



YOUR 8-STEP COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

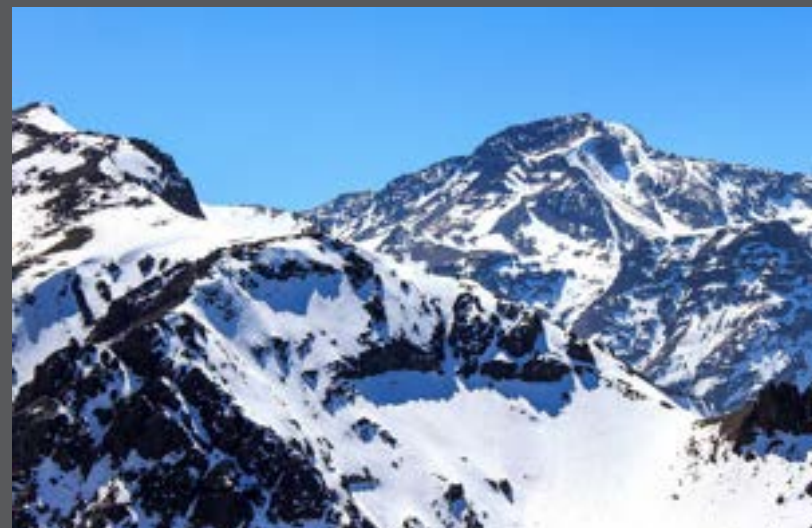
A Step-by-Step Guide | 2.0

A B2B PR INSIGHT



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A person stands on a rocky riverbank, looking out over a rushing river in a forested valley. The scene is captured in a monochromatic pink/magenta color scheme. The river flows through a rocky bed, surrounded by dense evergreen forests on steep slopes. The person is positioned in the lower center of the frame, looking towards the river. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

An introduction to communication strategy

Communication strategy in a nutshell

Rooted in defined commercial goals, your communication strategy (comms strategy) tells you how you are going to deliver your business plan from a marketing communication perspective.

Led by senior stakeholders from across your business, it details your value proposition, sector priorities, target personas, and messaging which will propel your target audience into action.

Acting as your marketing communication compass, your comms strategy ensures all internal stakeholders are strategically aligned. This will leverage each and every engagement with your target audience and accelerate your commercial goals.



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1/ INVOLVING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

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Recruiting your taskforce

A board level champion is essential or the change that your strategy demands in order to succeed, simply won't happen.

To develop an effective comms strategy, you need experienced, expert and insightful departmental leads to collaborate.

Complete the table overleaf with your ideal taskforce, detailing why each stakeholder has a valuable contribution to make - be specific. Your reasons can be practical or emotional, or both, all are valid.



Your taskforce

ROLE/EXPERTISE	NAME	RATIONALE
Board Champion		
Customer Service		
Commercial		
Product Development		
Marketing		
Sales		

Recruit with flattery

Having identified your ideal taskforce, you need to send out formal invitations. This invitation needs to be expressed with gravitas.

When you invite the participants, make sure they understand why you have asked them. Share your dream team with all participants together with your rationale. This will help them to understand how important you regard both the project and the value you believe they can contribute.

You may want to approach the people that you think will be the hardest to secure first so any adjustments to your list can be made with each confirmation.



The background of the slide is a photograph of a beach scene, tinted in a solid pink color. It shows waves breaking on a sandy shore with a large rock in the foreground. The text is centered over this image.

2/ THE COMMERCIAL CONTEXT

Understanding the sales requirement

The purpose of the comms strategy is to help you deliver the business plan. This will almost certainly involve the delivery of new business - either from existing or new customers; so filling the sales funnel with valuable potential contacts will be critical.

For this reason, we start by documenting the sales objectives for the next financial quarter and capturing the number and types of leads that sales would like to receive via marketing. The worksheet on the following page will help you capture this.

The comms strategy taskforce will use the sales requirement to keep the comms strategy focused and relevant.

The sales requirement

DATA	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Sales target				
Average deal value				
Win rate				
Av sales cycle duration/months				
Number of leads required				
Other #1				
Other #2				



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3/ VALUE PROPOSITION

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What is a value proposition

A value proposition is a simple statement that summarises what benefit someone will receive as a result of buying from you, that they cannot get elsewhere.

