

The Ultimate Guide to Creating a Brand Messaging Strategy

How to Make Your Audience Fall in Love with Your Product or Service

Do you have an incredible product or service, but struggle to convey its value or differentiators? **If so, you're not alone**. In fact, this is the most common challenge we hear from our clients...

"The copy on my brochure is completely flat, but as soon as my star salesperson gets in front of a prospect, everything suddenly clicks! They see the value in what we have to offer, when they couldn't before!"

Sound familiar? How about these?

- "It is really hard describe my product or service in a way people understand."
- "My marketing messages aren't resonating with my audience."
- "I know my product or service is great, but I'm having trouble communicating it."
- "I don't know which features of my product to focus on in my marketing materials."

(That last one trick question -- you should be focusing more on benefits than features -- but more on that later.)

If you find yourself saying any of these, you need to sit down with your team and create a marketing messaging strategy for your brand. Luckily, that's exactly what this guide is going to teach you how to do.







Table of Contents

5	"Wait, Why Do I Need a Messaging Strategy"	
10	Step 1 Choose Your Brand Strategy Style	
19	Step 2 Identify Your Personas' Decision-Making Styles	
25	Step 3 Craft Decision-Making Style-Based Messaging	
33	Step 4 Create Your Value Propositions	
36	Step 5 Develop Key Messages for Personas & Products	
38	Step 6 Present Your Ideas to the Group	
40	What Should You Do Next?	

Design by Christine Austin, @ItsChristine A







About the Author:



Stacy Willis Strategist, @stacy_mariew

Stacy is passionate about presenting ideas and conveying a vision. She enjoys designing and employing creative visuals to complement strong presentations. She is continuously driven to educate and provide obtainable, accessible information to an audience.

As a strategist at IMPACT, Stacy loves solving problems for clients and has significant experience working and interacting with customers. She is dedicated to providing a positive customer experience and building strong client relationships.

Stacy's Greatest Hits

- CTR vs. CTOR: Which Email Metric Should You Track?
- Brand Strategy: Which of These 4 Popular Styles is Right for You?
- What is Customer Delight? (And Why Should You Care?)









"Wait, Why Do I Need a Messaging Strategy?"

Before we address the "why," let's start with the elephant in the room. Every business should have a marketing messaging framework.

It's non-negotiable.

To show you why, here's a question:

Have you ever seen little kids play soccer? (We're talking really little -- like 6 years old).

There is no structure, no precision, no strategy to their moves -- just chaos. Even the proud parents watching their enthusiastic, uniformed youngsters out on the field have to admit it pretty much just looks like a bunch of children running around in an area that happens to house a soccer ball and goals.







That is exactly what your marketing messaging will look like if you have no messaging strategy -- a bunch of inconsistent, half-baked ideas that don't truly connect with each other or with your audience.

Now, let's contrast that with watching pros play soccer.

Watching pros is like watching gears in a finely tuned machine working in perfect harmony. All of the players are in-sync. They all work from the same playbook and each knows what the other is doing, or planning on doing next.

Similarly, if everyone in your organization is following the same playbook when it comes to marketing messaging, it will make a world of difference in your ability to win new business.

There will be continuity between different mediums or between different authors. The journey will flow seamlessly from marketing and sales, to customer service and delivery. Prospects will be able to easily see what key benefits they will get and how your product or service fits right in to relieve their pains.

A thoughtful messaging strategy will highlight your key differentiators (reasons why prospects should pick you over the competition), value propositions (what you can do for them), and detailed marketing messages you should use to win over your individual buyer personas.





In addition to making your product or service irresistible to prospective buyers, you'll see the following benefits within your own organization with the right messaging strategy in place:



No More Writer's Block for **Your Marketers**

They won't have to search for what to say or how to say it when asked about your product. They can just reference the playbook that is right in front of them.



Your Customer Service Will **Improve**

Empowering those individuals who are responsible for delivering to customers with the knowledge of exactly how to position the offering, will make customer service a breeze.



Create a Fool-proof Content Strategy

Knowing exactly what each of your personas will want to see in order to make decisions gives you a clear and easy-to-follow content roadmap.



Your Sales Reps Will Be More **Effective**

With a cohesive messaging strategy for each of your different personas, sales can create easyto-follow templates and scripts that will hit on all of the key points that matter to the different individuals they will be talking to.



