

How to Write Your Positioning Statement

Once you know how your firm differs from your competitors (see *How to Select Your Differentiators*), you're ready to draft a positioning statement.

What is a positioning statement?

A positioning statement is a succinct, carefully articulated expression of your brand. It is both *honest*, describing who you are today, and *aspirational*, speaking to the firm you want to become. Now, be careful — if your positioning statement skews too far toward the aspirational, your audience may not find it believable.

Your positioning statement is designed to lay the foundation for your firm's messaging, including everything from your elevator speech to the headlines on your website and print collateral. It's not a mission or vision statement. Instead, it is a practical guide you can refer to when you need to articulate what your firm stands for.

Keep in mind that your positioning statement is an internal tool. While you may occasionally use some of the language it contains in public, it is not intended to be quoted verbatim on your website or in any other public-facing communications.

Your positioning statement should consist of four to six sentences. And it should accomplish the following goals:

- Describe both *who you are today* and *who you want to become*
- Identify what you do and (if appropriate) for whom
- Emphasize your strongest differentiator up front
- Convey your firm's chief benefits and secondary differentiators
- Do all of this in simple, engaging, non-technical language

Step 1. Begin at the Beginning

Sounds great, but how do you get started? Begin by laying down your first sentence. If you don't know where to begin, try one of these openings:

"At [Your Company Name], we..."

or

"[Your Company Name], a [description of what you do] for [your key audience, if any], is..."

Ideally, your first sentence will also contain your primary differentiator, so try building it in. Let's see how this plays out in our example:

At Newco, we help multi-location restaurant owners grow their businesses faster and more effectively.

Step 2. Build Out the Middle

The next two to four sentences should tell your firm's story — how you're different, what problems your firm solves, and why you're relevant to clients. You can't go wrong writing simple declarative sentences that start with "We" or "Our." If one point supports or contrasts with another, introduce a little variety by starting sentences with transition words such as "In fact," "However," "And," and "But." These words keep your voice conversational and flowing.

When writing the positioning statement, keep the language simple — remember, some audiences won't understand industry jargon.

Here's how these details play out in the middle section of our accounting firm example:

How? We combine the expertise and reliability of a CPA firm with real-time financial and operational reporting — all tailored to the restaurant industry. Our experience and technology give clients strategic insight beyond their finances, giving restaurant owners the tools they need to achieve higher profits and greater growth.

Step 3. Write the Concluding Sentence

Whew! Nearly done. The final sentence, however, is often the toughest to write because it needs to accomplish two things:

1. Reprise your firm's key differentiator or benefit; and
2. Provide a fitting close to the statement. Ideally, it will have an inspirational quality, almost like a tagline.

While there are many ways to begin this concluding sentence, here are two dependable approaches:

“When you [need, want, etc.]...”; or

“At [Your Company Name], we...”

Of course, you wouldn't want to use this second option if you began the first sentence the same way. However you start the sentence, follow the opening by restating the paragraph's key point. Then close with a positive, inspirational message.

Here's the concluding sentence to our example:

When you're looking to expand your operations or increase the profitability of existing locations, Newco gives chain restaurants the power to feed their bottom line.

Step 4. Evaluate Your Positioning Statement

Once you've drafted your positioning statement, read it aloud. Does it sound natural and flowing? Are all the key messages in place? Is the order right? In the end, is the positioning statement inspirational?

If you answer “no” to any of these questions, go back and rework the language until you feel good about it. If you aren't sure which differentiators to emphasize — or if you want to give your team some choice — go through the same exercise with a reprioritized set of differentiators. Sometimes it helps to give each statement a title that reflects its essential message.

Here are two valid positioning statements from the same set of differentiators:

Option One: We Feed Restaurant Growth

At Newco, we help multi-location restaurant owners grow their businesses faster and more effectively. How? We combine the expertise and reliability of a CPA firm with real-time financial and operational reporting — all tailored to the restaurant industry. Our experience and technology give clients strategic insight beyond their finances, giving restaurant owners the tools they need to achieve higher profits and greater growth. When you're looking to expand your operations or increase the profitability of existing locations, Newco gives chain restaurants the power to feed their bottom line.

Option Two: Real-Time Tools for Growing Restaurants

In today's hyper-competitive restaurant industry, owners need real-time insight to react to a fast-changing marketplace. That's why Newco offers more than accounting and strategic services: we give owners data-driven tools to build more nimble and efficient businesses. From state-of-the-art financial and operational reporting software to the expert accounting and consulting of a CPA firm, Newco puts control back in owners' hands — so you can outmaneuver the competition and take your restaurant further, faster.

Step 5. Present the Positioning Statement

When presenting your positioning statement(s) to your team for the first time, read it aloud first without showing the words. When people hear the statement, they are better able to imagine what it would be like for a client or prospect to receive a similar message.

Next, reveal the statement(s) and walk through it line by line. Remind people that adding more detail and length is not going to make the statement more powerful.

A positioning statement is your brand stripped down to its essentials. If you got the differentiators right at the beginning, this should be more an exercise in word choice and prioritizing than re-engineering.

If you are considering two positioning statement options, steer the team to select one approach. Sometimes you will find the team wants to combine elements of each. This is fine as long as the final statement is no longer than six sentences (and fewer is usually better) and the “story” still makes sense.