

# Marketing your startup begins with your product, not your pitch

In a recent issue of Teaching Startup (#69), I answered a question from an entrepreneur who needed to make a decision about the marketing direction for his new product — one that was on its way to the minimum viable product stage (MVP).

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I was able to give him several questions he first needed to answer that would provide an axis for the direction of his messaging. While I was doing that, I touched briefly on how his initial marketing direction will impact everything from sales to the very future definition of the product itself. Maybe even the direction of his company.

I want to expand on how that happens in this post.

## Your customer experiences your product from the outside looking in

That's an adage a lot of entrepreneurs tend to forget when they're wordsmithing attention-grabbing marketing copy and clever sales pitches. Your customer's first impression of your product comes directly from the messaging they encounter when they first become aware of said product.

From that messaging, if they have any interest whatsoever, they'll next need to understand what your product is, through its positioning.

That in turn leads them to discover how your product solves their problem, through its value proposition.

And the value proposition is totally dependent on the design and function of the product itself.

The goal of your marketing should be to essentially draw a map for the customer from initial awareness all the way through to the purchase decision. However, when you hand someone a map, or even just give them directions, you don't start with the final destination and work your way backwards.

*You start with where they are.*

You know the destination and the markers along the map — the value prop, the positioning, and the messaging. You need to communicate those markers to the customer from *their* orientation, not yours.

## If you're a startup, you probably can't afford to be clever

So why does the reverse happen? It's likely because before any of us become entrepreneurs, we start out as consumers. So it's often misunderstood that the focal point of any marketing messaging is solely to capture the attention of the customer.

Why? Because, more often than not, that's what happened to us.

We tend to forget about all the times we were led astray by that evocative but ill-defined messaging. Sure, they got our attention, but then at some point before the purchase decision, probably way before the purchase decision, we realised that the product was not for us. We just liked the clever messaging.

I don't know why companies still market this way, but they do. I don't have that kind of marketing budget.

If your startup's marketing messaging isn't the end result of a process that begins with the definition of the product, walks through its value prop, finds its

position, and then crafts the messaging, you're likely wasting a lot of words, clicks, time, and money.

But worse, you're potentially setting expectations with the customer that could force your product to become something it's not.

Your value prop will suffer as your product poorly solves a problem close-to-but-not-exactly the problem it intends to solve.

Your customer's understanding of your positioning lumps you in with competitors who are better suited to fulfill their needs than you are.

And your product is viewed as an ugly duckling when it's really an awesome goose.

Don't fall into this trap. Walk backwards from your product and its value proposition, through your positioning, and then craft your marketing messaging. Save clever for those companies who already have an established brand.

*This article was originally published on Medium by Joe Procopio*

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