How to create a brand positioning map: 9 steps

Category: Strategy
written by Stewart Hodgson | 18 September 2024

Your company doesn't exist in a void. It's likely one of many organizations competing in the same industry to attract a similar target audience. A brand positioning map is how you determine exactly where your business sits in that larger landscape.

When you map your brand's position in relation to your competitors, you consider the entire competitive landscape, your company's strengths and weaknesses, and the perceptions of your customers.

You then use the visual representation you build to guide your brand strategy.

The insights you gather from your brand positioning map are how you identify how you're going to differentiate your company from the competition.

Here, I'll show you exactly what a brand positioning map is, how we use these tools at Fabrik to support our clients, and how you can design a positioning map of your own.

What is a brand positioning map?

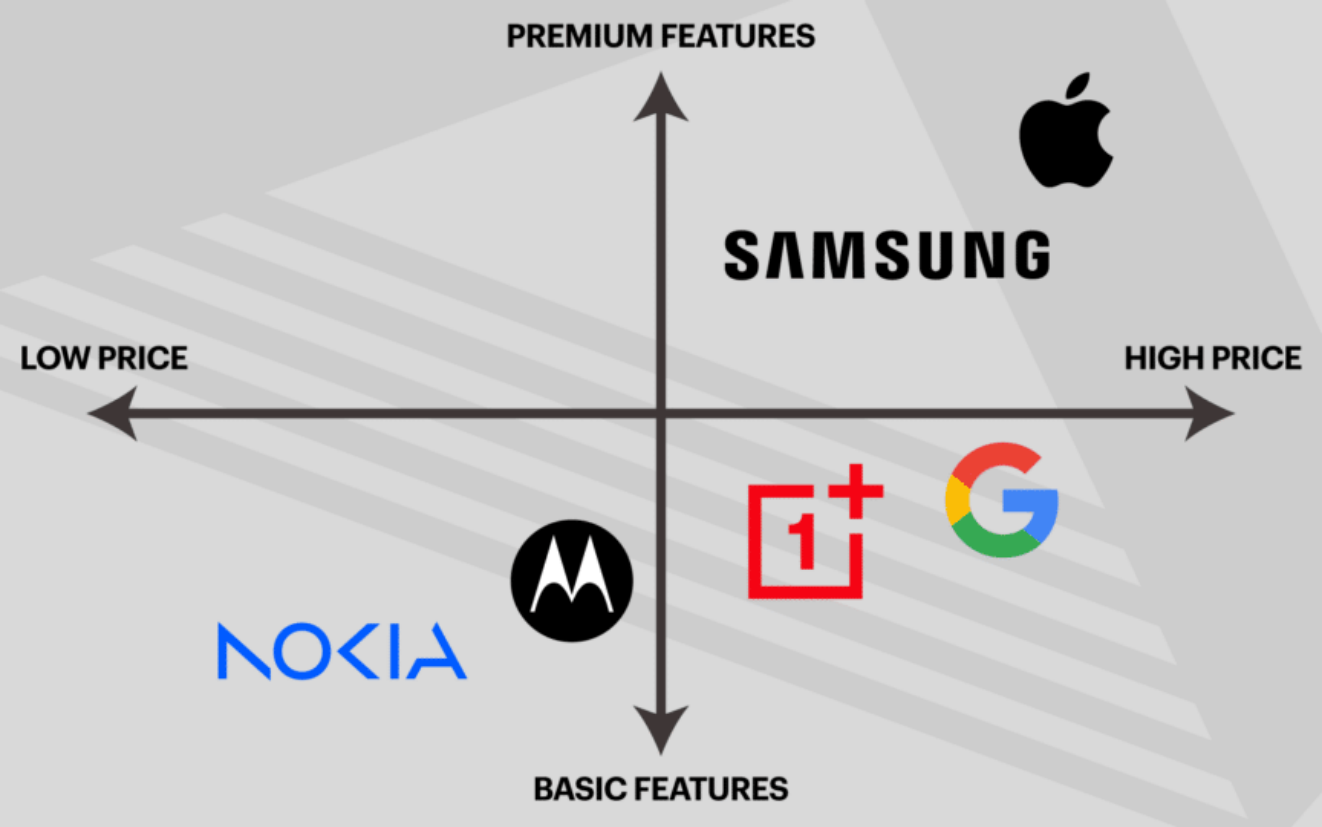
A brand positioning map, or "competitive positioning map", is a two-dimensional chart used to determine your company's unique position in the market, in relation to competitors. It provides a visual representation of how your company compares to other brands, based on specific attributes.

