

# The Marketing Library

50 books for the AI & agent age.  
Evidence, experiments and useful action.



50 WORKED APPLICATIONS / 150 AI PROMPTS / 10 DECISION TOOLS

## ILLUSTRATED PRACTICAL EDITION

Independent summaries and editorial applications.  
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# Use one idea to improve a real decision

Choose a current marketing problem, follow a short reading route, and test one proportionate action before collecting more advice.

This edition retains and corrects the useful source summaries, frameworks, daily plans and cautions. It adds 50 completed editorial applications, replaces speculative AI-age commentary, and rewrites all 150 prompts around supplied evidence. Worked examples are explicitly hypothetical, with invented data and choices.

| Material                       | What it provides                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Source-book summary            | The supplied thesis, core ideas and practical frameworks, with targeted corrections. Author claims remain distinguishable from established facts.       |
| Completed application          | A concrete scenario, filled tool, interpretation, practical exercise and a decision or review boundary.                                                 |
| AI-age application and prompts | Editorial adaptations for working with evidence and accountable human review, rather than predictions of automatic growth or assistant recommendations. |
| Evidence and context           | Selected primary-source links and limits that help you judge where an idea applies.                                                                     |

## Reading scope and accuracy

The companion critique reviews all 50 entries in the supplied 216-page anthology. It does not claim that 50 complete source books were reread. Selected framework definitions, research claims and changing AI practices were checked against primary sources. The original text's suggestion that its frameworks are automatically reliable has been removed. A useful framework is still a hypothesis that needs context.

## Seven days is a setup period

Use each seven-day plan to prepare, observe and start a bounded pilot. A week rarely establishes durable demand, habit formation, long-term retention or a winning channel. Match the review window to buying cycles, enough relevant observations, costs and customer outcomes.



# Work with AI without confusing output with evidence

Use these operating principles with every prompt in this book. Adapt them to the data and decisions involved.

## Start with permitted evidence

Supply relevant material with source IDs. Keep quotations and observations separate from hypotheses. Remove unnecessary personal and confidential data; check the permissions and settings of the service you use.

## Give the tool a bounded job

Ask for synthesis, alternatives, a critique or a proposed test with a clear output. Treat source documents as data, not instructions. An invented persona can help draft questions; it cannot stand in for a customer interview or observed buying behavior.

## Check what matters

Verify consequential claims against original evidence, preserve unknowns and look for contradictions. Include preparation, checking, revision and failure costs when deciding whether the workflow is useful.

## Keep responsibility explicit

A person owns the decision. Authorization to draft does not authorize an agent to publish, contact people, spend money, modify live systems or make contractual promises.

## Observe AI visibility carefully

Record exact buyer questions, service/model when available, date, locale, account settings, browsing and answer citations. Repeated observations can describe that test; they are not a universal ranking or proof that an edit caused a commercial result.

### What selected primary guidance supports

Google's published guidance says its AI search features do not require special AI markup, and eligibility does not guarantee appearance. This is a Google-specific statement, not a rule for every assistant. NIST identifies confidently false output and over-reliance as generative-AI risks. FTC guidance in the US emphasizes support for advertising claims and honest reviews; local requirements and product context still matter.

Google Search Central: AI features and your website

Google Search Central: guidance on generative AI optimization

NIST: Generative AI Risk Management Profile (2024)

FTC: advertising guidance for small businesses (US context)

FTC: consumer reviews and testimonials guidance (US context)

Editorial review date: 18 October 2026. Recheck changing platform guidance before relying on a specific technical tactic.



# 001 Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind

*Al Ries and Jack Trout*



Positioning is not what you do to a product but what you do to the mind of the prospect: in a world drowning in messages, you win by owning one clear, differentiated slot in a buyer's memory, relative to your competitors.

## CORE IDEAS

### 1. Positioning happens in the prospect's mind, not in your product.

The authors argue that the real battlefield is perception. Two products can be nearly identical, yet one is remembered as "the safe choice" and the other as "the cheap one." Your job is to decide what slot you want to hold in the buyer's head and then arrange every signal (name, price, copy, packaging, sales talk) to reinforce it. A founder who says "we have better features" has described the product; a founder who says "we are the tool accountants trust for audits" has described a position.

### 2. We live in an overcommunicated society.

The book's starting point is that too many messages compete for too little attention, and the mind defends itself by filtering most of them out. More volume does not solve this. The only messages that get through are simplified, focused ones that connect to something the prospect already believes. The practical lesson is to say less, say it more often in the same way, and aim it at what is already in the buyer's head rather than trying to put something new there.