It captures why you exist and why your customers should care. Your value proposition should form the rallying point for everything the company says, does and develops. It keeps you focused and relevant.

A value proposition will:

1. Identify the most compelling benefit you offer.
2. Describe what makes this benefit valuable.
3. Identify your target customer's main problem.
4. Connect this value to your target customer's problem.
5. Differentiate you as the preferred provider of this value.

Constructing your value proposition

Don't expect this process to be quick or easy. Everyone will have a different perspective, particularly if you've got the right taskforce working on this project.

Unless you have been talking about this frequently, and recently, it is unlikely you will have an immediate consensus.

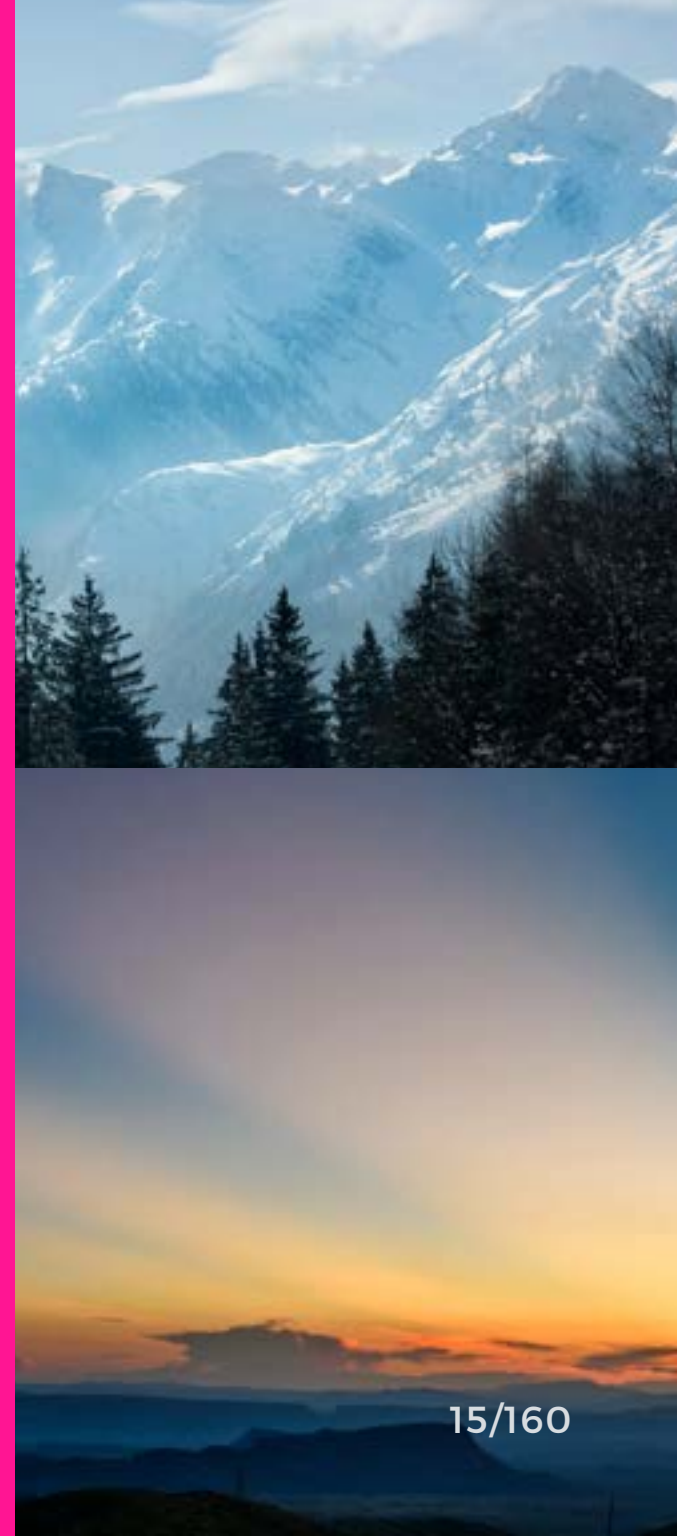
Challenge everyone to be **specific**, avoid multiple adjectives, and make sure you can evidence any claims you make.

