 11 short, practical books on one subject, sold together.

STILL TO COME IN BE THE OBVIOUS CHOICE

- | | |
|--|--|
| 2 Choose the customer you serve best | 5 Proof that makes the promise believable |
| 3 Find the one thing you can own | 6 Name, look and voice on a small budget |
| 4 Say it in one line: your positioning statement | 7 The same brand at every touchpoint |
| | 8 Is it working? Recall, enquiries and price |

THE 11 BOOKS IN THE MARKETING SHELF

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 Be the Obvious Choice | 7 Customers Who Come Back |
| 2 Worth Following | 8 Sales on Track |
| 3 Ads That Pay | 9 Close with Confidence |
| 4 Be Found First | 10 Win Business Buyers |
| 5 Known on LinkedIn | 11 Marketing That Adds Up |
| 6 Chats That Sell | |

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