For instance, when we were developing a brand strategy for Slamcore, a robotics technology innovator, we used a

positioning chart to identify that the company could differentiate itself from its competitors with a focus on innovation, proprietary technology, and authority.

Positioning maps don't have to be complex. Most of the time, you'll end up with a simple diagram that features an X and Y axis, labelled with attributes relevant to your target audience.

As an example, in the technology industry, a positioning map might focus on the attributes of "price", and "functionality/features".



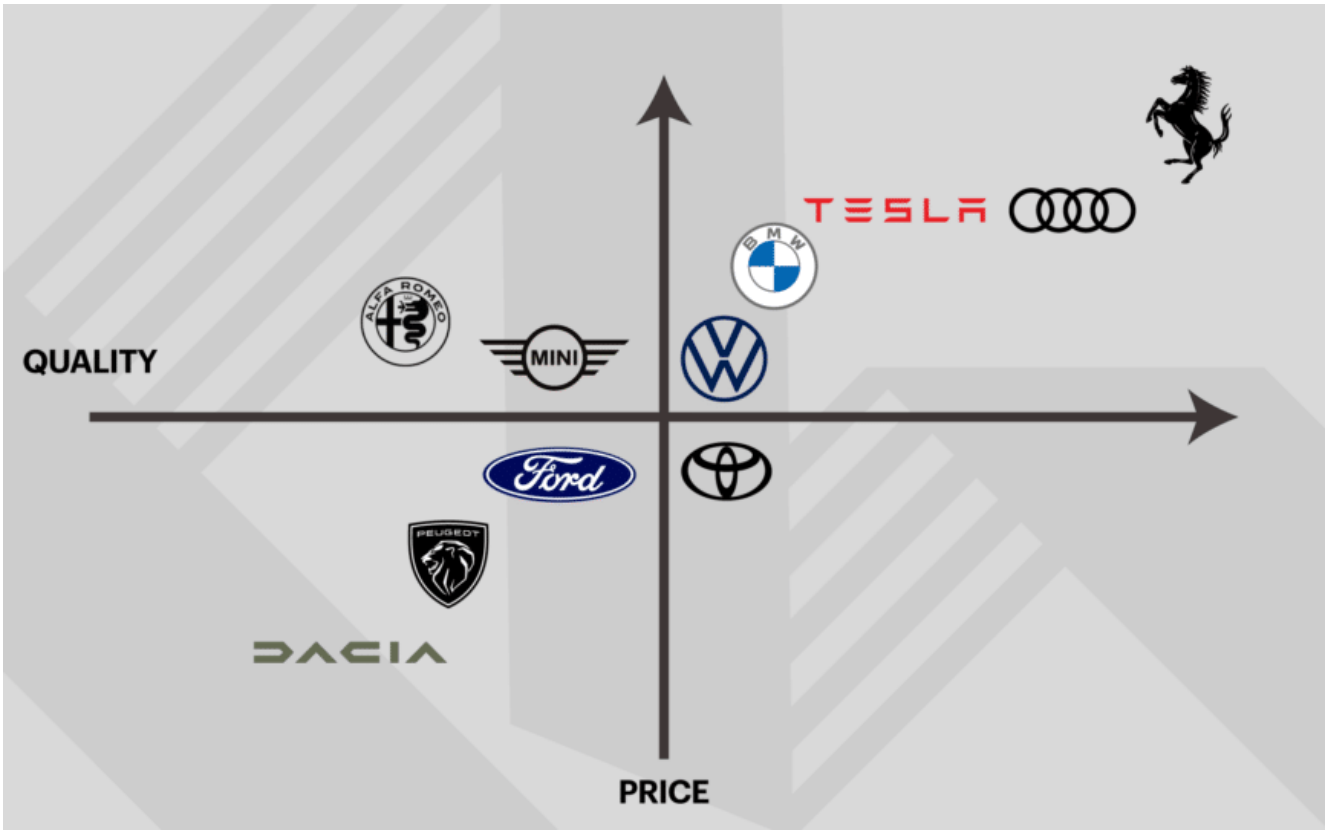
With a chart like that, a company like Apple would see that it can differentiate itself based on premium features, but might struggle to compete with companies offering lower prices.