Split your taskforce into two competing teams to see who develops the most credible and compelling value proposition. You could even imagine you're a start-up pitching to potential investors to raise funds - how can you inspire them?

Once you've identified the key elements, you can wordsmith it and make it flow - but start with identifying the right building blocks.

Value proposition tips

- **Company name:** This is self-evident!
- **Competitive category:** Describes the specific, recognisable sector in which you are competing for customers. Think: what sector would a customer say you work in?
- **Target audience:** Whose problem do you solve most often and with greatest success?
- **Benefit:** Having used your product or service, how do people think or feel better than they did before?
- **How do you do this:** This is the tricky one! What is your process, for delivering your benefit consistently? It is essential that you can evidence how you deliver your promise. Consider: Something which may have started as an intuitive behaviour and now needs to be captured in a process as your business grows.



Your value proposition

Replace the text in [brackets]. You can find some more tips overleaf.

[Your company name] is the only [competitive category] that provides [your target audience] with [practical or emotional benefit] by/with/through [how you achieve this].

Using your value proposition

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of articles telling you how to create your value proposition but few on how to use it. So here are some pointers:

1. Use it to evaluate whether a proposed new feature, product or service, reinforces or dilutes your value proposition. If it doesn't reinforce it, think very hard about why you need to invest in developing it.
2. Hardwire it into your customer service processes.
3. Make sure it's 'loud and proud' in your sales collateral, presentations and events.
4. Feature it on the home page of your website and link to case studies and testimonials which help to evidence your promise.
5. Use it to help you select which conferences and events to attend and what to speak about.
6. Use it to brief all your agencies - all your comms, content and campaigns should point to your unique point of difference.





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4/ TARGET SECTOR PRIORITISATION

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Priotitise, prioritise, prioritise

Unless you have bottomless pockets, you will need to prioritise your resources.

Identifying your target audience sweet spot is the most effective way of achieving this.

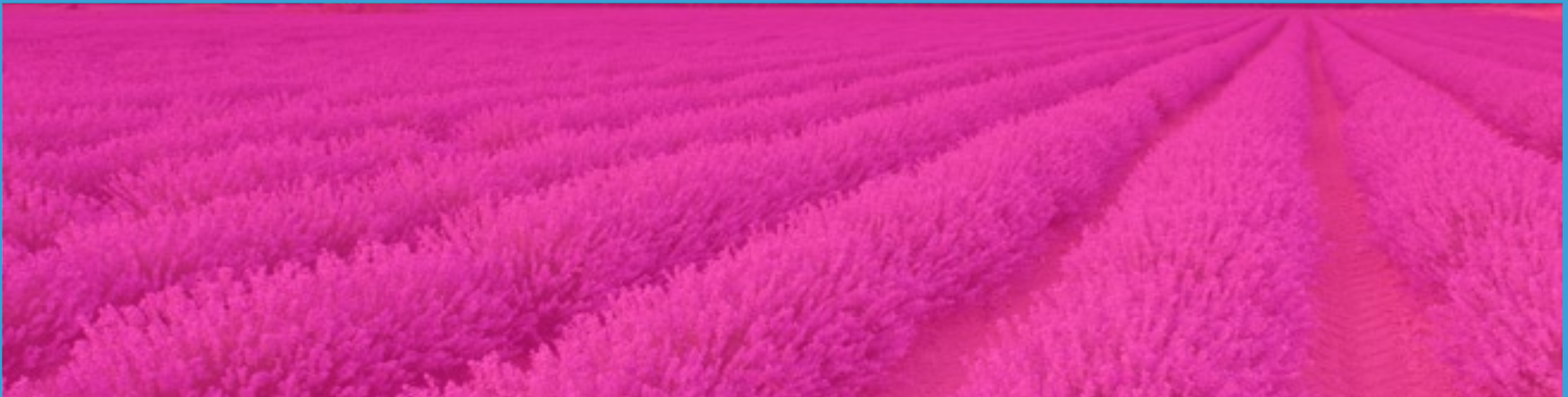
Start by gathering insight about your ideal customers by capturing the key characteristics:

- who they are - identify a target segment
- where they work - document business attributes
- why they are a good target - include psychological attributes

We call this exercise the sweet spot.