Disseminate Knowledge at Scale

Right now all the information about your company is probably trapped in the heads of those in charge. That's not great for scalability. Get that information out of their heads and into the hands of everyone at the company.



You're Killing Your Message with These Words. Here's How to Fix It.

Learn More »









How to Create a Marketing Messaging Framework

The best way to create a solid brand strategy and messaging framework is to treat it like a great recipe.

First:

Gather all those smart people in one room for a messaging workshop and try to pull information out of their brains -- your ingredients. You'll want

to make sure you've included sales leadership, executives or company owners, and product or service delivery leads. Basically, you want anyone who considers the company or the product it produces "their baby."

They should be able to talk at length about the offering, and ideally they should be the one's who have a successful track record of getting people to buy.





Free Resource: Jumpstart Your Messaging Strategy with Our Messaging Workshop Template

Get it Now »







Then:

Combine, refine, and distill that information into the first draft of a **messaging matrix**. (Don't worry! We'll show you what that looks like later!) From there, you'll feed it back to the smart people and let them poke holes in it — tastetesting.

Once you've gathered all the feedback, you can revise and perfect that strategy into a finished product — a new dish for your menu.









Step 1: Choose Your Brand Strategy Style

In our messaging workshops, the first place we always start is with brand strategy.

A brand strategy is different from your marketing strategy -- which defines your objectives and activities -- and is the foundation of your marketing and how you try to "sell" yourself.

There are four major types of brand strategies companies can follow.

ook: **f**







Style 1: Arm Wrestling

In this style, you are trying to take on the market leader and beat them at their own game. This type of strategy can be used when there is a wellestablished market category but no clear market leader that is leaps and bounds ahead of everyone else.

The classic example is Coke vs. Pepsi.

The two products that are very similar and have to constantly compare themselves against each other to try and gain market share.

Advantage

Your audience already has a frame of reference, making it is very easy for them to understand your offering. "Oh, I get it, this product is just like X."

Risk

It takes a lot of money and time to make it successful.



Article: How to Transform Complicated Tech into Simple Marketing Messages

Learn More »











Style 2: Big Fish, Smaller Pond

The idea behind this style is to focus on a smaller subsegment of an existing market. For example, creating a niche within an underserved market segment. This strategy is especially useful if there is an identifiable segment of the existing market whose needs are not being met by the existing market leader.



Many marketing agencies, for instance, take this tactic and may position themselves as a specialist in providing services to a specific industry with unique needs. For instance, an IT consulting firm that only works with law firms.

Advantage

Your audience already has a frame of reference. They understand your offering because it is similar to something that already exists. You also don't have to go head to head with the market leader since you are targeting a very specific niche.

Risk

The market leader could turn around match your offering to that niche if they see it working.









Style 3: Reframe the Market

This style of brand positioning looks to reframe an existing market in new terms, making the benefits highlighted by previous market leaders irrelevant. You would use this if your product or service features an innovation or advancement that was previously unattainable, or if there has been a recent shift or change in the market needs or expectations.

Look at Tesla and Apple.

Before Tesla, the electric car market competed solely on battery life. Tesla entered the market and said, "Battery life is a given, so we're not even going to talk about it." Instead, they highlighted the style and experience of their cars as their differentiator.

Tesla moved the conversation away from battery life and started talking about style.

Apple approached the computer market in much the same way. Every computer is going to have an adequate amount of storage and a decent level of CPU speed, so they didn't even bother talking about it. Instead, they highlighted and competed on style and status.







Advantage

You can highlight your strengths as differentiators that are so important to the audience, they make the market leader's strengths completely irrelevant.

Risk

The market leader can strike back by simply adding a feature that is similar to yours. So, your strength or differentiator must be bigger than a simple "feature."



Infographic: 10 Things Your Business Can Learn from Apple's Marketing

Learn More »



Style 4: Change the Game

This style is reserved for when there is no market category for what you do. You are the first of your kind, and you get to invent your market category! This strategy should be used when your strengths don't fit you into an existing category or if a need has emerged that isn't served by any existing market categories.





Uber is a great example of this style.

The rideshare app category didn't exist until they invented it. You'll know you're successful in this category when people use you to create comparisons: "My company is the Uber of food delivery."

