

EXPERIENCE, DISCOVER & VALORISE HIDDEN TREASURE TOWNS AND SITES OF THE ADRIATIC AREA

4.2.1 COMMON METHODOLOGY TO ELABORATE THE POSITIONING STRATEGY A GUIDELINE

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EXCOVER

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Positioning starts with a product. A piece of merchandise, a service, a company, an institution, or even a person. Perhaps yourself. But positioning is not what you do to a product. Positioning is what you do to the mind of the prospect. That is, you position the product in the mind of the prospect (...) Positioning is the first body of thought that comes to grips with the difficult problem of getting heard in our overcommunicated society.

In Al Ries, Jack Trout, *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*, McGraw Hill, 2001, 12-13

1. WHAT IS POSITIONING STRATEGY AND WHY IT IS IMPORTANT

According to Saqib¹, positioning has become a highly influential marketing management paradigm. It is generally accepted that theoretically, practically and strategically positioning has become one of the key components in modern marketing management, both from the academic and the practical or business point of view. The concept was introduced to the advertising community as a marketing strategy in 1969², and has been defined as “establishing and maintaining a distinctive place in the market for an organisation and/or its individual product offerings”³.

Positioning is the proper placing of one’s own product among products already available on the market. An efficient product positioning should guarantee the highest possible potential number of buyers by its clear appearance on the market. In other words, brand positioning “represents the marketing communication attempts to achieve congruence between the brand identity and brand image (...) The purpose is to succinctly convey the brand identity in a way that will stand out amidst the noise of other mass communications by rival and substitute brands and be noticed by the target consumer in a meaningful and memorable way”⁴.

Positioning defines where one’s product (item or service) stands in relation to others offering similar products and services in the marketplace as well as the mind of the consumer. Positioning is a key

¹ Saqib, N. (2020). Positioning – a literature review. PSU Research Review. <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/PRR-06-2019-0016/full/pdf?title=positioning-a-literature-review>

² Trout, J., & Ries, A. (1979). Positioning: ten years later. *Industrial Marketing*, 64(7), 32-42.

Al Ries, Jack Trout (2001). *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*, McGraw Hill.

³ Lovelock, C. (1991). *Services marketing*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 110

⁴ Pike, S., & Page, S. (2014). Destination Marketing Organizations and destination marketing: A narrative analysis of the literature. *Tourism Management*. 41, 202-227.

step as every decision in this field would affect the entire marketing strategy, so that by making the wrong positioning decision the subsequent actions (for example, communication) would not be effective. Less successful objective positioning occurs when the feature is **not unique**: “one of the first rules of effective positioning is uniqueness”⁵. On the opposite, a good positioning makes a product unique and makes the users consider using it as a distinct benefit to them.

Positioning strategy aims at “creating, communicating and maintaining distinctive differences that will be noticed and valued by costumers”⁶. We move from the idea that people do not buy just products, but experiences and perceptions. So, we need to link our products or services to a perception of uniqueness: in other words, the idea that our destination is absolutely unique and different.

The positioning strategy is the process that precedes the promotion and communication plan and the two are necessarily coordinated (see **EXCOVER WP5.3 Promotion and Communication Plan Definition & Guidelines**, slide 3 and slide 6).

It’s usually not realistic for a destination to try to appeal to all potential tourists in a market. Positioning strategy is concerned with creating (and then communicating) distinctive differences that will be noticed and valued by those tourists with whom we would most like to develop a *long-term relationship*.

For a successful positioning, we need to understand our target customers’ (i.e. excursionists and tourists) preferences, their conception of value and the characteristics of their competitors’ offerings.

⁵ <https://www.europetour.tips/results/training-modules/english/>

⁶ Wirtz, J. (2018). Positioning Services in Competitive Markets. Winning in Service Markets Series. Vol 2. https://jochenwirtz.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Winning-in-Service-Markets-Series-Vol.-2_Positioning-Services-in-Competitive-Markets.pdf

2. THE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before starting the positioning strategy process, a framework analysis is to be conducted; Wirtz asserts that a systematic way to conduct a positioning strategy “starts with an analysis of Customers, Competitors and Company”⁷.

According to Wirtz, the positioning strategy moves from the market analysis and the internal analysis and includes the competitors’ analysis (figure 1)