Who is your target market

Draft a sentence in the panel below, review in light of the tips overleaf.



A large, empty white rectangular box intended for drafting a sentence.

Sweet spot tips

- Avoid trying to be all things to all people - focus will shorten the sales cycle.
- The sweet spot consists of those most likely to buy your product or service - NOW.
- The sweet spot helps to clarify the opportunity, the problem you will solve.
- Companies don't make decisions, people do - for this reason we focus on responsibilities, not job titles.



Identifying your sweet spot

Who they are:

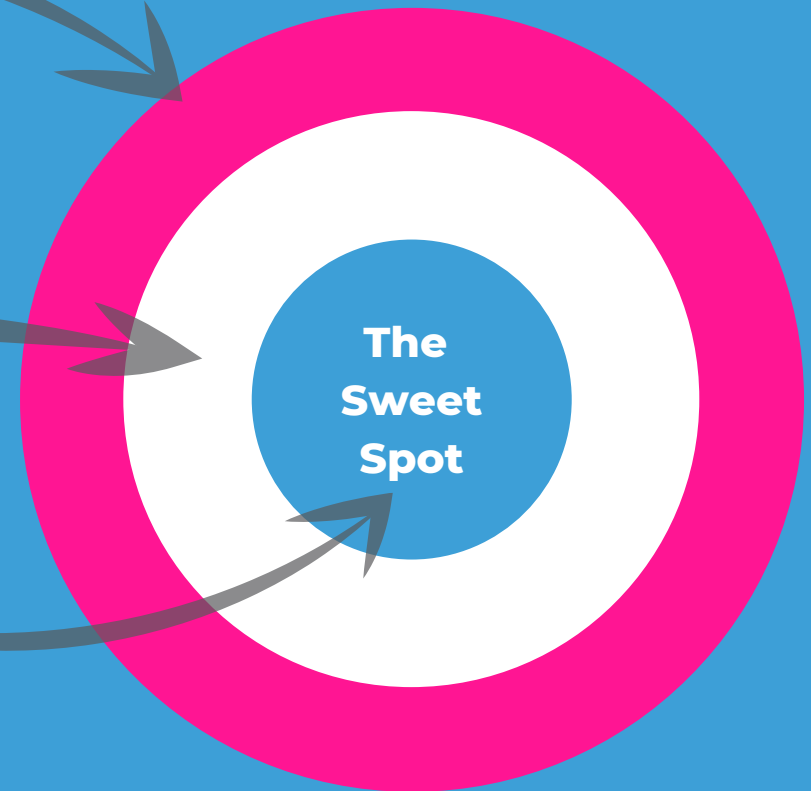
- Focus on responsibilities
- How do they refer to themselves?
- What problems are they experiencing?
- What goals & objectives do they share?

Where they work:

- Classify the segments along dimensions of relevance like industry, geography function
- Enterprise or SME
- How much business do they provide?

Why they are a good target:

- What are they thinking?
- Early adopters, part of the majority or market laggards
- Are they predisposed to your type of solution?
- Do they need to be educated?



Sweet spot example

Who they are:

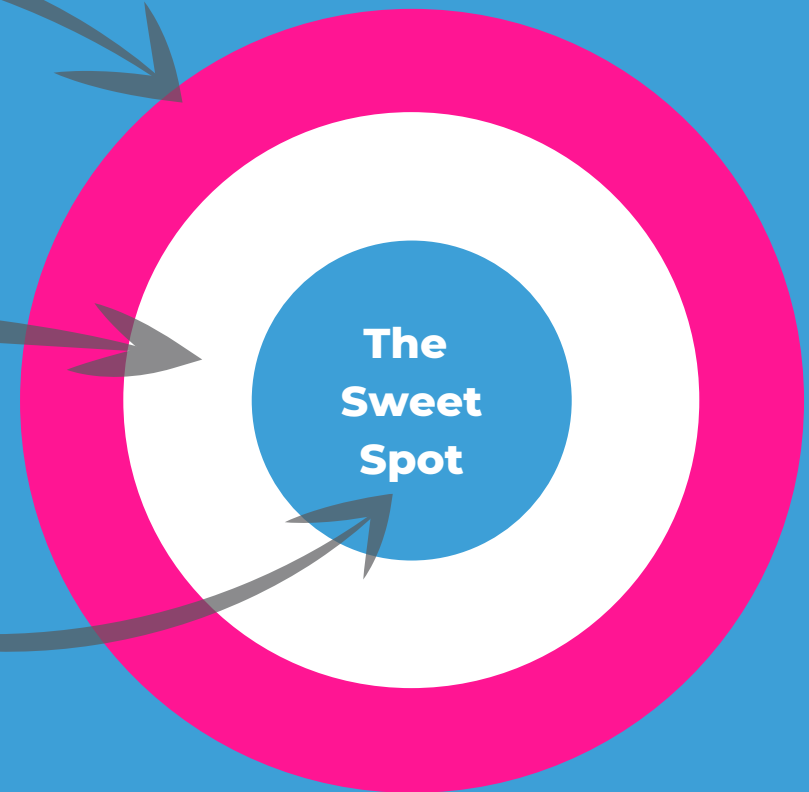
- IT leaders (executives and influencers) who are responsible for architecting and managing their evolving network in order to ensure that it supports business priorities today and tomorrow.
- Network architects, not network engineers