Advantage

You'll be the default market leader because you created the category.

Risk

There are a few risks to be aware of. For example, you'll want to be sure there really is a need for your product or service. Sometimes if a market category doesn't exist, it's because it doesn't need to. Don't believe me?

History is littered with "innovative" product flops that tried to fill a need that didn't exist:

- New Coke
- The Facebook Phone
- The Amazon Fire Phone
- Google+
- Crystal Pepsi
- The DeLorean
- Microsoft Zune







The other major risk with this strategy is copy-cats. Fast followers may be able to quickly copy and beat you before you have a chance to establish yourself as a leader. So, just make sure you have a big enough head start if you are going to try this strategy.



Article: 27 Social Media Campaign Ideas From Big Brands You Want to Be [+Video]

Learn More »



Differentiation vs. Disruption

Brands are always talking about how to differentiate themselves from competitors. But first, we need to talk about differentiation vs. disruption.

The term "disruptor" is thrown around a lot, especially in the startup world. The idea behind it is that disruptors come in and "shake up" the market.

We want to encourage you not to think that way.





Peter Thiel says it best in his book Zero to One:

"You don't want to be a disruptor, you want to be a leader."

In grade school the term "disruptor" had a negative connotation. It was reserved for students who caused problems in class. As a business, the term should be no different.

Labeling yourself as a disruptor will only push others to think about how you compare to direct competitors, and highlight nitpick-y differences between you and those you are up against. Think instead about how you can be a leader and talk about what makes you amazing and unique instead of just what makes you different than that guy over there.

Instead of trying to disrupt the market, think about how you can be a leader.

If you think like a disrupter, you'll end up looking like a game of Where's Waldo.

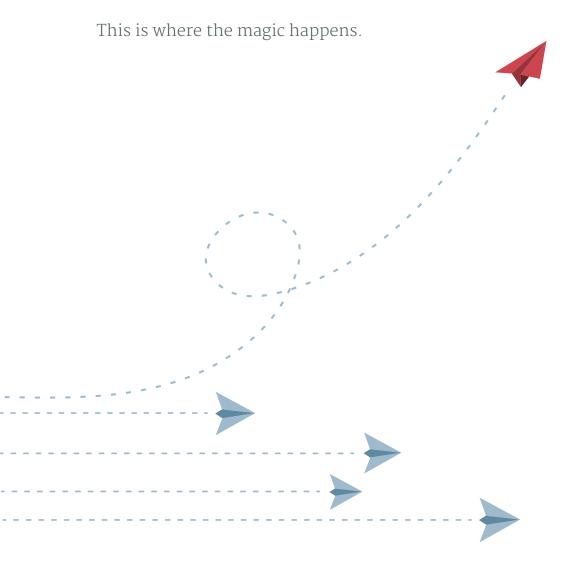




You and your competitors all the look the same, and someone would be hardpressed to pick you out of the crowd. If you think like a leader, you'll end up standing where there is no crowd, and people find you with little effort at all.

This is how you should select your differentiators:

- What do you do that **nobody else** can.
- What do you offer that **nobody else** does.
- What can you say about your company that **no other company can say**.











Step 2: Identify Your Personas' Decision-Making Styles

We've talked at length on the IMPACT blog about buyer personas, so we won't rehash it here. We'll just say that you must have your buyer personas in place before you do anything else.

Here are a few of our existing resources to help:

- Why You Need to Create Buyer Personas
- Why Buyer Persona Development Should Be a Team Effort
- The Why, How, and What of Effective Buyer Persona Development
- Do You Know Where Your Buyer Personas Are?

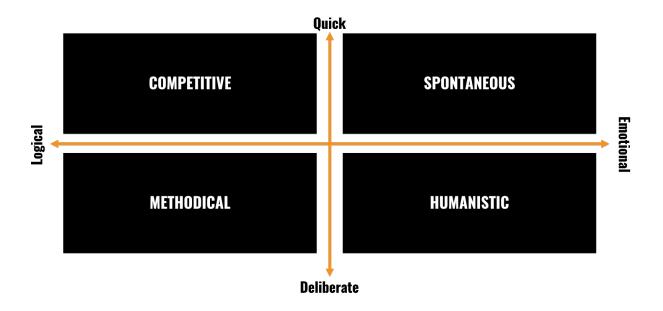
Now comes our favorite part: breaking down decision-making styles. This is where the puzzle pieces start to come together.







