

Market Positioning as a Driver of Value Creation

Introduction

Every great company begins with potential – a product breakthrough, a spark of innovation, or a bold idea. But in markets crowded with sameness, potential alone doesn't build belief, scale, or lasting value. What separates companies that achieve breakout success from those that stall isn't just the quality of their product or the speed of their execution; It's how they position themselves in the market – how they show up, how they're understood, and how they're believed in.

This paper is written for founders, CEOs, and boards navigating the challenges of growth – whether early ventures clarifying their story for scale, growth-stage companies repositioning for the next wave, or mature firms reframing themselves ahead of exit. It lays out six principles of effective market positioning, illustrated with real-world examples and practical guidance on how to apply them.

Market positioning is often misunderstood as a “marketing job.” In reality, it is one of the most powerful levers of enterprise value creation. Done well, it connects a company's future ambitions with the perceptions of customers, partners, employees, and investors. It builds trust before scale, broadens appeal beyond the immediate niche, and helps companies claim an ownable space in the market that allows them to grow faster, raise smarter, and exit stronger.

Why positioning is more than marketing

Introduction



Clive Lennox spent over a decade at Silicon Valley Bank, leading growth capital relationships across EMEA and the US. He has worked directly with hundreds of venture-backed companies and their investors, seeing first-hand how clarity of story and market positioning influences funding outcomes, strategic decisions, and enterprise value.



Jason McNamee brings two decades in brand and positioning strategy, most recently as Executive Director at McCann London. He has helped shape the narratives of some of the world's most iconic brands – including Microsoft, Pernod Ricard, Just Eat & Aldi – as well as many disruptive early-stage ventures finding their first market footholds.

About the authors

Together, they founded The Tomorrow Partnership to bring capital expertise and market positioning under one roof – because in today's markets, value creation happens at the intersection of the two.

1. ANCHOR TO FUTURE GROWTH, NOT JUST TODAY'S PRODUCT

Too many companies position themselves around what they sell today, rather than the trajectory they are on. The problem with this approach is that it limits perception. Investors, customers, and talent are not buying into today's product alone – they are buying into the company's ability to grow, adapt, and lead tomorrow.

Why it matters

Investors consistently state that their funding decisions are based as much on future potential as on current performance. Customers, too, are drawn not just to what a company sells now, but to the story of where it's going. If a company positions itself narrowly around current features, it risks being typecast as a commodity supplier. If it positions itself around the future impact it intends to create, it builds belief, momentum, and resilience. A McKinsey study of 3,000 growth companies found that those who consistently outperformed peers in valuation multiples were those who communicated a clear vision of category leadership rather than simply listing current features

Example: Tesla

Tesla did not position itself as a car manufacturer. From the beginning, it positioned itself as a company driving the transition to sustainable energy. The Roadster, Model S, and Model 3 were products along that journey – but the positioning was anchored to the future: an energy transition the company would lead. This future-oriented story was key to Tesla raising billions in capital even when its financial performance was precarious.

Contrast this with Better Place, an electric vehicle charging company founded in 2007. It positioned itself narrowly as a battery swap network. Despite raising \$850 million, it failed to inspire belief in its broader role in the energy transition. It collapsed in 2013. The difference? One positioned as a leader of the future; the other as a vendor of today.

Six Principles for Market Positioning That Accelerates Growth & Enterprise Value

1. ANCHOR TO FUTURE GROWTH, NOT JUST TODAY'S PRODUCT

Practical Guidance

For founders, this means asking:

1. Does our positioning describe only what we do now – or the bigger change we're driving?
2. Would our narrative still resonate if our current product pivoted?
3. Are we anchoring our story in a future outcome customers and investors believe in?

A useful exercise is to draft two positioning statements: one describing your product today, and another describing the impact your company will have in five years. If the latter is not front and centre of your narrative, you may be positioning too narrowly.

Application

- In investor decks, elevate beyond product-market fit to category leadership potential.
- In customer messaging, connect functional benefits to long-term impact.
- In internal culture, frame the mission as building towards future leadership, not just delivering current features.

The Value Creation Link

Anchoring positioning to the future drives higher valuations by increasing perceived scalability and inevitability. It also broadens market appeal, attracting partners and customers who want to be aligned with the “future winner.” In short: positioning around tomorrow, not today, multiplies enterprise value.

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2. CARVE OUT A CATEGORY OF ONE

Every company faces competition. But the most valuable ones don't just compete within a category – they reshape the category around themselves. They carve out a “category of one”, where they become the natural choice not because they are incrementally better, but because they stand for something different altogether.