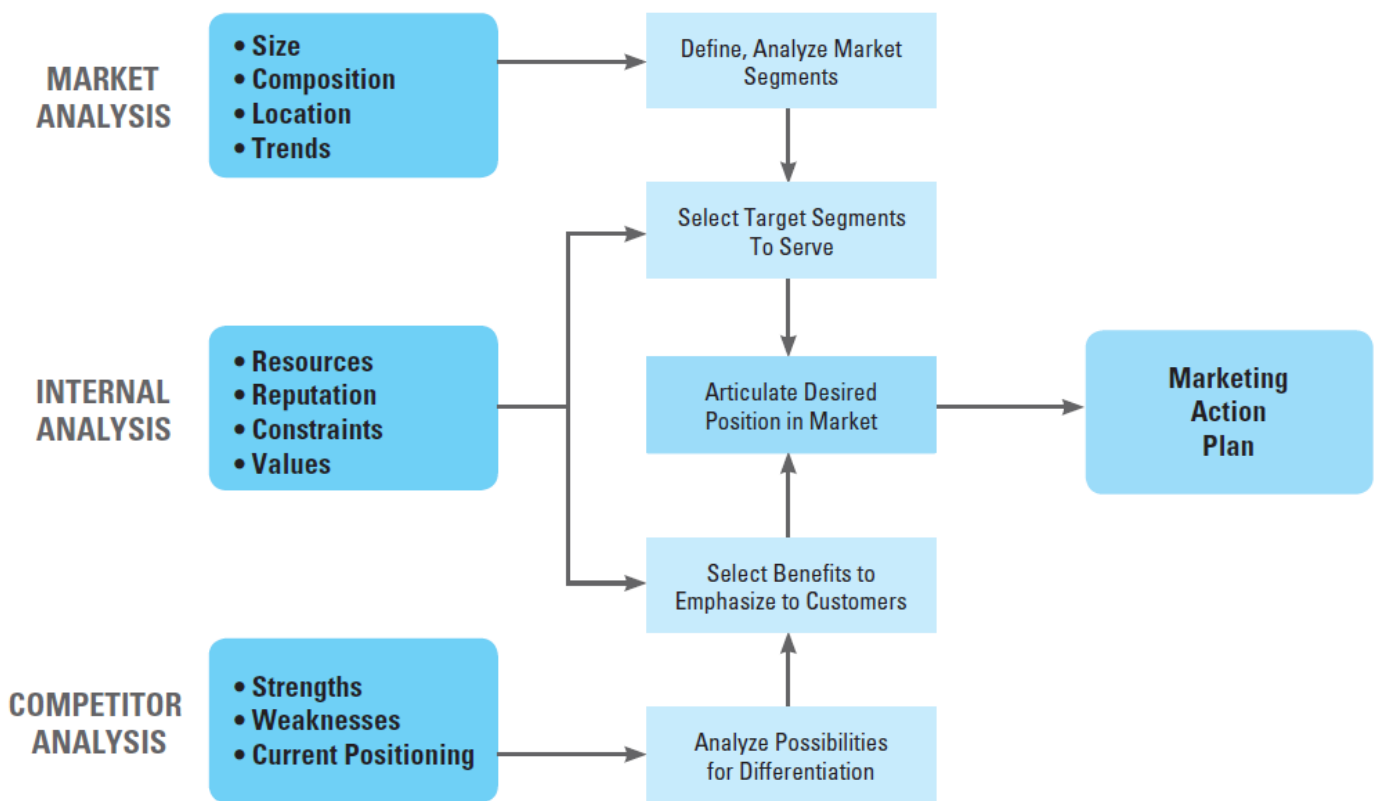


Figure 1 – Developing a marketing positioning strategy
Source: Lovelock & Wirtz (2011). Service Marketing. Pearson, 71

⁷ Jochen Wirtz, Positioning Services in Competitive Markets, 10

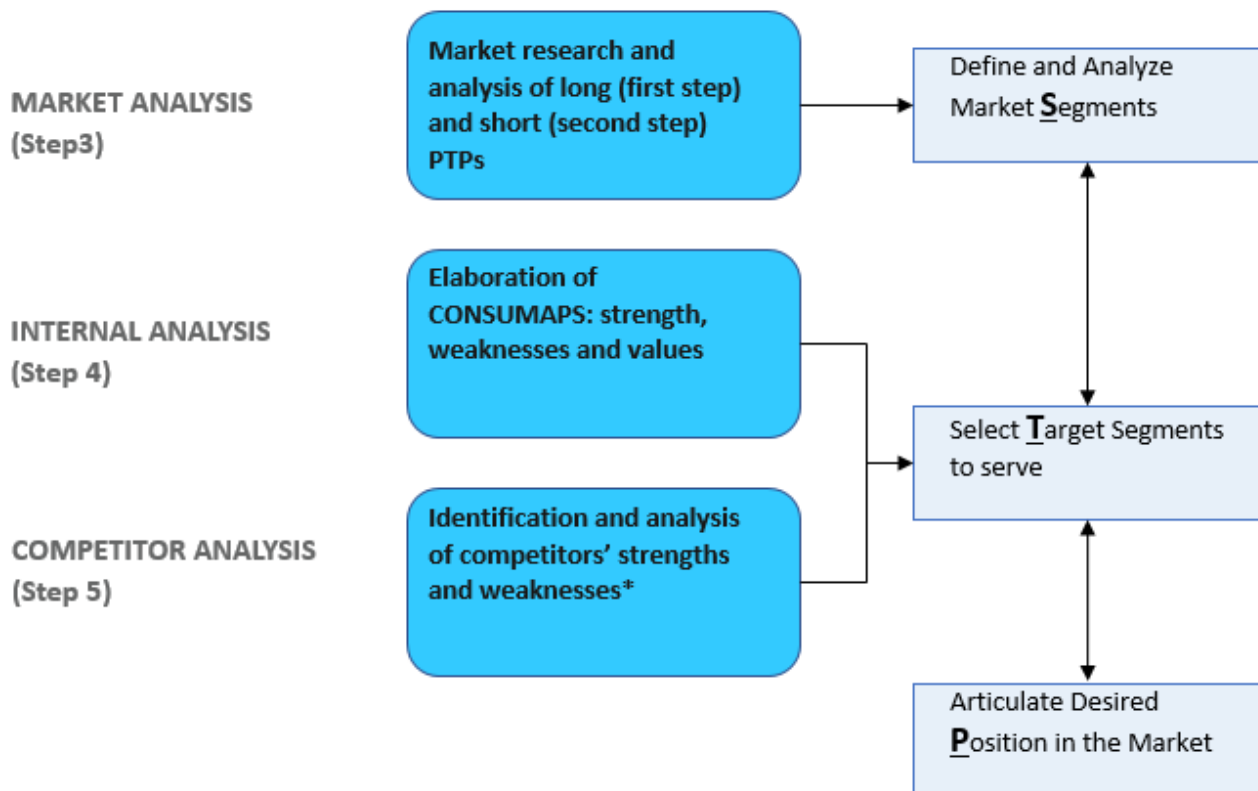
Applying this framework to *Excover* project it is then clear the positioning strategy is a part of a process that can be undertaken only if the background information has been collected.