Where they work:

- Within the installed base, current customers
- Fortune 500 enterprises at the divisional level, not HQ
- Mid-sized businesses, up to 2,000 employees
- Emphasis on education, healthcare, retail verticals

Why they are a good target:

- Early majority
- IT leaders of new or expanding business offices, outlets, or other locations.
- They are already considering adding wireless access.



Brainstorming your sweet spot

Just some space to jot down some thoughts.

Who they are

Identify a target
segment

Where they work

New prospects or
current customers

Why they are a good target

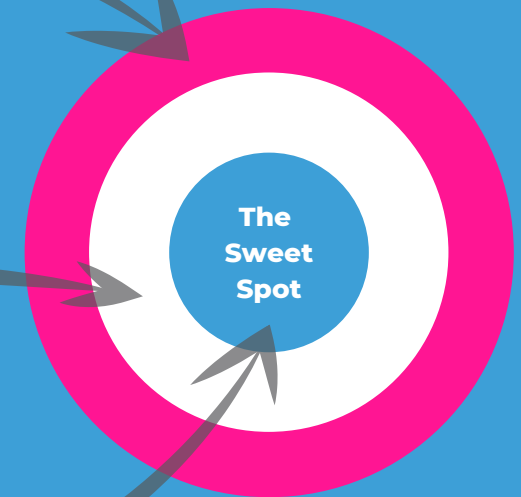
Add psychographics
to the mix

Your sweet spot

Who they are:

Where they work:

Why they are a good target:





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5/ TARGET PERSONAS

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Your target personas

A persona is a fictional representation of your target buyer. They are not real people but each persona description should be so complete that it feels like a real person.

Not every contact you engage with will have every attribute detailed in your target persona template; however, the closer they are to your ideal target persona, the faster the sale is likely to be because they are a best-fit target for your business product/service.

For each target buyer you now need to create a persona using the template overleaf. Make sure you complete every box in detail because you will be using the information to craft your messaging and plan your marketing campaigns further down the line.

If a section is empty, someone on the taskforce needs to take an action to find the information.

Persona template

Gender & Age	Education
Job title & key responsibilities	Role in purchase
Title & responsibilities	Professional aspiration (s)
What role do they play in the buying cycle?	What key problem of theirs can you solve?
Ideal company demographics & region	Values (what cultures and behaviours are important to this person)
Fears (significant concerns or drivers)	Pet peeves (professional irritations)
Information sources (where do they look for professional insight)	What's their memorable name? e.g. Strategic Sarah, Data Dave, Governance Gav

Target persona tips

- **Gender/age:** We may aspire for a 50/50 world but it doesn't exist yet. Be realistic about the gender and age, provide male/female splits. Why do we need this information? Men and women source information differently.
- **Title/Responsibilities:** In the sweet spot exercise we asked you to ignore job titles. However, if you identified a job title cluster include it here.
- **Role in purchase:** Identify whether they are the decision maker or influencer and whether there are any interdependencies.
- **Ideal company profile:** Be specific - where should we lay our bets?
- **Values:** Avoid generic features. See complete persona example overleaf
- **Visual representation:** As part of bringing the persona to life, find an image or caricature to represent this person.