There are four primary types of personalities, and each of them have four distinct decision-making styles. So, the next step in building your messaging strategy is to identify which type of decision-maker each of your personas really is.



People make decisions across two different spectrums.

Looking at the diagram above, you can see on the X-axis is the spectrum between logical (heavily fact-based) and emotional (heavily feeling-based) decision-making. On the Y-axis is the spectrum between quick (makes decisions very quickly) and deliberate (makes decisions very slowly) decision-making.

Using the information below, assign a primary decision–making style to each of your personas.







Free Resource: The Inbound Marketer's Pocket Buyer Persona Toolkit

Learn More »



The Competitive Decision-Maker



Individuals who fall in the top left quadrant tend to make decisions more quickly and make them based on facts and logic. This decision-making style aligns with **Dominant DiSC** personality type.

Competitive Personality Traits

- Direct and decisive;
- Prefer to lead rather than follow;
- High self-confidence;
- Risk takers and problem solvers;
- Tend to be self-starters;
- Business-like and power-oriented; and
- Disciplined and fast-paced use of time.







The Spontaneous Decision-Maker



Individuals who fall in the top right quadrant tend to make decisions quickly but make them based on "gut feeling" and intuition rather than facts or numbers. This decision-making style aligns with Influencer DiSC personality type.

The Spontaneous Decision-Maker

- Enthusiastic, optimistic, talkative, persuasive, impulsive, and emotional;
- Enjoys being the center of attention;
- Trusts others naturally;
- Functions best when around people or when working in teams;
- Great encouragers and motivators of others;
- Personal and activity-oriented; and
- Use of time is undisciplined and fast-paced, constantly in motion.



Infographic: 12 Different Types of Branded Content Consumers Love

Learn More »







The Methodical Decision-Maker



Individuals who fall in the bottom left quadrant tend to make decisions very slowly and only make them based on facts gained through rigorous research. This decision-making style aligns with Conscientious DISC personality type.

Methodical Personality Traits

- Accurate, precise, detail-oriented, and conscientious;
- Makes decisions carefully with plenty of research;
- Holds very high standards for both themselves and others;
- Avoids conflict rather than argue;
- Business-like and detail-oriented; and
- Use of time is disciplined and slow-paced.



Free Resource: Get Started with Our Turnkey Messaging Workshop Template

Get It Now »









The Humanistic Decision-Maker



Individuals who fall in the bottom right quadrant make slower decisions and tend to base those decisions on how they think the outcome of that decision will make themselves or others feel. This decision–making style aligns with <u>Steady DISC personality type</u>.

Humanistic Personality Traits

- Steady, stable, and predictable;
- Prefer close, personal relationships;
- Patient, good listeners;
- Strives for stability and a feeling of peace and safety;
- Uncomfortable with change;
- Personal and relationship-oriented;
- They want to know the person behind the business; and
- Use of time is undisciplined and slow-paced.

Just like with DISC personality types, it is entirely possible to have a hybrid between two decision-making styles, but one style should stick out as the primary. Try to associate only one decision-making type to each of your personas. More than that will start to get confusing.







Step 3: Craft Decision-Making Style-**Based Messaging**

Now that you know how each of your personas make decisions, you can begin to formulate your ideas around how you'll message to each of those personas. Use the following guidelines below to tailor your value propositions and key messages toward each individual.



Article: 4 Questions for Defining a Winning Value Proposition

Learn More »





Guidelines for the Competitive Decision-Maker

The Competitive wants to know what you can do for them, not how you do it. And they want you to tell them quickly and simply. They also want a clear understanding of the options in front of them and why you are the best choice.

How to Message to the Competitive Decision-Maker

- They must see your qualifications, records, and values;
- Documented evidence stressing results are hard to argue with;
- Show WHAT you can do for them, and how it will help them meet their goals;
- Support their ideas and conclusions rather than "pushing" a solution on them;
- Provide options, probabilities, and potentially challenge them to find something better;
- They value freedom from the mundane and tedious tasks;
- Motivated by new challenges, setting and achieving goals, and seeing tangible results; and
- Be direct, to the point, and brief.

