



It's All About  
**Them**

Marketing  
to the  
Digitally  
Empowered  
Buyer

Rebel Brown

# Welcome to the World of Empowered Buyers

Thanks to the digital age, today's buyers can research, select and purchase their products without getting you involved in the decision. You won't even know they're buying. Everything has shifted. Your choices? Shift, too—or get left in the past.

We all know that people buy because of their perceptions. Today's perceptions are created through the Internet and word of mouth. You no longer have tight control over the way your market sees your business, the information that is available about you or the buzz about your brand.

## **Marketing, the way we've always done it, doesn't work anymore.**

Yesterday's marketing was all about pushing tons of Me, Me, Me chest-thumping claims at our audiences. We pushed out emails and flyers and newsletters and more. We sent direct mail and used telemarketing—all focused on telling the world how great we were and spouting product propaganda like there was no tomorrow.

Guess what? The way we've always done it doesn't work anymore, if it ever did.

In today's world you have less than five seconds to get your audience's attention, and the only way to do that is to focus on them. If you don't get them in five seconds, they are gone. Off to another article, webinar, video, website—off to a competitor who grabbed their interest.

There is good news. With the right positioning stories and interactive communication models, you can and will attract prospects and customers to your door and keep them coming back. You can build strong customer relationships, if you remember one thing.

It's *all* about them.

# It's *All* About Your Buyers

Today's buyers do not listen to Me, Me, Me marketing when making decisions about purchases. Buyers want credible evidence. The challenge? Buyers no longer view vendors as the best source for credible facts. We blew that opportunity with too much chest thumping over the years. Even if you are sharing your truth, buyers may not believe you, thanks to overdone hype and under-delivered results. Buyers go straight to the market—your buyers, prospects, partners and their friends—to gather information today.

## **When was the last time you trusted vendors to guide a personal buying decision?**

Do you believe what the manufacturer says about that refrigerator, that car, that hot new sound system you want to buy? Or do you go ask your friends about their likes and dislikes, their experiences? Maybe you read what Consumer Reports says. If you're like me, you don't drink the vendor's marketing Kool-Aid when deciding on your new refrigerator. You don't have to anymore, thanks to the Internet. You're empowered.

*Why would you expect your own customers to be any different?* Just because you're now operating from the vendor side doesn't mean your customers behave any differently than you do, whether you're in a B2B or a B2C environment.

**The perception of your audience has never been more important.**

Marketers must focus on creating relationships based on customers' interests to get and retain positive buyer attention. Forget your own opinions—they don't matter, unless you're buying your product. Get to know your audiences. Learn what they need, what they care about, what they think about their business, markets and challenges.

Then, share stories of your qualitative value—the intangibles that matter to them. Focus your stories on other customers' successes, other people's perceptions. Speak to your audiences about how you've helped others just like them, show them you understand their needs, you care, you've been here before. Treat them as individual friends, not the masses.

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# Creating Compelling Stories

**Compelling marketing is about telling a story that matters to your customers.**

Creating positioning stories is one of the most important things you'll do in your business. After all, the best product rarely wins. We all know that. In this age of digital connectedness, we must focus on stories that reflect *top of mind and real* problems for your customers.

The right stories set the stage to create relationships with your buyers. Sharing them in the right ways compels buyers to listen to and trust you, and ultimately buy your offerings.

Some key information to share, in your market's words:

- » Why your audience should trust you—based on others' experiences
- » Why your audience should partner with you—based on others' partnering experiences
- » Examples of your expertise in action—with other customers and partners
- » Proof that you understand their business—demonstrated by real world examples
- » How you've helped others who are like them—stories that map to their needs

Savvy companies create stories that compel buyers to listen and act, stories that touch each buyer in a unique way, yet create a consistent and powerful market perception.