Why it matters

When companies compete only on product features or price, they become interchangeable with others. That leads to margin pressure, high customer acquisition costs, and difficulty sustaining long-term value. By contrast, companies that carve out unique market positions command premium pricing, enjoy customer loyalty, and attract investor belief in their defensibility.

Category leadership is also directly linked to valuation multiples. Bain & Company research shows that companies perceived as category leaders command 30–50% higher valuation multiples than peers. Investors pay more for companies they believe own their space.

Example: Oatly

Oatly began as a niche oat milk producer. Instead of competing with dairy on health claims or price, it repositioned itself as a lifestyle brand for the climate-conscious. The brand narrative was bold and distinctive – “It’s like milk, but made for humans” – reframing the entire conversation. The result? Oatly grew from a small Swedish business into a \$10bn global player, creating and owning the plant-based dairy category.

Example: Salesforce

When Salesforce launched, the CRM market was crowded with incumbents like Siebel. Instead of competing on features, Salesforce reframed the conversation around “No Software.” They weren’t just another CRM; they were pioneers of the SaaS model. That positioning created a category of one and positioned Salesforce as inevitable in the shift to the cloud.

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2. CARVE OUT A CATEGORY OF ONE

Practical Guidance

For founders, the challenge is to ask:

1. Are we competing on the same terms as everyone else, or have we redefined the game?
2. What category do we want to be remembered as having created, not just participated in?
3. If a competitor copied our product tomorrow, would our narrative still make us distinct?

A useful exercise: Write down your top three competitors' narratives. Now write down your own. If they sound similar – “faster,” “cheaper,” “smarter” – you are competing in noise, not carving out space. The goal should be to articulate a position only your company can own.

Application

- Define your “enemy”: the status quo or a competitor mindset you are replacing.
- Make your category explicit in messaging (e.g. “the first X,” “the only Y”).
- Bake the distinctiveness into every touchpoint – from product roadmap to investor deck.

The Value Creation Link

Owning a category of one creates pricing power, market share defensibility, and investor belief in long-term growth. It transforms companies from “better participants” to “natural leaders,” driving both revenue growth and valuation uplift.

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3. MAKE TRUST YOUR FIRST JOB

No company scales without trust. Yet one of the biggest reasons promising ventures fail is that they appear too small, too risky, or too much like a “science project.” Trust is not just earned over time; it is shaped by how you position yourself from day one.

Why it matters

In B2B especially, buyers and investors seek reassurance. They want to know the company they are backing won’t disappear tomorrow. The perception of scale – credibility, momentum, and maturity – often matters as much as scale itself.

Research from Edelman’s Trust Barometer shows that 70% of stakeholders say trust is the deciding factor in buying or investing in a new company. Lack of trust leads to higher churn, slower sales cycles, and investor scepticism. Conversely, companies that project stature and reliability attract customers, employees, and capital more easily.

Example: Stripe

When Stripe launched, it was essentially an API for payments – something many companies could technically build. But Stripe projected trust far beyond its stage. Its clean, developer-first brand, endorsements from influential investors, and early partnerships with credible platforms all helped it appear bigger and more reliable than it was. This trust narrative was pivotal in Stripe becoming a \$50bn+ company.

Example: Beyond Meat

Beyond Meat faced the challenge of being dismissed as “just another food fad.” To overcome scepticism, it invested heavily in credibility – clinical studies, partnerships with mainstream restaurants, and endorsements from athletes. This positioning shifted perception from “novelty” to “trusted future of protein,” fuelling its IPO at a \$1.5bn valuation.

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3. MAKE TRUST YOUR FIRST JOB

Practical Guidance

Founders should ask:

1. Does our narrative convey credibility and scale, or do we sound early and unproven?
2. What proof points (clients, partners, investors, endorsements) can we surface to build trust signals?
3. Does our design, tone, and messaging project maturity consistent with our ambition?

A practical step: Audit your external touchpoints (website, deck, LinkedIn). Ask an outsider to score whether it looks like a \$1m company, a \$10m company, or a \$100m company. If you look smaller than the value you're aiming for, you're creating unnecessary drag.

Application

- Prioritise proof points: case studies, partnerships, investors and team credentials.
- Invest early in professional brand design - visual maturity builds subconscious trust.
- Use your narrative to proactively address perceived risks (e.g., scalability, adoption, longevity).