Questions You'll Need to Answer

- What are your competitive advantages?
- What makes you the best?
- How can you help me be more efficient?







- How can I trust you?
- Can you help me reach my goals?
- What are your credentials?

Guidelines for the Spontaneous Decision-Maker

The Spontaneous loves being a part of the "in-crowd." They want to know who's used your service and why. For them, the focus is on the enjoyment of life.

How to Message to the Spontaneous Decision-Maker

- Provide evidence that you are trustworthy and friendly;
- Show that they are going to be listened to;
- Show personal attention and interest, make them center of attention;
- Demonstrate WHY you are the best solution;
- Support their feelings, interests, and excitement;
- Provide guarantees and opinions but not options;
- Let them know they won't have to worry about the details;
- They are motivated by the approval, flattery, praise, popularity, or acceptance by others; and
- Avoid feelings of rejection or disapproval.

Questions You'll Need to Answer

How can you provide what I'm looking for quickly?







- Is your service the best?
- Can I customize your offering?
- Can you help me narrow down my choices?
- Can you make this process easy on me?
- How will this let me enjoy life more?



Article: How to Turn Strangers Into Super-Fans with the Value Journey Canvas Learn More »

Guidelines for the Methodical Decision-Maker

Speaking to the Methodical is where you can break the rules about discussing how your product works. They really do care and want to know every detail, so provide it to them early in the buying process.

How to Message to the Methodical Decision-Maker

- Show evidence of your experience, knowledge, and processes;
- Documented evidence of success and preparation are key;
- Demonstrate HOW can you provide a solution and the steps you take;
- Support their principles and rational approach;
- Provide evidence and show superior service;
- Focus on the details rather than the larger picture; and
- They are motivated by information and logic.







Questions You'll Need to Answer

- What are the details?
- How does it work?
- What is your process?
- Can you walk me through the steps?
- What is the plan?
- Can I see the proof?
- Do you provide a guarantee?

Guidelines for the Humanistic Decision-Maker

The Humanistic is all about people and relationships. They want to know who they are working with and are very interested in the relationships that will accompany the use of your product or service.

How to Message to the Humanistic Decision-Maker

- Talk about who are you, what you think, and who you know;
- Give them recognition and approval;
- Focus on WHO have you provided solutions to;
- Support their ideas, intuitions, and focus on your relationship;
- Let them know how it "feels" to work with you;
- Offer testimony and incentives;
- Motivated by safety and security;
- Appreciate their loyalty and dependability; and
- Try to be personable and build rapport.









Questions You'll Need to Answer

- How will your product or service make me feel?
- Who uses your product? Do I recognize their name?
- Who are you as a company and a team?
- What experience have others had with you?
- Can I trust you? And will I like you?
- What are your values?
- How will you help me build and strengthen relationships?

Now, Start to Fill in Your Messaging Matrix

	Product or Service #1	Product or Service #2	Product or Service #3
		Tone of Voice - Frame of Mind - Turn-Offs	
Persona #1	 Value Proposition Level of Urgency Key Messages Overcoming Common Objections What to Avoid Sample Story 	 Value Proposition Level of Urgency Key Messages Overcoming Common Objections What to Avoid Sample Story 	
		Tone of Voice - Frame of Mind - Turn-Offs	
Persona #2	 Value Proposition Level of Urgency Key Messages Overcoming Common Objections What to Avoid Sample Story 	 Value Proposition Level of Urgency Key Messages Overcoming Common Objections What to Avoid Sample Story 	
		Tone of Voice - Frame of Mind - Turn-Offs	
Persona #3	 Value Proposition Level of Urgency Key Messages Overcoming Common Objections What to Avoid Sample Story 		 Value Proposition Level of Urgency Key Messages Overcoming Common Objections What to Avoid Sample Story
		Tone of Voice - Frame of Mind - Turn-Offs	
Persona #4	 Value Proposition Level of Urgency Key Messages Overcoming Common Objections What to Avoid Sample Story 		 Value Proposition Level of Urgency Key Messages Overcoming Common Objections What to Avoid Sample Story

Sample Messaging Matrix





Before you move on from this point, you will need to put together a messaging matrix to fill in. You will use this matrix to document the key messages you've identified in this section, as well as what follows in the remainder of this process.