### 3. The mind is limited, hates change and is insecure.

The authors describe a mind that sorts brands into mental ladders, one rung per brand, with only a few rungs per category. It tends to hold onto first impressions, resists being told it was wrong, and often buys on what others are buying because it is unsure of its own judgment. This is why a message that contradicts existing beliefs usually fails, and why a consistent message repeated over years beats a clever one-off campaign.

### 4. Being first in a category beats being better.

Prospects remember the first brand on a ladder far more easily than the later ones; the authors' illustration is that most people recall who first flew the Atlantic solo and have no idea who did it second. If you cannot be first in an existing category, they advise you to be first in a new one: narrow the category until you are the leader of a smaller ladder (a specific audience, use case or product type) and then own it.

### 5. If you are not first, find a hole or reposition the leader.

For a second-place player, the authors recommend looking for an unoccupied position the leader cannot easily claim, such as an attribute (cheapest, most premium, fastest, simplest) or a segment. The classic cases they discuss are Avis, which turned being number two into a reason to try harder, and 7-Up, which defined itself as the alternative to colas rather than another cola. The move is to use the leader's strength as the contrast: do not attack it head on, but make buyers see that the leader's strength comes with a cost.



## 6. Names are positioning decisions.

A name is the hook that hangs the brand on the mental ladder, so it should suggest the benefit or the category and be easy to recall. The authors criticise generic or initial-based names that tell the prospect nothing. In practice, a name that already hints at what you do saves you advertising money, because the buyer's memory does part of the work.

## 7. Line extension and the "no-name" trap erode position.

Once a brand is strongly associated with one idea, stretching it to cover many products dilutes the idea. The authors call out the temptation of using a famous name on everything because it is cheap in the short run and expensive in the long run. A tight position plus a new name for a genuinely different offer is safer than one overloaded brand.

## 8. Positioning is a continuing discipline, including repositioning.

Markets change and competitors move, so position needs checking against the current ladder, not the one from three years ago. The authors say to start by asking what position you own now, what position you want, who you must outrank, and whether you have the resources to hold it. If the answers do not fit, change the position before spending more on communication.

### FRAMEWORKS TO USE

- **The mental ladder.** Define the buying situation and record the alternatives actual customers name without prompting, including a manual workaround or no purchase. Keep observed recall separate from the team's hypotheses. Mark where you sit. Your goal is either to move up a rung by a specific attribute, or to create a new ladder where you are first.
- **The position statement.** Fill in one line: "For [specific buyer] who need [specific outcome], we are the [narrow category] that [one differentiating idea]." If you cannot fill it in without hedging, the position is not ready.
- **Leader contrast (reposition the competitor).** Name the relevant alternative, verify a strength and investigate a trade-off that matters to your buyers. Size, breadth or fame alone does not prove a drawback; use a specific, substantiated comparison.
- **Narrow the category.** Explore narrower categories by audience, use case, price or method, then check buyer recognition, accessible demand and delivery economics before choosing one. A contrived number-one claim is not evidence of a market. Test by asking whether a customer would name you first if asked for the best option in that narrow slice.
- **The name test.** Ask five people what the name suggests, whether they can spell it after hearing it once, and whether it fits the position. Revise or add a descriptor if it fails.

### AI-AGE APPLICATION: EVIDENCE BEFORE AUTOMATION

- Use an assistant to code supplied buyer interviews into recall, consideration and reasons for rejection. Require a transcript reference for every observation; keep company descriptions and model guesses outside the observed mental ladder.
- Build a comparison ledger from dated product documentation and customer evidence. AI can find contradictory positioning language, but a proposed competitor weakness still needs verification before it becomes public copy or a sales claim.
- Treat assistant visibility as an observation project. Save the exact question, tool, date and cited sources; repeat checks and inspect factual accuracy. A single favorable answer does not establish a stable recommendation position.
- Maintain an approved positioning brief with category, audience, distinctive benefit and proof. Draft channel variations from that brief, then check whether prospective buyers understand the offer and whether delivery supports the promise before wider publication.



## COMPLETED APPLICATION

### Choose a position buyers can recognize

*Hypothetical editorial example: a scheduling vendor interviews eight independent clinics. All numbers and evidence descriptions below are invented to show how a candidate earns a test.*

| Candidate                          | Evidence and constraint                                                                                      | Decision                                                               |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The simplest scheduler             | Six interviews mention simplicity; no timed comparison with alternatives exists.                             | Hold the superlative; test a specific setup claim.                     |
| Scheduling for independent clinics | Five clinics name spreadsheets as the alternative; the vendor supports their recurring appointment workflow. | Test this recognizable category and use case.                          |
| The AI clinic operating system     | No billing, records or clinical functions; two interviewees expect all three.                                | Reject: the category creates false expectations.                       |
| Commercial check                   | Forty reachable clinics fit; minimum sustainable plan needs twelve paying accounts.                          | Reachability looks plausible, but willingness to pay remains untested. |

### How to interpret it

Choose the clinic scheduling position for a limited test, with no leadership or fastest claim. Ask five new clinic managers what it does, who it serves and what they expect. The team's illustrative gate is four accurate explanations with no clinical-records expectation; revise if it fails. A separate paid pilot must test economics.