The Value Creation Link

Trust directly influences valuation. Companies that look credible command better terms, reduce friction in sales, and shorten investor diligence. By projecting trust, companies accelerate growth and de-risk their story - multiplying enterprise value long before they've scaled in reality.

Six Principles for Market Positioning That Accelerates Growth & Enterprise Value

4. BUILD A NARRATIVE THAT TRAVELS ACROSS AUDIENCES

Many companies create narratives that work in one context but fail in another. They might have a customer story that sells product features but leaves investors unconvinced. Or they have a slick pitch for VCs but nothing that inspires employees or partners. True market positioning requires a narrative that travels – one that works for customers, partners, staff, and investors alike.

Why it matters

Growth doesn't happen in silos. Customers, employees, investors, and partners all interact with your story in different ways, but they should all walk away believing in the same core idea: why this company matters. A fragmented narrative confuses the market, weakens credibility, and slows growth. A cohesive narrative creates alignment across audiences, making it easier to scale trust, attract capital, and inspire teams.

Example: Airbnb

Airbnb's early positioning as "rent someone's spare room" appealed to budget travellers but limited broader adoption. Over time, it reframed its narrative around 'belonging anywhere'. That message resonated with travellers, hosts, regulators, and investors alike – uniting multiple audiences behind a single idea. By broadening and aligning its story, Airbnb scaled from niche service to global category leader.

Example: Revolut

Revolut started as a travel card offering cheap FX rates. Its narrative was narrow, appealing to travellers but not to the broader banking market. It evolved to position itself as the super app for money – a story that resonated with customers (all-in-one convenience), investors (category expansion), and talent (ambition to disrupt banking). That unified narrative was crucial in attracting over \$2bn in funding and millions of customers.

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4. BUILD A NARRATIVE THAT TRAVELS ACROSS AUDIENCES

Practical Guidance

Founders should ask:

1. Would our narrative inspire a customer to buy, an investor to fund, and a talented hire to join?
2. Does our story emphasise functional benefits, or does it express a bigger purpose that unites audiences?
3. Are we tailoring language for each audience while holding to one consistent core idea?

Exercise: Write your narrative in three versions – for customers, for investors, for staff. Circle the words that change, and underline the words that stay the same. The underlined words are your true positioning; the rest are audience framing.

Application

- Develop a single “north star narrative” that articulates impact, purpose, and trajectory.
- Tailor supporting proof points and language for each audience, without changing the core.
- Align leadership, comms, and culture to reinforce the same story everywhere.

The Value Creation Link

A narrative that travels reduces friction across growth levers — sales, hiring and fundraising. It ensures the market sees one consistent picture of your company’s potential, compounding belief and accelerating value creation.

Six Principles for Market Positioning That Accelerates Growth & Enterprise Value

5. ALIGN THE WHOLE BUSINESS

Positioning cannot live only in the brand or marketing team. It has to run through every facet of the business – product, customer experience, pricing, internal culture, and growth initiatives. Alignment is what makes positioning believable and powerful.

Why it matters

Investors and customers are quick to spot disconnects. If your story promises scale but your product roadmap doesn't support it, belief evaporates. If you claim to be premium but your pricing undercuts competitors, credibility is lost. If you say you're people-first but staff turnover is high, trust crumbles.

Misalignment between positioning and reality doesn't just weaken growth – it erodes value. Conversely, alignment makes a narrative not just believable, but inevitable.

Example: Monzo

Monzo positioned itself as the transparent, customer-first bank. That wasn't just a slogan – it aligned its entire business around it. Real-time spend notifications, transparent fees, and a culture of radical openness (including publishing outages publicly) all reinforced the positioning. This alignment made Monzo credible and trusted, fuelling adoption at scale and giving investors confidence in long-term growth.

Example: Allbirds

Allbirds built its positioning around sustainable comfort. But unlike legacy apparel brands that use sustainability as marketing veneer, Allbirds aligned every part of the business to deliver it. Materials were sourced innovatively (merino wool, sugarcane, recycled plastic), retail stores were designed with sustainability at their core, and pricing reinforced the premium-yet-accessible narrative. The result: Allbirds grew into a global challenger brand, appealing to eco-conscious customers, partners, and investors with a story they could believe in because it showed up consistently across the business.

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5. ALIGN THE WHOLE BUSINESS

Practical Guidance

Founders should ask:

1. Does every part of our business reflect the story we tell?
2. What elements of our culture, product, or pricing contradict our narrative?
3. Have we given teams clear principles for how to express the positioning in their work?