Why do you need a positioning map?

Ultimately, a brand positioning map gives you a clear view of how your company compares to other organizations in your industry, so you know how to "present" yourself to customers.

Your map guides your [“brand positioning” strategy], showing you the value you can offer your customers that your competitors can’t. This helps you to create more impactful and meaningful marketing strategies, that capture the minds of your customers.

Look at this brand positioning map featuring car brands:



With this representation, a company like Ferrari would see that their high price tag means they’d need to position themselves as a “luxury” high-quality brand to connect with the right audience.

Ferrari’s marketing teams know they’re never going to appeal to budget-conscious consumers. That’s why Ferrari has built its brand image around a focus on luxury and quality, to help attract affluent consumers dreaming of a specific lifestyle.

Ultimately, perceptual mapping strategies like this give you a visual way to determine how you can shape consumers perceptions of your brand with the right marketing and branding techniques. In some cases, brand mapping can even

help you identify opportunities for growth.

You might decide that you can reach a broader audience by asking your product development team to create a more user-friendly, cost-effective, or quality-focused product.

How to create a brand positioning map: Step by step

At a glance, creating a brand positioning map seems pretty simple. All you really need is a chart with two lines and four "segments", two key attributes, and a bunch of competitors to compare yourself to.

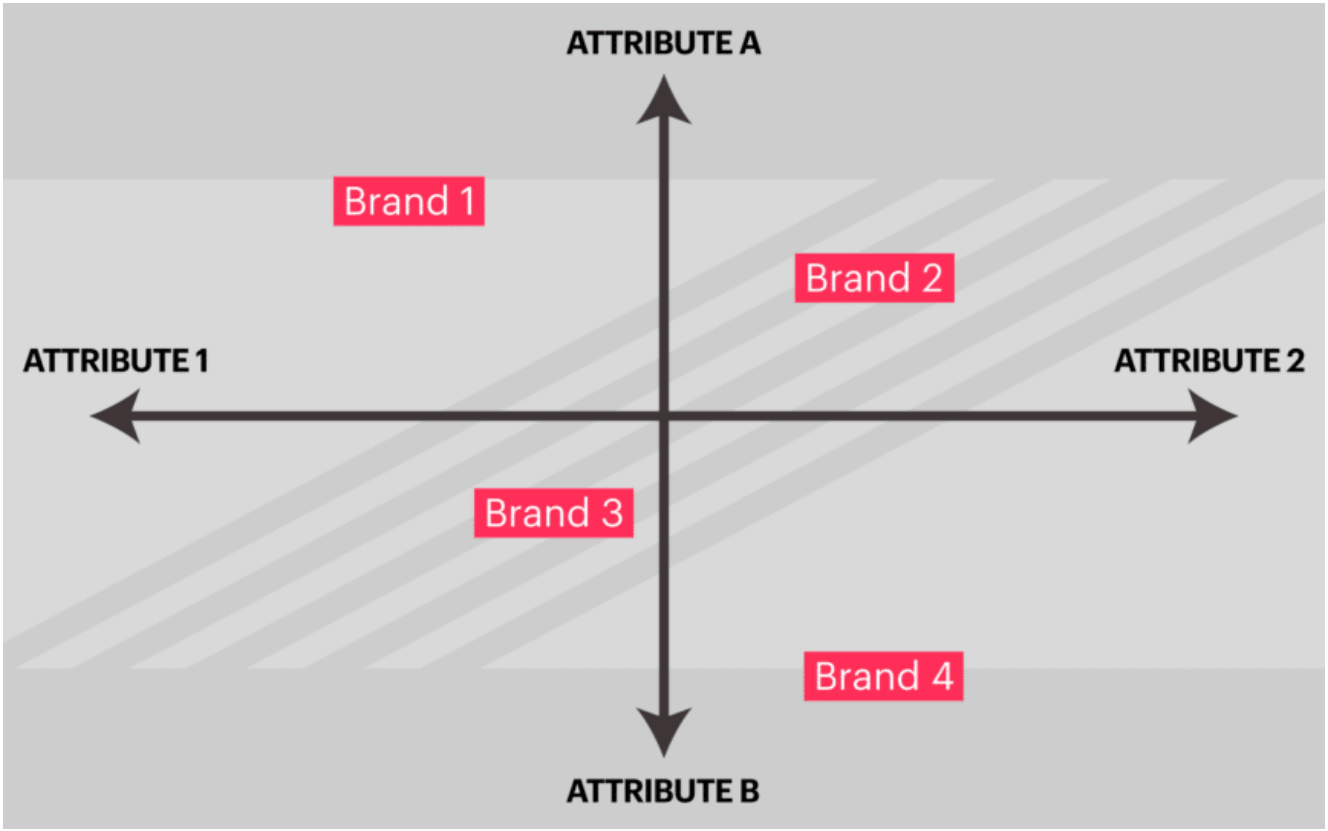
However, brand mapping can be a little trickier than it seems. Not only do you need a clear understanding of your current position in the market (and what potential customers think about you), but you need to objectively review your competitor's strengths and weaknesses too.