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6/ POSITIONING STATEMENTS

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Speak to the heart of your target customer

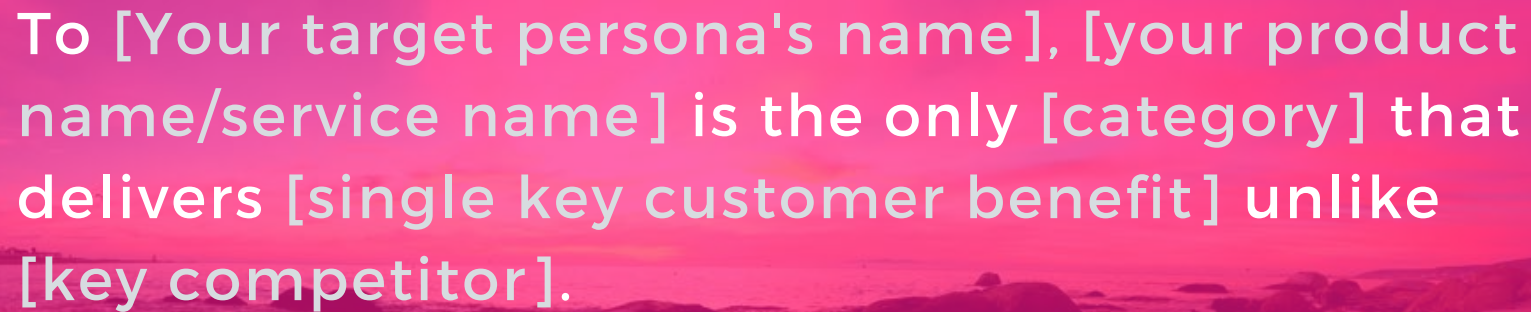
A positioning statement is a subset of the value proposition which speaks directly to the heart of the individual target persona.

It defines the target audience, the product and its category, as well as a single specific benefit that is differentiable from the nearest competitive alternative.

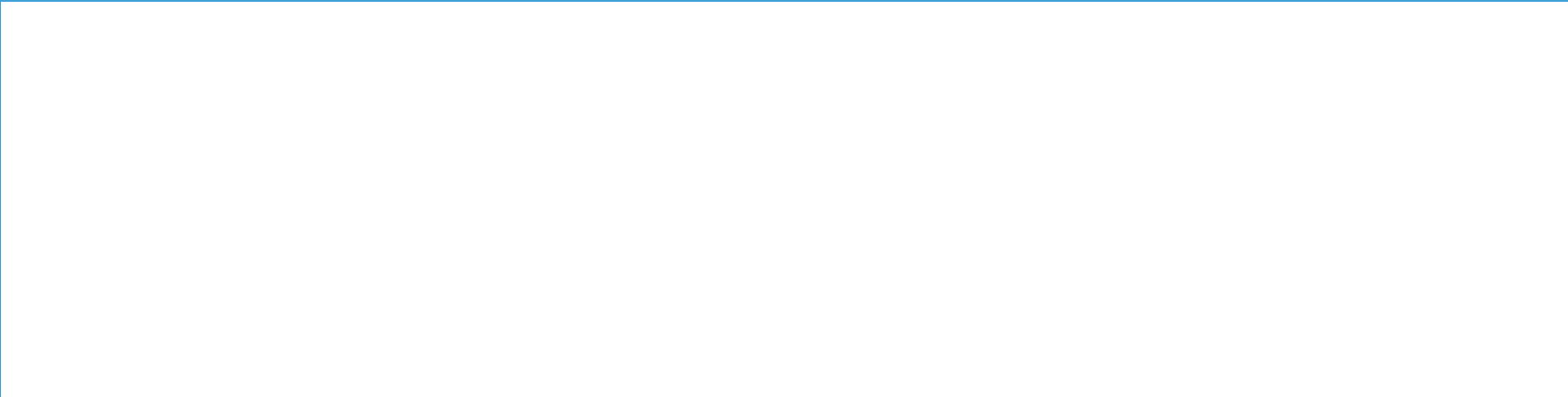
You need a positioning statement for each product, service or sub-brand. It is also a very useful tool to establish whether there is any space in the market for a new product idea.