A useful step is to create “narrative principles” – practical guidelines for product, customer experience, hiring, and comms teams to deliver the positioning consistently.

Application

- Audit all business touchpoints (sales, website, onboarding, customer support, product roadmap, pricing).
- Identify misalignments between your narrative and delivery.
- Embed narrative principles into team objectives, product design, and culture.

The Value Creation Link

Alignment turns positioning into reality. It makes investors believe your trajectory is achievable, makes customers experience your story in every interaction, and makes employees live it. This consistency builds credibility and amplifies enterprise value.

Six Principles for Market Positioning That Accelerates Growth & Enterprise Value

6. THINK LONG-TERM MEMORY, NOT JUST SHORT-TERM CLICKS

In a world dominated by performance marketing, it's easy to obsess over immediate clicks and conversions. But research shows that 95% of buyers are out-of-market at any given time. Positioning and narrative aren't just about short-term performance – they're about building long-term memory structures so your company is the one people recall when they are ready to buy, partner, or invest.

Why it matters

If your positioning only focuses on short-term tactics, you're invisible to the 95% of future buyers and investors. Companies that invest in building memory, distinctiveness, and emotional connection create a moat of awareness and trust. When those buyers come into market, they're already predisposed to choose you.

Example: HubSpot

HubSpot coined and invested in the concept of inbound marketing. For years, most businesses weren't ready to buy its software. But by owning and educating the category, HubSpot became the company associated with the idea. When the market matured, HubSpot was the default choice, accelerating adoption and valuation.

Example: Octopus Energy

Octopus didn't try to outspend competitors on short-term ads. Instead, it built a narrative around fairer, greener energy, reinforced by customer-first service and transparency. This narrative stuck in the minds of customers and policymakers long before many were ready to switch. When energy markets shifted, Octopus was the brand that felt inevitable – a direct result of long-term memory building.

Six Principles for Market Positioning That Accelerates Growth & Enterprise Value

6. THINK LONG-TERM MEMORY, NOT JUST SHORT-TERM CLICKS

Practical Guidance

Founders should ask:

1. Are we building a narrative that will matter in 3–5 years, or are we chasing clicks today?
2. Do we show up in a way that people will remember, even if they're not ready to buy now?
3. Does our positioning connect emotionally, not just rationally?

Application

- Balance short-term sales messaging with long-term brand storytelling.
- Invest in distinctive brand assets (tone, design, narrative) that create memory.
- Build thought leadership or education programs that keep you front of mind.
- Measure not just conversions, but recall and preference over time.

The Value Creation Link

By investing in long-term memory, companies become the obvious choice when buyers or investors come into market. This increases efficiency, reduces customer acquisition costs, and boosts valuation multiples – because you're not just seen as an option, you're remembered as the leader.

Six Principles for Market Positioning That Accelerates Growth & Enterprise Value

CLOSING THOUGHTS – TURNING POSITIONING INTO VALUE

Every founder knows the challenge of scale isn't just building a great product, it's building belief. The companies that grow fastest and command the highest valuations aren't always the ones with the most advanced technology or deepest pockets — they are the ones that own a space in the market, tell a story that people rally behind, and deliver it consistently across every touchpoint.

Positioning and narrative are not cosmetic exercises. They are strategic tools of value creation. A unique and defensible market position makes you harder to ignore and easier to believe in. A sharp, compelling narrative accelerates customer adoption, strengthens investor conviction, and inspires talent. Alignment across the business makes it real. Together, these forces transform potential into momentum – and momentum into enterprise value.

The principles in this paper are not just ideas. They are practical levers every founder and leadership team can act on:

- Carve out a category of one.
- Build a narrative that connects both emotionally and commercially.
- Align every function of the business behind that story.
- Keep evolving your position as markets and audiences shift.

Do this well, and positioning doesn't just help you sell more. It helps you grow faster, attract better capital, retain stronger teams, and ultimately exit at a higher multiple.

At The Tomorrow Partnership, this is the lens through which we view every business we work with: how to shape positioning and narrative as a driver of growth and value creation, not as a marketing exercise.

For ambitious companies, the message is simple: don't wait until you need investment, or until growth slows, to sharpen your positioning. The earlier you embed it, the more powerful it becomes. Positioning is not an event; it's a discipline. And the companies that treat it that way are the ones that compound value over time – becoming the obvious choice for customers, partners, investors, and acquirers alike.

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