Step 1: Draw your brand positioning map template

Let's start with the simplest part of this whole process – drawing your positioning map.

There are different ways you can "create" a positioning map, but I'd recommend keeping things simple. Use a pen and a piece of paper, or a simple online template. You can find some great options here.

You can't really go wrong with this stage. Ultimately, you should end up with a "box" with four quadrants, separated by a horizontal and vertical line.



Step 2: Choose your attributes for brand mapping

Once you've got your two lines (your X and Y axis) you need to decide what they're going to represent. Here's where things start to get a little tricky.

To gain valuable insights from your brand or marketing positioning map, you need to focus on attributes that matter to your customers. This means doing some research, to find out what influences your customer's purchasing decisions, and brand loyalty.

A lot of companies start of by focusing on "price", and "product features", as their two attributes. This could be a good option if you're competing for market share based on affordable pricing, or you're trying to determine how you can maintain a competitive edge while charging higher prices.

However, depending on your target audience and industry, a lower price might not matter much to your customers. Your

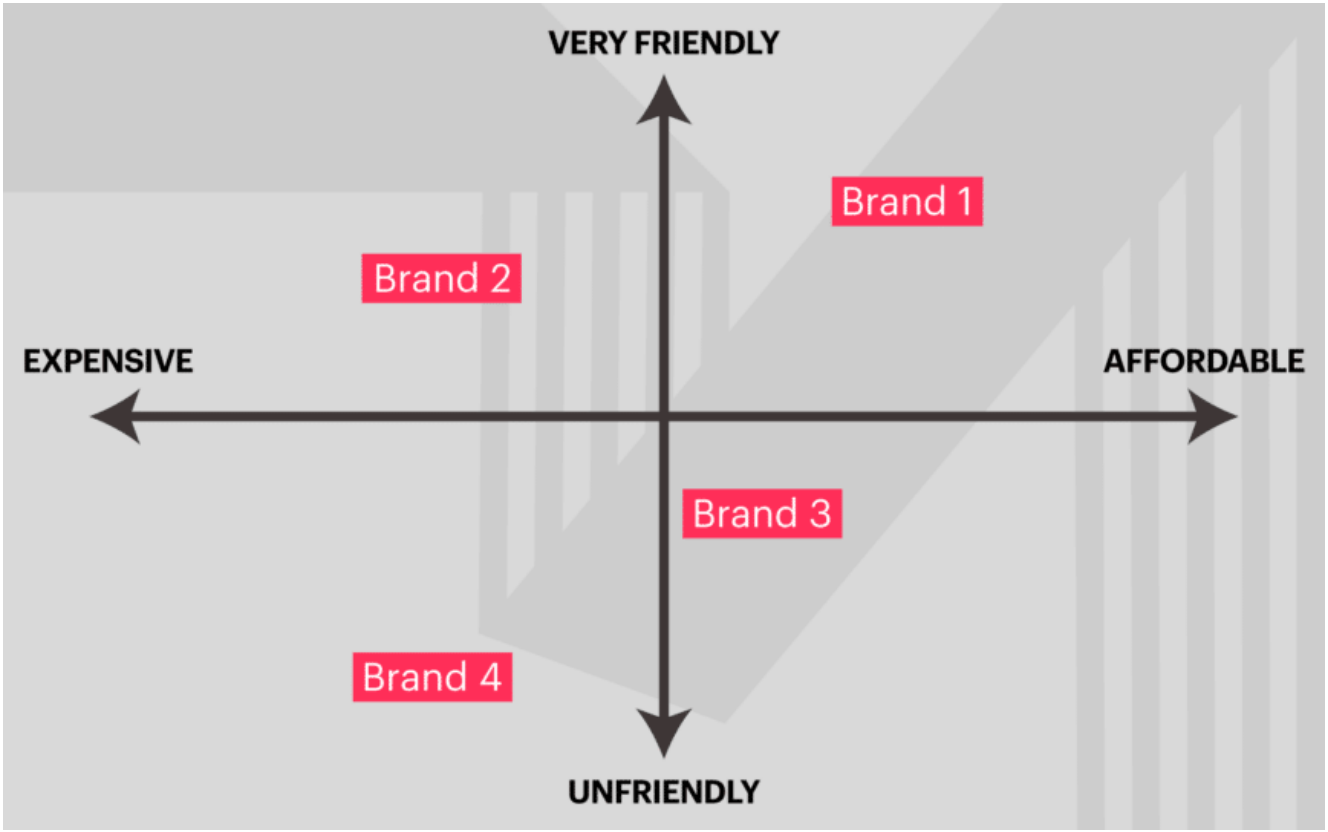
consumers might be more affected by things like “user friendliness”, or “convenience”.

Customers shopping for luxury cars probably won’t compare brands based on pricing. Instead, they’ll be looking for things like customization options, customer service, and specific product features.

If you’re not sure what influences the minds of consumers when they’re evaluating solutions in your niche, conducting focus groups and sending out surveys can help. Ask your target customers what matters most to them when they buy a product like yours and start there.

Add your chosen attributes to your map in a “high” to “low” scale format.

For instance, if your attributes are “user friendliness”, and “price”, your map might look like this:



Step 3: Choose competitors to add to your map

Now you have your brand positioning map template, and your two focus attributes, it’s time to add your company, and your competitors into the mix.

It’s sometimes easier to add your main competitors to the map first, as you can use what you know about them as a “yard stick” when evaluating your own brand.

Companies in particularly competitive markets (like technology or fashion), are likely to have a lot of names they can add to this map. Since you don’t want your map to end up too cluttered, I’d recommend sticking with about 10-15 of your most significant competitors.

Focus on the companies that target the same market segment and have a very similar product. If you’re mapping the position of your new local coffee shop, focus on other local brands, or companies that specifically sell coffee from a café setting.

Adding other competitors’ brands that sell pre-packaged coffee, or global companies to the mix will probably just make the experience more confusing.



Step 4: Choose the position of each company on your list

Once you have your list of competitors, you'll need to figure out where they're going to sit on your map. This is one of the trickiest parts of brand mapping. It's easy to downplay the relative strengths of your competitors in comparison to your own brand.

However, the purpose of your positioning map isn't just to make you feel good about how "great" your company is. It should provide an objective view of your genuine position in the industry.

