

MARKETING AND BRAND

Modern Positioning and Permission

Trout & Ries · Godin · Miller

PAPER 03 / 03

A Furtherance reference compendium on the intellectual traditions behind organisational design, leadership, execution, and culture.

IN THIS PAPER

The series closes with the ideas that shape how a brand occupies a customer's mind and earns their attention. It covers positioning, permission and message clarity. The question it answers: in a crowded, attention-scarce market, how does a brand get into – and stay in – the customer's head?

Trout and Ries established that the battle is fought in the mind; Godin showed attention must be earned, not interrupted, and rewarded with remarkability; Miller made the message clear by casting the customer as hero and the brand as guide.

Trout & Ries Positioning, 1981

Positioning · the battle for the mind

CORE THESIS

Positioning happens in the **mind of the prospect**, not in the product. A brand wins by **owning a word or position** in that mind – ideally by being **first**, or by creating a new category it can be first in. Focus beats line extension.

FRAMEWORK

Law / idea	Meaning
Positioning	Own a distinct place in the customer's mind
Be first	The first into a category is hard to dislodge
Create a category	If you can't be first, invent one you can lead
The line-extension trap	Stretching a brand blurs the position

METHODOLOGY

Practitioner doctrine drawn from advertising and brand strategy.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

Foundational to the very idea of positioning. The critique: it is aphoristic and pre-digital, and its emphasis on differentiation sits in tension with Sharp's distinctiveness evidence in the previous paper.

Seth Godin Permission Marketing, 1999 · Purple Cow, 2003

Permission · remarkability · tribes

CORE THESIS

Interruption marketing is fading; attention must be **earned**. Win **permission** to send anticipated, personal, relevant messages; be **remarkable** – a “purple cow” – so people spread the word; and serve the **smallest viable audience** rather than chasing everyone.

FRAMEWORK

Idea	Meaning
Permission marketing	Earn the right to an ongoing conversation
The purple cow	Be remarkable, or be invisible
Smallest viable audience	Delight a specific few; they spread it
Tribes	People unite around a shared idea and leader

METHODOLOGY

Practitioner essays that anticipated the shift to earned attention and word of mouth.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

Prescient about the move from interruption to permission and remarkability. The critique: the work is aphoristic and light on measurement.

Donald Miller *Building a StoryBrand, 2017*

Message clarity · the SB7 framework

CORE THESIS

Make the message **clear**: the customer is the **hero**, and the brand is the **guide** who offers a plan to solve their problem. Using a simple story structure, a brand helps customers instantly see how it helps – because if you confuse, you lose.

FRAMEWORK

SB7 story element	Role
A character (the hero)	The customer, with a want
...has a problem	External, internal and philosophical
...meets a guide	The brand, with empathy and authority
...who gives a plan and a call to action	A clear path to buy and to win

METHODOLOGY

A practitioner framework built for small and mid-sized businesses.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

A highly practical tool for clarifying a marketing message. The critique: applied mechanically it can feel formulaic, producing templated sameness across brands.

Synthesis

Contribution	Focus	Key idea	Register
Trout & Ries	The mind	Own a position; be first	Doctrine
Godin	Attention	Permission; remarkability	Essayistic
Miller	The message	Customer as hero; SB7	Practical framework

FOR THE OPERATOR

Modern positioning and permission move marketing from the product to the mind and the relationship – owning a position in the customer's mind (Trout & Ries), earning permission and being remarkable (Godin), and clarifying the message by casting the customer as hero (Miller). For the operator: win the position in the customer's mind, earn attention rather than interrupt for it, and make your message so clear the customer instantly sees how you help. That closes the Marketing and Brand series.