# Your Story: Consistent and Distinct

I use a Positioning Matrix to create stories that carry a consistent message and share distinct value for each audience. Think of it as a Rubik's Cube of your marketing messages. This collection of story elements, when woven together in customer-focused ways, allows you to share your story—tuned to meet a specific buyer situation.

**Start with Pivot Points.** Compelling, concise message statements create the Pivot Points for your story. These core positioning statements must be short and to the point—less than eight words, and five words is better. Get concise about what you say, and then say it consistently. Even small variations on core themes can change your story and the perception you give your audience.

**Layer compelling evidence.** This is where you get to expand your core messages in as many and varied ways as you can prove value. Note that I said *prove*, not claim. The more evidence the better—as long as that evidence is used consistently. For each core statement, apply supporting evidence that details the story behind that specific statement. For example, if your company positioning is “The leader in whizbang widgets for the financial services enterprise,” you better darn well have evidence to prove leadership in the financial sector. External market research, third party endorsements and a history of corporate growth are some options. *Evidence is the key to a great story—and there is never enough!*

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**Apply everything in a story.** This is where positioning transforms from concept to real-world. Spin a logical story that brings your positioning statements together. Then add customer success stories that prove your claimed value—right in the middle of customer reality. Short anecdotes are often even more powerful than comprehensive case studies. Talk to your customer service advocates. They usually have the best anecdotes of all. Make sure you stay focused on the customer perspective, and don't start thumping your own chest.

The key to the matrix is to have each of these elements available for spinning as needed in everyday conversations. From that fifteen-second elevator pitch to the three-hour customer discussion, combine the appropriate elements and stay consistent in using them.

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# The Positioning Matrix

I like to focus on three Pivot Points, the key areas that allow you to create a comprehensive story about your business, its value and who you serve. The Pivot Points are:

**Your market:** The customers you serve

**Your company:** The expertise you bring

**Your solutions:** The value you offer

Create a clear and concise message for each of these three Pivot Points. It's best to have a single message for each Pivot Point. Sometimes I stretch out to three messages per Pivot Point, but they have to be relevant and easy to spin as part of a logical story progression. Use evidence to support and expand the core message as needed for specific purposes. Too many messages can lead to confusion, so stay focused. (NOTE: Questions to define each positioning message are in the Appendix of this eBook.)

I start to gather evidence in the Pivot Point areas long before I begin the positioning exercise. You learn so much when you collect evidence about a business, and often see it from a totally new perspective. That's why I go talk to customers, partners, analysts and other external folks to get their perspectives on a business. What you think really doesn't matter—it's all about them!



After I've collected all my evidence, I start to create the Pivot Points. It's important that you don't get locked into Pivotal messages before you have all the evidence in front of you. You'd be amazed at some of the gems of evidence I've found sitting on a shelf, dusty as can be and yet oh-so-critical to the future of the business. Keep digging for evidence and success, as well as potential blindsides. You have to know all those corporate legends—including the skeletons in the closet—to create a complete story.

**Use the “So what?” approach to tune positioning statements**, while also assuring that the value is customer focused. Start with your positioning statement, then put yourself in your customer's shoes and ask yourself “So what?” You'll know when you strike value.

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# Spin Doctor Time: Spinning the Threads

**Evidence is the color, sparkle and just plain tangibility that makes your story come to life.**

The key to being a great spin doctor, to weaving compelling stories, is to share stories that are relevant to your specific audience, at any point in time. The Positioning Matrix empowers you to tell consistent stories by leveraging the Pivot Points of market, company and solution as the fundamental "lead in" for your story with any audience. Consistency is key to great marketing. But so is providing evidence that resonates with your specific audience. Here's how the Positioning Matrix helps you accomplish that, too.

Think of each of the Pivot Points of the Positioning Matrix as having a set of evidence threads beneath it—customer stories, market facts, market surveys. For each unique customer situation, you select a Pivot Point to begin your conversation and then use evidence threads related to their specific situation to weave together a story that is compelling to your buyer. The result? You'll tell a consistent story across all buyers, even as your audience hears just what they need to hear to see themselves in your stories—and to see you as the company that can help them succeed.