The pictured sample matrix is one that we use to draft our messaging strategies for clients, but yours could look different. However, a successful messaging matrix must include your personas, and your product and services, as well as space, to define each of the following:



- Value proposition;
- Level of urgency;
- Key messages;
- Overcoming common objections;
- What to avoid; and
- A sample story.

In any case where a specific product or service offering would apply to a specific persona, the messaging strategy for that persona should be entered into that cell.





Here's an example of how you might flesh out some of these details for a persona:

Messaging: Services Stan

Tone of Voice: Business-like, trustworthy and knowledgeable.

Frame of Mind: He is interested in how your process works, and how it will affect his own day-to-day processes.

Turn-Offs:

- Lack of detail about process.
- Anything that is not very logically explained and defined.
- · Mistakes. It is important that you prove your technical "chops" to him.

Key Content:

- · Datasheets describing step-by-step processes.
- Case studies showing success.
- · Video demonstrations of features.

Level of Urgency: LOW

- · He will want to make a decision at his own pace and have plenty of data to sift through.
- He will typically enter into the decision-making process in later stages to vet the idea, rather than be the trigger.

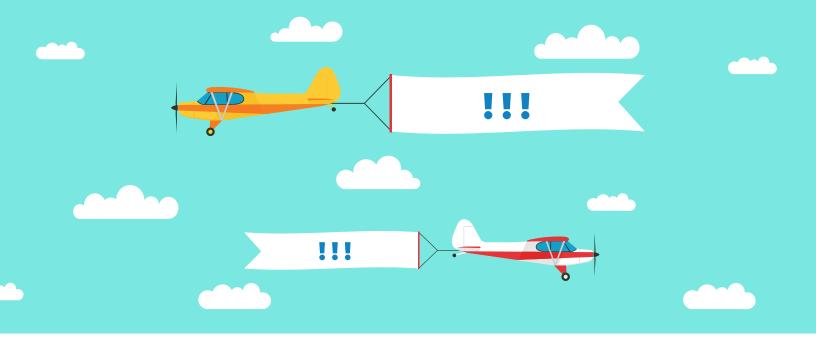
(We'll show you another example later featuring key messages and a sample story.)

The messaging matrix will be the heart of your messaging framework, so you cannot proceed without it.

s Ebook:







Step 4: Create Your Value Propositions

Now that you have personas created and a decision-making style assigned to each, it is time start the real work -- writing value propositions! You'll want

to write a separate value proposition for each product or service line for each persona that would purchase that product or service.

A value proposition is a single sentence about your product or service that distills down the benefit it provides to the end user.







A good value proposition seeks to try and answer all of the following questions:

- ► Why do your products or services matter?
- ► What problem(s) are you trying to solve?
- ▶ What is it that you do to solve that problem?
- ▶ What makes you different from everyone else?

Notice we don't have "How does your product or service work?" in the list above. Your value proposition should not be about how your offering works, but should ultimately focus on the benefits your product or service provides.

A great starting point is to use the following template:

[My firm] is the only [noun, competitive category] that provides [plural noun, your target audience] with [plural noun, emotional benefit] by/ through/with [adjective, your unique differentiator].





We wouldn't recommend leaving it in that format grammatically, because that isn't how people really talk. But, if you write it in that format first, it can help get your ideas on paper. Then you can rephrase it into a more conversational structure.



Get Inspired: 31 Value Proposition Examples You Wish You Had

Learn More »









Step 5: Develop Key Messages for Personas & Products

Up next, you'll want to select key messages for each of your personas and products. You should have no more than four or five key messages for each cell in your messaging matrix. These points should be the benefits provided by your product or service that this specific persona will identify with.

Here's what a fully-developed example of key messages and a sample story might look like:

Positioning CyberGuard to the Service Provider

: CyberGuard is the only platform which provides assessment metrics that are directly translatable into

Key Messages

- Make recommendations faster: provide clients direct recommendations without a lengthy analysis time
- Improve operational performance: metrics that are immediately translatable into recommendations for program improvement.
- Track tangible results: provide your clients with recommendations based on consistent, objective data-based metrics.
- Create a competitive advantage: grow your business, provide consistent results and set your services apart from competitors.

