



Competitive Analysis Supercharges PR Results for Industrial and High-Tech Companies

Better focused positioning, expanded branding, increased market share, more qualified leads and reduced cost of marketing - these are some of the benefits that competitive analysis, when used in PR, can bring to industrial and high-tech companies.

In the 1980's and 1990's advertising was king for industrial and high-tech companies. But times have changed, and now PR has moved to center stage. For industrial and high-tech companies, the most effective form of PR is feature stories. If a company is not getting consistent feature stories running in its target market publications then its marketing effort is running at sub-level, and it is letting its market share and leads go to the competition.

In today's competitive environment, industrial and high-tech companies need a powerful feature story print PR effort to drive their marketing machine. Twenty to thirty feature stories running per year, 75 to 80 pages of dedicated feature editorial, along with one or two cover stories, is what it takes to entrench a company's positioning in its markets and create the long-term stability needed to ensure viability. Instead of losing market share, the company will be taking market share from its competitors faster than they can replace it, no matter how many ads the competition runs in trade pubs.

Sound speculative? It is not. A growing number of large industrial and high-tech companies worldwide have discovered this and are successfully doing it right now. It is working.

Competitive Analysis: What lies behind this is the concept of competitive analysis. Competitive analysis is the system of thoroughly examining, analyzing, viewing, compartmentalizing, and to a marked degree influencing forces competitive to one's company, products and services.

Competitive analysis employs an in-depth inspection of competitive forces to improve positioning, allowing a company to better focus its positioning relative to its competition and more effectively gain market share in targeted markets. When applied to public relations, the results are tremendous.

For industrial and high-tech companies, competitive analysis streamlines and intensifies PR activities, increases the potential for market share in core and secondary markets, and makes overall marketing far more cost effective.

But, the subject of competitive analysis is seldom well implemented into the marketing fabric of industrial and high-tech companies, much to their detriment.

It is popular, yet foolish, for many companies to expound that competition is something they need not consider. Various reasons are given such as, "No one has a product line like ours to warrant being considered competition." or, "We just concentrate on doing our job, we really don't care what anyone else is doing." or, "We are the market leader, the others can't touch us." These are statements typically originating from misinformed executives. From a competitive analysis viewpoint, these statements reflect a perception of unreality towards the markets they are attempting to approach and an underestimation of the magnitude of the competitive forces in those markets.

No company, industrial, high-tech or other, can be successful if it is not perceiving and dealing with the reality of competition. Much of the marketing difficulty faced by industrial and high-tech companies stems from a deficiency in controlling competitive advances.

Yet companies, rather than looking at the reality of a competitive problem, misdiagnose it, and attempt arbitrary, opinionated and largely useless marketing and sales "remedies" based on little or no empirical data. The ability to resolve the complex problems of competitive issues requires a set of analytic tools not found in MBA college curriculums or in marketing texts from bookstores.

Not many industrial and high-tech companies have a clear understanding of what competitive analysis might encompass. At best, industrial and high-tech companies, even the big ones, do a short-sighted look into their competitors' offerings. And, their PR firms and ad agencies have historically offered little insight.

In competitive analysis, everything critical to the competition's marketing potential is isolated. This includes their product and service offerings, acceptability and desirability of their products and services by their target markets, their stated positioning versus their actual market-perceived positioning including sub-market categories, and a comparative of competitor strengths and weaknesses.

Competitive Positioning: Competitive analysis is instrumental, actually critical, to the development of a truly workable competitive positioning which will subsequently be used as the fundamental driving concept in all of a company's marketing and PR efforts. Yet, we see a widespread epidemic of bad competitive positioning found liberally amongst industrial and high-tech companies of all sizes. Most notable is the lack of adequate differentiation between competitor positions within the same markets, and the high volume of clearly weak, easily usurped positions being put forth.

Companies have a tendency to either overextend or undervalue their positioning, which can reveal critical weaknesses in both a company's positioning and that of competitors. Competitive analysis helps locate these weaknesses and provides a detailed reality on their actual market positions. This enables a company to see positioning options which it likely would not have seen prior and to assess the viability of these options. It allows a company to modify its existing positioning for greater marketing advantage and to become more differentiated from its competitor's positions. Competitive analysis also opens up opportunities for the diminishing of a competitor's positioning.

There are a number of criteria which determine the strength of a competitive positioning. For example, if a company's positioning can be easily usurped by a competitor, it is a poor positioning. A positioning too similar to a competitor's is a weak positioning. The ability to diminish the position of a competitor by reducing the value of the competitor's category is a valid quality in a positioning. A positioning which can re-assign the position of a competitor to a different market category is a strong feature in a competitive positioning. And, of course, it is a given that a strong positioning should embody and strengthen the core attributes of the company and brand, and should convey that they are a leader in the category in some aspect.

A competitive positioning must not only establish the strength of a company or brand, it also must create or advance its category, be difficult to usurp and must allow a significant degree of influence over the positions of competitors. Only then can it be considered a strong positioning. But, few industrial and high-tech companies ever approach this high level of positioning strength.

After the most optimum positioning is determined, it is then intertwined into the fabric of the feature stories being written. A powerful positioning woven throughout a series of excellent feature stories provides an incredibly powerful marketing tool that will effectively shift market opinion en masse in the company's direction, while eroding its competition's position in the market.

A company may get a feature story made available to them now and then by a publication. Within a company, engineers, sales managers and presidents sometimes prepare feature stories. If these stories do not contain the right positioning, based upon sound competitive analysis and subsequent positioning analysis, they will not be very successful, they will not diminish the influence of the competition, and they will not deliver significant market share. For industrial and high-tech companies, competitive analysis provides a surefire platform to build successful PR campaigns.

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This article was excerpted from Jim McMahon's upcoming book

"Ultra-Positioning in Industrial & High-Tech PR"

About the Author

Jim McMahon is president and senior writer of Zebra Communications, America's most published industrial and high-tech PR firm. His feature stories have graced the industry and covers of thousands of industrial and high-tech magazines published throughout the world. McMahon also developed Ultra-Positioning™, a system using in-depth competitive analysis to improve positioning, allowing a company to better focus its positioning relative to its competition to more effectively gain market share in its target markets. He is releasing a how-to, practical manual on the subject entitled "Ultra-Positioning in Industrial & High-Tech PR", as well as a second book, "27 Tips for Writing and Placing the World's Best Industrial & High-Tech PR", both available in early 2009 through Zebra Communications.

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▼ 2009 (24)

- ▶ April (1)
- ▶ March (2)
- ▶ February (15)

▼ January (6)

Industrialmarketingtalk issue 36

Latest big name signs up for Process Engineering L...

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...

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▶ 2008 (68)

▶ 2007 (46)

▶ 2006 (43)

▶ 2005 (3)