

Create an Effective Positioning Statement: Define How You Want to be Viewed in the Market

By Leslie Richards and Francois Lasselle

Perception is everything in the legal industry. And with an effective positioning statement, you can shape that perception and define how you want to be viewed in the market. A positioning statement is a concise, unique message that describes your service and target audience and explains how it fills a market need.

Who needs an effective positioning statement?

- Law firms that want to go up-market and sell more complex services.
- Law firms that want to position themselves for new markets, clients, or practice areas.
- Newly formed small firms that want to get a strong marketing program underway.
- Individual attorneys building their personal brand.
- General Counsel, partners, and associates who want to grow their business and make it more profitable.
- In-house legal marketing teams that want to position their companies as industry leaders.

IDENTIFY YOUR AUDIENCE(S): *Understand who they are and what motivates them*

The challenges, goals, and pressures a GC might face likely differ from that of a firm partner, associate, or individual attorney. Identifying WHO you're trying to reach and understanding the unique concerns of your intended audience will allow you to communicate with them in a way that is more relevant.

- What does your audience need from a legal service like yours?
- What are their personal and professional goals?
- What pressures do they face in their role?
- How can you potentially speak to those pressure in a way that is helpful?

Goals based on professional roles should inform messaging

Chief Executive Officer

- Containing costs – legal expenses are seen as a cost center
- The advisor that mitigates risk to business operations or profitability such as contracts, HR, buy/sell, etc.
- Protecting investments in process, innovation or strategic relationships such as IP and NDAs

General Counsel

- Acquiring expertise that isn't available internally
- Holding down external costs (convergence/consolidation)
- Expanding a team to meet demand without acquiring a fixed cost or competing in talent wars

Procurement Director

- Meeting internal expectations
- No budget surprises
- No negative impact to internal reputation
- Job security

PERSONALIZATION IN THE DIGITAL SPACE: *Create authentic messaging relevant to a specific audience*

Understanding how your audience uses technology - email, social media, and websites - is going to empower you to create, deliver and measure targeted messaging that resonates with them. The more relevant your communication, **the more likely your message will engage somebody and get them to think about your services as a potential fit for their needs.** There are many marketing automation platforms (MAPs) available. This technology can help you have personalized interactions at scale. MAPs can:

- Deliver branding materials that are customized for a target audience.
- Offer dynamic content suggestions based on reading behavior.
- Create improved customer experiences.

If you want to avoid fancy high-tech options, you can employ simpler tactics, such as properly segmenting your email list. This will allow you to communicate more effectively and provide insight into who is paying attention to you. Digital tools allow you to have meaningful conversations with existing constituents and increase the retention of active clients.

THE POSITIONING STATEMENT: *Address the benefits, differentiators, and features*

A positioning statement is not about you; it's about what you can do for your audience. Many firms have opening statements about their credibility, commitment, or experience. Instead, **make your positioning statement focus on how you solve your clients' problems.** By creating an effective positioning statement that defines your firm's key benefits, features, and differentiators, you will elevate your reputation as an industry leader, increase memorability within the market, and boost your bottom line.

- **Benefits:** the value your practice delivers to your clients and how you will solve a problem or help a client achieve their goal.
- **Features:** a characteristic of your practice that describes what it does. Be clear about the services you offer, the area in which you practice, and any other defining characteristics of your market niche.
- **Differentiators:** a distinguishing feature of your firm or practice that sets you apart. Avoid generic descriptions like ‘we build strong relationships with clients’ (doesn’t every firm?) and instead, use memorable language that shows you’ve put time into understanding the industry you serve: ‘we have one of the most diverse teams in our vertical, and employee retention is three times better than the industry average,’ or ‘we prosecute sexual assault cases, and our attorneys are trained in trauma-informed methodologies.’

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: *Create your unique positioning statement today*

You’ve identified your target market and understand the benefits, features, and differentiators of your practice. You’re ready to draft your positioning statement. Our example below will help you get started.

Example: You are an intellectual property firm focused on biotech. You are seeking clients in small incubator labs as well as clients in large pharmaceutical companies. Maybe you support the CEO of a small start-up doing their first USPO filing.

Example Positioning Statement: We serve high-growth and start-up clients who are at the cutting edge of innovation. We understand the need to move fast, pull ahead of the pack and inspire. By embedding closely with our client’s teams, we assist biotech and life science organizations, from university research departments to startups and mid-market companies, realize the professional and financial rewards of bringing new products to market.

RESULTS: *How to know your positioning statement is communicating effectively*

You can measure the effectiveness of your positioning statement in several ways, from client interviews to focus groups. A simpler, quicker way may be to ask your partners, colleagues in other practice areas of your firm, family, friends, and neighbors what your firm does. Do they reply with something close to what you had in mind? If the answer is, ‘well, you’re a lawyer,’ then you still have work to do.

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A content marketing strategist, Leslie embraces the power of good data and combines analysis with a solid understanding of clients' business goals. Through a combination of messaging that resonates and data that informs, she deploys smart SEO tactics that support the strategic goals of every marketing, public relations and content campaign. Leslie can be reached at leslie@furiarubel.com.

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