Conducting research into your target market and their purchasing preferences, using social listening tools, and collecting feedback can help you make more objective decisions.

You could also ask an impartial third-party, like a brand strategist, to help with the positioning of competitor brands.

When you’re placing each brand on your map, you don’t have to be too artistic.

You can just add the brand name of the competing company to the chart, or you could use shapes in different sizes to convey the “strength” of each company.



Step 5: Add your brand, and look for positioning gaps

When all the competing companies you’ve selected are added to your two-attribute matrix, add your own brand. Again, remember to be objective and realistic when determining your brand’s market position. Once your map is “full”, you’ll have a clear view of where you sit in the market.

You can use that graphical representation to help you plan your next marketing campaign or branding strategy. Alternatively, if you want to expand your reach with a new product, you could start looking for “positioning gaps”, you might be able to fill.

For example, if your map looks at your position in the market in relation to the attributes of “quality”, and “pricing”, you might discover there are gaps in the market for:

- Companies that offer mid-level quality, for a much lower price.
- Brands that offer high quality for a mid-tier price.
- Organizations offering low-price products with high quality.



Step 6: Repeat with different attributes

After you’ve completed one brand positioning map, you might decide to create a few more, to look for other market gaps, or other factors you can add to your unique value proposition.

Your initial map might not give you a clear view of how you can differentiate yourself from the competition. A computer company that uses the two-attribute matrix of “price” and “quality” for their positioning map may find that both their

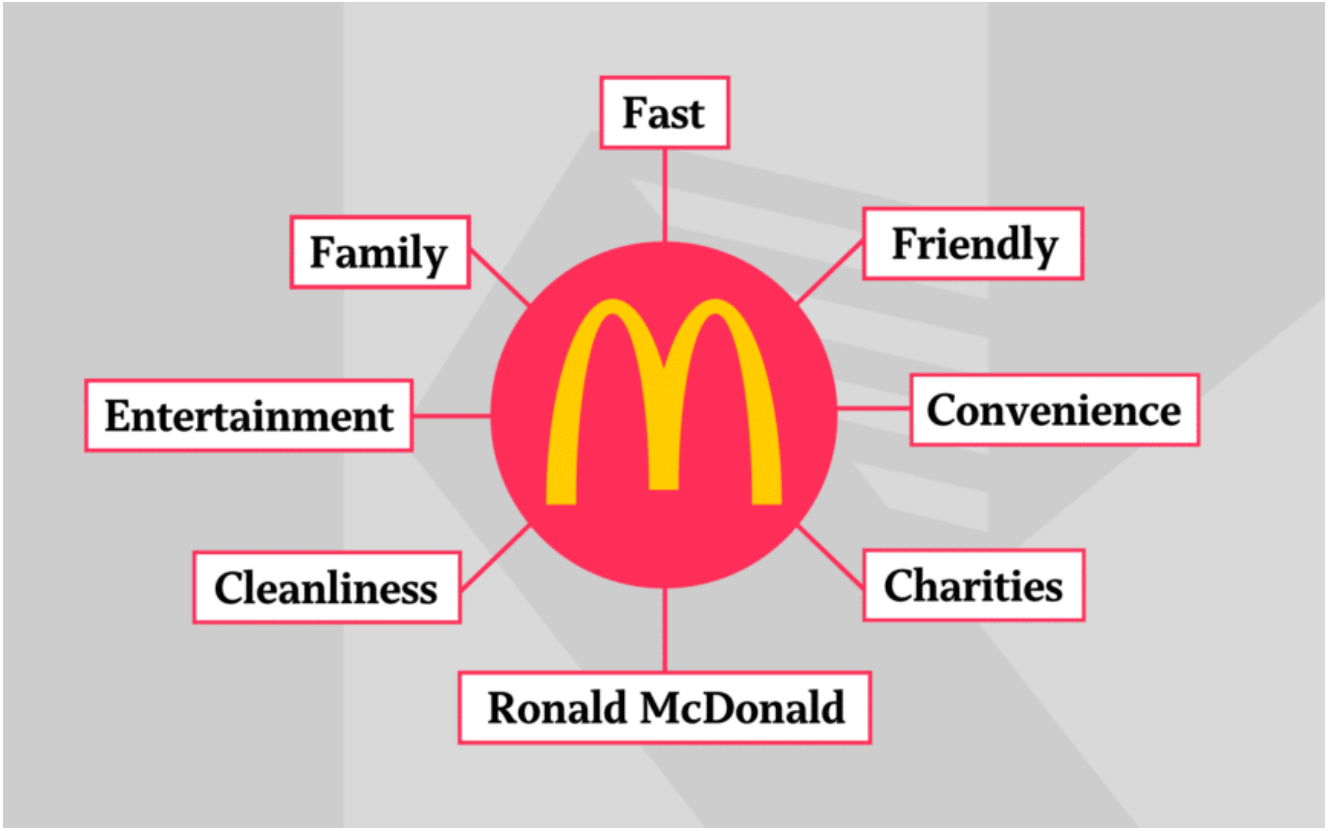
prices and quality are great.