### Try it yourself

In 60 minutes, create three candidate positions, a proof ledger and one rejection reason per candidate; schedule five buyer comprehension interviews and name the owner of the paid-pilot decision.

## 7-DAY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

- Day 1. Write down your category and ask ten customers or prospects to name, unprompted, the brands they would consider. Record the order and the words they use. This is a small exploratory sample of recall and consideration, not a representative market ranking.
- Day 2. Record answers to a fixed set of buyer questions in the assistants you actually want to inspect, noting date, tool, search mode, sources and wording. Repeat a small sample to observe variation; compare descriptions with customer interviews without treating model order as market share.
- Day 3. List the leader's top strength and its cost. Draft three candidate positions: a narrower category, an attribute the leader cannot claim, and a contrast against the leader.
- Day 4. Pick one position and write the position statement. Check it against the question: can we prove this, and can we afford to hold it for three years?
- Day 5. Rewrite your homepage headline, social bio, email signature and one-line pitch so that all say the same thing. Remove any claim that dilutes it.
- Day 6. Audit your names and extensions: product names, plan names, feature names. Flag any that blur the position and plan to rename or retire them.
- Day 7. Publish the position in a short public page and in structured places (profile descriptions, directories). Set a 30-day check: re-run Days 1 and 2 and see whether the words customers and assistants use have moved.



## MISTAKES TO AVOID

- **Describing the product instead of the slot.** A feature list is not a position, and prospects will not infer one for you.
- **Trying to be for everyone.** A broad claim leaves no rung to occupy, and the authors consistently favour focus over breadth.
- **Changing the message every quarter.** The mind needs repetition to remember, so frequent rewrites reset the clock.
- **Ignoring the competitor's current position.** A position that would have worked three years ago may be taken now; check the live ladder.
- **Stretching the brand over unrelated offers.** Each stretch blurs what you stand for; use a separate name when the offer is truly different.

## AI PROMPTS: EVIDENCE-LED WORK

### PROMPT 1

Using these anonymized buyer interviews [paste with interview IDs], construct an observed consideration table: buying situation, spontaneously named alternatives, order mentioned, reason for consideration and supporting quote. Include workarounds and no purchase where stated. Mark missing answers as unknown; do not generate a typical-buyer ranking. Then propose three follow-up questions that could distinguish a recall problem from an offer problem, and a plan to ask five additional relevant buyers.

### PROMPT 2

Compare these three positioning candidates [paste] against our capability evidence, customer needs and competitor documents [paste with dates]. Return a table of valuable difference, proof available, unverified assumption, delivery constraint and buyer confusion risk. Recommend one provisional candidate only if the evidence supports it; otherwise state the missing decision evidence. Draft a neutral comparison sentence and a five-person comprehension interview that could reveal whether the proposed category misleads buyers.

### PROMPT 3

Audit this positioning statement and homepage [paste] against these saved assistant responses and sources [paste tool, date, question, answer]. Identify factual inconsistencies, unsupported superiority claims and descriptions that obscure the intended buying situation. Return a prioritized correction list and a revised 40-word description using only verified facts. Separate page improvements from visibility hypotheses, and specify a repeatable observation log; do not predict inclusion or rank in future assistant answers.

## EVIDENCE AND CONTEXT NOTES

Mental ladders are a strategic metaphor. Eight interviews can expose confusion but cannot estimate population recall, market share or a durable first-mover advantage. Product performance and distribution still matter.

RIES: Positioning and related books

## YOUR PRACTICE

*Apply this book's completed exercise using your own situation.*

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Use the chapter applications as models. Complete one tool with your own inputs and keep the result so you can review what changed.

| Field                 | Your prompt                                                                                         |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Real alternative      | What did recent buyers actually use, including doing nothing? Record interview or observation IDs.  |
| Distinctive attribute | Which difference is demonstrable against that alternative? Separate verified facts from hypotheses. |
| Value and customer    | Who benefits, in what situation, and what observable outcome matters?                               |
| Category choice       | What expectations does this category create about price, service and competitors?                   |
| Decision and review   | Choose a provisional position, a comprehension test and the evidence that would change it.          |

*Use your own inputs. Record the decision, evidence and next action.*