Positioning statement template

Replace the text in [brackets]. You can find some more tips overleaf.

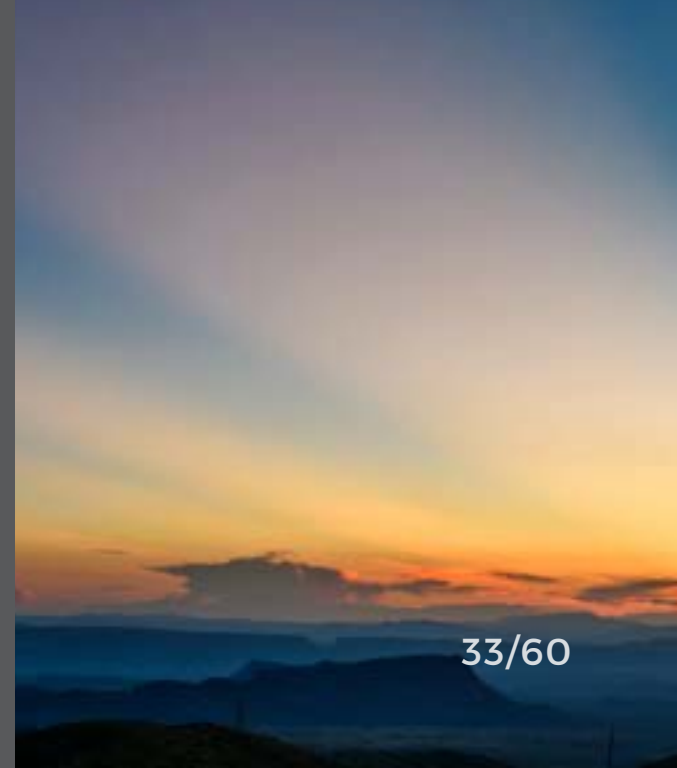
A rectangular box with a pink-to-purple gradient background. Inside the box, there is a faint, low-contrast image of a beach with rocks and waves. The text is centered within this box.

To [Your target persona's name], [your product name/service name] is the only [category] that delivers [single key customer benefit] unlike [key competitor].



Positioning statement tips

- Usage: A positioning statement is an internal statement to give marketers a shared view of the market. It is not a slogan, tag line or de facto message to be repeated to customers.
- Singularity: Avoid a long list of features disguised as benefits. Features do not equal benefits and customers do not care equally about every benefit. Don't drown out the really compelling offer with the mundane.
- First amongst equals: Not every point of difference is important to a customer and trying to explain each point serves to confuse rather than clarify.
- Just what the customer values: Best practice focuses on just those elements that matter most to customers.
- Benefit: A true benefit answers the 'so what?' question and will have 5 key attributes:
 - It will be singular and specific
 - Relevant to your target customer
 - Sustainable
 - Believable
 - You can prove it