In other words, the positioning strategy cannot start unless all the previous steps have been completed. Those are:

1. Motivations for visiting
2. Long list of Potential Tourism Products
3. Market Research and analysis of the Long List of Potential Tourism Products
4. Analysis of Short Potential Tourism Products
5. Consumap
6. Tourism Products Portfolio
(see Work Plan for Implementing WP4 Widespread Welcoming)

Only when all those steps have been successfully concluded, the Positioning Strategy can be developed.

Adapting Lovelock and Wirtz scheme to *Excover* project, we might suggest that the Positioning strategy moves from a background analysis of the market, of the characteristics of each territory and of the potential/actual competitors (Fig. 2).



*We must differentiate from the competitors

Figure 1 – Adapted from Lovelock, Wirtz, *Service Marketing*.

What results from this framework is the **segmentation, targeting, positioning** steps for the positioning strategy, whereas:

1. Segmentation refers to distinguish the groups of costumers
2. Targeting refers to focus on one (or more) specific segment
3. Positioning refers to the place that the destinations have in the “minds” of the tourists.

This process is common to a wide variety of products and services: first comes the analysis of the situation, then determine target groups, then define the targets and develop the strategies⁸

⁸ <https://www.europetour.tips/results/training-modules/english/>

3. PRINCIPLES OF POSITIONING

Following what experts in this field suggest, the positioning strategy implies:

1. Establishment of a position in the minds of its targeted customers
2. Choice of one simple and consistent message (singular position)
3. Choice of a position that strongly differentiates the destination from its competitors
4. Need to focus on one (or more than one) market segment(s)

To sum up:

1. The segmentation decision implies the assessment of **strengths and weaknesses of the destination and its competitors**; only after the assessment, that should be realistic and based on data, the decision can be made which market segments should be target and with which products and services.
2. Image: the objective of positioning is to create a singular (and special) place in the mind of potential tourists and visitors. This evocative image is central in the process of differentiation of the destination from the competitors.
3. Selection of destination's features that will become the core of the positioning.

Positioning is more than just image creation.
This important form of market communication helps to distinguish cultural tourism destinations from similar destinations so that visitors can choose the one that is the most attractive.
Thus, true positioning differentiates a destination from its competitors on attributes that are meaningful to visitors and gives it a competitive advantage.

Source: <https://www.europetour.tips/results/training-modules/english/>

3.1 Checklist for the positioning strategy:

1. What is the image of your destination in the minds of current and potential visitors?
2. What visitors do you serve now, and which ones would you like to target in the future?
3. What market segments do you target at?

4. How does each of your service products differ from those of our competitors?
5. Do tourist perceive your service offerings as meeting their needs?
6. What changes do you need to make to your service offerings in order to strengthen our competitive position within our target segment(s)?

4. POSITIONING STATEMENT

A **Positioning Statement** is brief paragraph, which encompasses your institution, business, or destination and sets the mood for marketing tools. The Communication Plan (see **WP5**) will be inspired by the Positioning Statement.

When creating a Positioning Statement, some rules should be followed⁹:

- Make it short, but honest and emotive
- Use key words, which are selected for their relevance to the destination and its target markets
- Dig down deep to get to the truth behind your institution or business!
- Talk to your visitors and your non-visitors!
- Always refer to your positioning statement when faced with advertising choices, business changes and plans for the future.
- Don't be afraid to re-position if the situation changes!

4.1 Checklist for your positioning statement:

1. Is it memorable, motivating and focused?
2. Does it provide a clear, distinctive and meaningful picture of your institution / your business, that differentiates it from the competition?
3. Can the brand own it?
4. Is it credible and believable?
5. Does it enable growth?
6. Does it serve as a filter for decision making?

⁹ <https://www.europetour.tips/results/training-modules/english/>