However, if they're very similar to what's offered by other brands, that company would need to look at other ways to differentiate their products' position in the market.

For instance, you might compare yourself to other competitors based on:

- The unique benefits of your product (such as ease of use or accessibility).
- Your approach to customer experience and customer support.
- The speed with which you innovate and create new products.

Sometimes, brand mapping can be a case of trial and error, where you repeat the process until you can find an effective way to differentiate your brand, or a profitable niche to target.



Step 7: Use your analysis to create a brand positioning statement

When you're finally done creating all of your maps, and you know exactly where your company stands out, craft a brand positioning statement. This is a simple, straightforward statement that identifies your target audience, your brand's offering, and what makes you different.

Highlight how you address customer needs, and what gives you a competitive advantage (based on what you've learned).

As an example, the brand positioning statement for our client Network Homes might look something like this:

"Network homes is a friendly, supportive, and innovative company that delivers affordable housing to people throughout the UK. We make finding affordable rent easy and work hard to ensure every person can access comfortable, secure housing."

Step 8: Create a strapline, slogan, or tagline

Your positioning statement will be a valuable strategic planning tool that can help guide your marketing efforts, and your brand growth. However, you can also use it to create additional assets to boost brand awareness and recognition.

Based on your positioning statement, you can create a strapline, tagline, or slogan that essentially condenses your positioning statement into a memorable message for your audience.

You don't have to include this message in all your marketing materials, but it can be a good way to influence purchase decisions and tell customers a little more about your company.

When we worked with Abri on their branding strategy, we

devised a specific personality, positioning statement, and identity for the group, which led to the creation of the messaging concept “Let’s talk over a cuppa.”

This simple slogan might not sound like much at first, but it’s a great way to highlight the company’s position as a friendly, supportive partner for its community.

Step 9: Review and optimize over time

A brand positioning map doesn’t need to be something you create once and simply forget about. In fact, I recommend returning to your positioning chart every so often for a review.

Over time, new competitors can enter the market, and many may attempt to capture the attention of your target audience with similar value propositions to yours. Additionally, as your business evolves, the perceptions customers have of your company might change.

Depending on your product development and marketing strategies, customers might start to see you less as a “luxury” company selling high-price products, and more as an innovator on the cutting edge of your industry.

Pay attention to how consumer perceptions change over time, and adjust your positioning strategy where necessary, to ensure you can maintain your competitive edge.

Master brand mapping with the right positioning chart

A brand positioning map can be a handy tool for many companies. It gives you a comprehensive view of where you stand in your market, and how you can differentiate yourself from the competition.

Plus, a good positioning chart can give you insights into new markets you can potentially branch into as your business grows. However, while creating a positioning map seems simple, it can be difficult to implement and use these tools effectively.

If you need help defining your company's position in a specific market, finding ways to differentiate your brand, or shaping consumer perceptions, it can help to speak to the experts.

Contact Fabrik to see how we can help you design effective positioning maps, identify your unique value proposition, and increase the ROI of your marketing campaigns.

Fabrik: A branding agency for our times.