The result? Every story is dynamic and tuned to attract the specific audience you're addressing with powerful, resonant evidence—just for them. For example,

**Let's say you are speaking to a current customer.** They know a lot about you and understand your current solutions. So what's your best opening Pivot Point? Probably your vision of their market, re-affirming your expertise and position as a partner they can trust. Follow that with education about new approaches, your upcoming solutions, why you have done what you've done and the value you're focused on providing for them.

**What about a brand new prospect?** If they are positively inclined toward you, lead with your experience and vision to establish yourself as an expert they can trust. If they have a negative perception, start with your company Pivot Point and provide evidence to address that negative perception, subtly but firmly. Then move into specific stories that apply directly to that prospect's need, today. Let them see how you've helped others like them.

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# Sharing Your Story

Once you have a “So what?” tested story that resonates with your audience (and you’ve tested that in a variety of ways), it’s time to communicate.

Now comes the most important part.

You can have the best story out there, but if you don’t share it in a compelling way you will not win the minds and trust of your buyers. Here are a few tips I share with clients:

**Listen first.** We’re here to listen to our audiences, understand their needs and then share with them how others have solved their same or similar problems with our help. We’re not here to shout our praises to anyone who might be listening. Social media is a gift to marketers—when we learn to use it as a listening and interactive conversation tool instead of a megaphone.

**Think relationship not megaphones.** It’s time we shift the way we think about marketing communications—from pushing our praises into the world to creating relationships based on customer’s specific situations and needs. Instead of blasting your story with that megaphone hoping the right people will hear it, tune and tailor that story to the profiles and needs of your audience segments. Then share it in a personal and interactive way with them.

**Your story *is* your marketing.** Stories are not about a specific campaign or marketing arrow. Your story must permeate every marketing communication or action you take, consistently. Don’t create a story for a campaign, communicate it and move on. That’s not going to get you any traction. Stories create the flesh on the bones of your marketing direction. You wouldn’t chop off a leg and move on, so don’t do that with stories either.

Today’s connected world gives marketers the best opportunity ever to create lasting relationships with their customers. But only if we shift our approaches and patterns, ceasing the bombardment of the past and focusing on quality, targeted, customer-centric conversations.

# New Ways for a New World

Social Media, digital marketing, websites, videos, and integrated content—they all give us the tools we need to create powerful relationships through marketing stories. But before we jump into using these communication mechanisms, let's discuss a few new premises in today's digital marketing world. You can't use "the way we've always done it" in the new world and be successful.

Here are a few key tips to gain credibility and retain your audiences:

**Tell the truth.** Making false promises, creating fake success stories and all the other bogus claims won't get your business ahead. It will sink your opportunities. Today's audiences are too smart and too well informed to fall for that fake crap. Stop it. Tell the truth. If you don't have the value to tell the truth, then go back to the drawing board and find it.

**Cut the hype.** People are just plain overloaded with hype and SPAM. It's the bane of social media and the backlash is becoming significant for those who continue to play that same old game. Hype marketing has gone the way of the Dodo bird. You push your audiences away with big flashy claims. That's especially true with interactive social media as well as your blogs and e-communications. Inform and advise. Leave the hype to that oft-lambasted used car salesman.

**Show yourself, warts and all.** We are programmed to think we have to show perfection for our products, services, leaders and our company. That couldn't be farther from the truth. We all know that none of us are perfect—our businesses aren't perfect and neither are our products and services. So many business disasters could be avoided—after the incident happens—if we simply told the truth about our flaws. Open the kimono and be real. That's whom your audiences want to know—the real people and culture behind the company image. People trust the company that is 100 percent open, above board, honest and, well, slightly imperfect.

Customers want to trust you before they buy from you. So be the real people they can trust.