 Communicate recommendations: easily translate
- cyber security program improvement recommendations in a way that makes sense to clients.

Sample Story

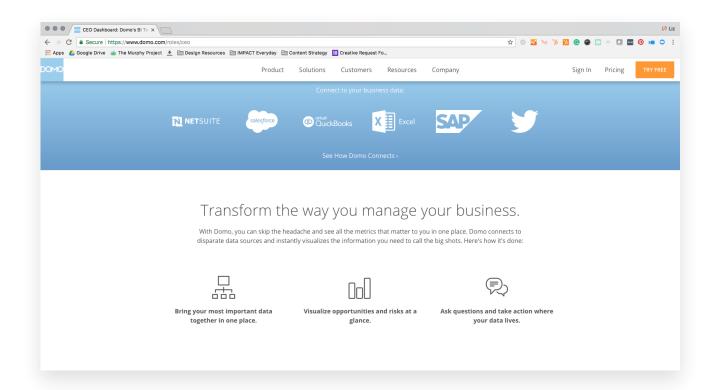
Services Stan struggled to provide assessments with actionable recommendations to clients in a profitable manner. Every assessment required a significant amount of his time and effort.

With the use of CyberGuard, Stan was able to reduce the amount of time spent on the assessment process and give clients a much more actionable assessment with a low touch for clients. These actionable recommendations facilitated the sale of follow-on services to clients, thus improving his overall revenue stream.

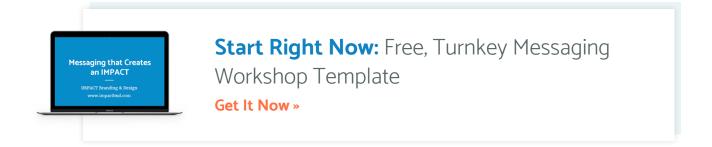




One great example of this is <u>Domo</u>, where they have pages on their site dedicated to outlining the value propositions for specific personas.



You'll see in the address bar **that this is a page designed only for CEOs**. It highlights the three key benefits that come from their product for the CEO, based on their goals and challenges. **This is how you should approach the creation of your key messages**.









Step 6: Present Your Ideas to the Group

It is our firm opinion that no messaging strategy can be created in a vacuum. You can't do it alone. One person will never be able to create a great messaging strategy. You'll want the ability to bounce ideas back and forth and test them out.

Personally, we don't think any company can really do a good job of creating a messaging strategy by themselves. It truly takes an objective, outside party who is willing to push back. The core team from inside the business will be too "in the weeds" to really see things from an outsider perspective. So, keep that in mind if you're trying to do this internally.

Ebook:





Once you have written a messaging framework, consider it just a first draft, a "proposal" of sorts. Take it back to the same team who helped you brainstorm and let them poke holes in it, make minor tweaks and perfect it.





Infographic: How 57 Experts Handle Negative Feedback Like a Champ

Learn More »









What Should You Do Next?

The messaging strategy you create at the close of this exercise using your matrix should be treated like gold. It truly is one of the most important documents for your company's success. Think of it like your business' North Star or Guiding Light. Everyone in the company should know it like the back

of their hand and be comfortable speaking with outsiders about the products and services your company offers.

But once you have the framework in-hand, what should you do next?

Well, the answer to that depends on what your immediate needs and goals as a business are, but here are a few suggestions:







▶ Update Your Website Copy

Are the messages currently on your website in-line with what your personas need to hear based on your newly-defined decision-making styles and preferences?

▶ Revise Your Marketing Collateral

Are your brochures and handouts targeting the right message for the right people?

▶ Refine Sales Scripts & Templates

What messaging changes can you make to your sales tools that will have an immediate impact?

▶ Update Your Employee Onboarding

Are there opportunities to introduce these new insights early, as part of training for new marketing, sales, and customer service team members?

And so much more.

But remember, your marketing messaging framework is not a "set it and forget it" strategy. Businesses pivot, products change, and target markets evolve. Revisit your messaging regularly — maybe on a quarterly or annual basis.

Now, we release you! Go forth and message wisely!









LET'S GET STARTED

One phone call. Zero obligation.

Learn how we can help you reach your goals -- and to see if we're the right fit for you.

GET STARTED