# Some Do's and Don'ts of Social Media

All social media platforms are powerful interactive communication tools, but we have to use them in the correct ways. Here are some Do's and Don'ts based on a recent experience of my own.

**The Don'ts.** I checked my *full* Twitter feed one day (not my filtered stream, the full feed) and was shocked. At least three quarters of the tweets were blatant self-promotions around products or services or just plain silly things. By the way, if you scroll down a Facebook home feed you'll see the same. LinkedIn might be a bit more sophisticated in the phrasing, but it's still the same Me, Me, Me focus. Nothing about the audience, nothing about a benefit to be found. Here's a clue folks—nobody cares. Full on self-promotion may make you feel better, but it isn't going to woo your audience. It's noise pollution at its best. Stop It!

**The Do's:** After I looked at the full feeds, I went to my own lists (Twitter) and to the folks' pages whom I know are using social media in a conversational, relationship-building way. Talk about a difference! Not a self-promoting word to be found. They were sharing their own thoughts and those of others, having conversations with naysayers and supporters alike, providing blog posts about relevant topics. Every interaction was focused on helping their audiences solve their problems—not on themselves.

Customers want to trust you before they buy from you. So be the real people they can trust.

My point? Social media empowers your business to be personal. So get personal with your audience. Focus on helping your audience solve their problems, and be yourself while you're at it. That's powerful.

### **What about blogs and websites?**

Blogs and websites are a powerful marketing tool—when we use them as a mechanism to help solve customer problems, instead of pumping our products.

**The Don'ts:** Too many websites are all about us, without showing the audience why they should even care. Too many blogs are poorly disguised promotional shots. Pretty much the same Don'ts apply here as in social media tools, only on a bigger scale. Your audiences do not care what you say about yourself, so stop with the self-promotion. Chest-thumping claims about solving world hunger are not believable. You'll be branded as a blowhard and lose all credibility. Don't write a blog post that is all about you—no one cares! Websites that babble on about your value and greatness, including mile long dropdowns of options about products and services are not powerful marketing tools—they're encyclopedias for research by your competition.

**The Do's.** Websites and blogs that focus on solving customer problems, sharing interesting tips and techniques to support customer success, exploring new ways of thinking about our markets or our businesses are powerful tools.

Focus your websites on your customers, their successes and educating your audiences. Include information on yourself, but make it factual and low key. Blogs offer a superb opportunity to share the reality your customers face every day. Explore their challenges and discuss alternative solutions, bring in experts to give them fresh perspectives, share stories of how your customers have solved problems—just don't mention your name and products. Trust your customers to speak for you and remember your buyers are smart. They'll figure out you were the one behind the solution—and they'll appreciate the fact that you didn't rub it in their face.

# Tying Up the Loose Ends

I want to mention a few focus areas that are often overlooked or under-resourced.

**Test with the right audience:** Test your story with the people that matter—your customers and prospects. Forget what people inside your company think; they aren't the ones buying your solutions. You don't have to test with hoards; a few of the right folks will do. But do make sure you test with someone besides those five favorite customers.

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**Train your storytellers:** The best positioning matrix will fail if it's not used appropriately by everyone in the company. I mean everyone. Consistency is the difference between great corporate positioning and confusion. That's why training is important and, in my humble opinion, something we all do poorly. We train a team once, maybe twice, and then expect them to be savvy. Ongoing, on-the-job training is the best approach. Set up a mechanism for internal folks to ask questions or share scenarios where they were stumped; make it easy for them to share concerns and new thinking. Also, train your folks on how to communicate on social media. Teach them about conversations instead of megaphones. Monitor their posts and tune the approach as needed.



**A living, breathing thing:** So you have a final matrix and stories are flowing. Now what? Start evolving. As soon as you get customer and sales feedback that show consistent comments, evolve! Successful marketing companies are constantly tweaking their messaging matrix and stories, throwing the old and stale into the fire while fueling the new and powerful.

Also be sure to re-evaluate your social media and digital marketing results. If you're not creating conversations that drive revenues, then rethink your approaches until you do just that. Try new approaches and ask your audiences what they'd like to see.

**Dynamic is the new black** when it comes to creating customer relationships with digital marketing. Nothing lasts forever, so keep your stories and your approaches fresh and lively. You want to keep your personal relationships fresh and vibrant—do the same with your customers. They'll like you better for it.

Nothing lasts forever, so keep your stories and your approaches fresh and lively. You want to keep your personal relationships fresh and vibrant—do the same with your customers.

# Summary

**It's all about them.** Chest-thumping claims and self-promoting statements do not create trust in your audience. They do put buyers off and make them wonder about your truthfulness or motivation—unless you happen to be a huge vendor who has built-in credibility due to size alone. These days those are few and far between. When creating your position, focus on what's important to your audience and leave the chest thumping for the gym.

**Tell a clear and concise story.** Messages in and of themselves are abstract statements. So how do you get them to really hit home with your audience? Apply them. Tell stories that focus on customer/real-world situations that resonate with your audience. Encapsulate your messages in stories that demonstrate your customer's experience and bring them to life. Anyone can write a claim in thirty words. Now try doing it in 5 words. Less is more, always.

**Marketing is about relationships, not megaphone blasts.** That one-size-fits-all campaign blast will not speed your success in today's world. The Delete key is too powerful. Use the digital tools available to you to build relationships with your audience. Be interactive, listen a lot and only speak when you can share information that will help them—not promote you.

**Let others speak for you.** The best evidence comes from independent sources, not you. Customer success stories are the most powerful evidence you can communicate, so focus there. Forget making claims about yourself—where's the credibility in that?

**Create trust.** Customers buy from vendors they can trust, who they know care more about their needs than the bottom line. When you listen to your audiences first and then communicate interactively with a focus on their needs and solving their issues, you create trust. The reality is this: If your products and services deliver distinct value, and your customers need that value, they will buy. To create trust, they need to see that you're in it for them and not yourself. 📌

APPENDIX:  
Pivot Point  
Questions  
To Ask Your  
Customers

**MARKET** INPUT

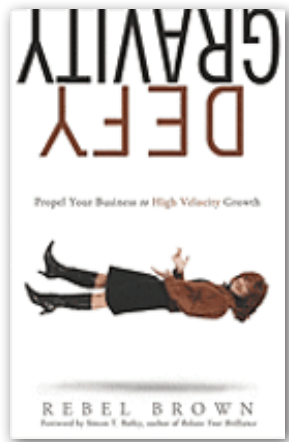
- What are your biggest concerns and challenges? How can we help?
- What do you see as the future of products like ours within your industry? Your company?
- What do you see as your biggest opportunities for products/services like ours in the future?
- How do you see our company supporting you? What role do we play?
- Do you view us as a market leader? How and why?
- What value do we bring to your future?

**COMPANY** INPUT

- What comes into your mind when you hear our company name? What expertise?
- What is the most valuable asset or service we offer to you? Why?
- Why did you buy from us? Why do you keep buying from us?
- How do you view our company versus your other vendor choices?
- What negative impressions can we address about our company for you?

**SOLUTION** INPUT

- What key value do we provide to you with our solutions?
- What can you do with our solutions you couldn't do before?
- Would you share a simple story of that value?
- Why is our solution the best choice for you?
- What are the most valuable assets we bring to your business—intellectual property, experience, services? What else?



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rebel Brown is a specialist in growth strategies. She guides companies to break through the status quo to achieve higher velocity in their sales pipelines—regardless of challenging economic conditions. She's recognized for her expertise in business and market strategy, corporate and product positioning and go-to-market launches. In her two-decade-plus consulting career, Rebel has worked with over 100 clients—primarily in startup, expansion or turnaround scenarios.

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