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7/ MESSAGING

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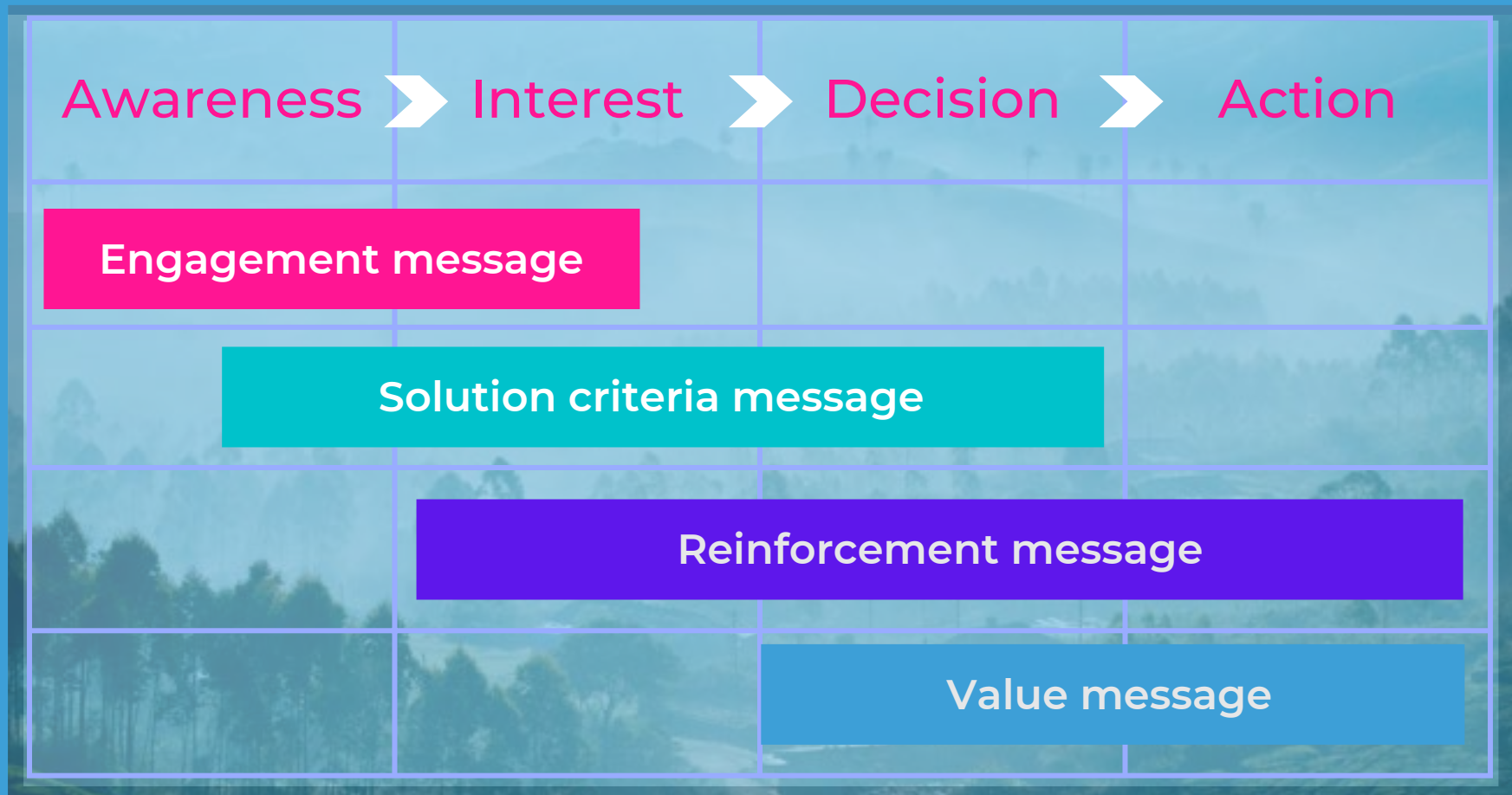
Who are you and why should I trust you?

Not every target persona knows that they have a problem you can solve and even if they did, if they are unfamiliar with your brand, why would they trust you anyway?

Our approach to messaging helps you to earn trust and build a relationship so the sale becomes a logical conclusion. We have adopted a framework that enables you to deliver the right type of message, at the right time in the relationship.

There are four well-documented stages in the buying cycle - awareness, interest, decision, and action. Our messaging framework is designed to reflect the wants and needs of the target persona in each phase - we call it the message box.

The message box phases



The message box



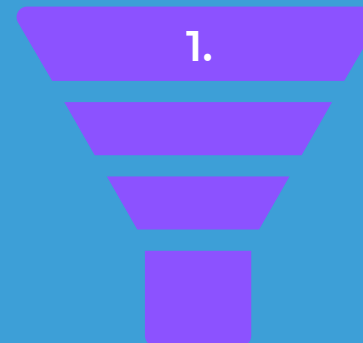
Engagement message

Your target persona has entered the buying cycle.

They are becoming aware they have an issue but they have not yet started considering possible solutions.

Your objective is to get them to see you as an expert who has an in depth understanding of their sector challenges.

This is not about flogging a solution or your brand but positioning yourself as an authority that they can trust.



Engagement message tips

- It's not about you: The engagement message is all about the target persona. What statement or question can you make that will grab their attention?
- Use their language: How do they describe their problem, opportunity or interest? Use their language to paint a picture of an issue they care about. (An issue you know you can solve, but they don't know that yet.)
- Be invisible: Do not mention your solution, company or brand name.
- Hint: Refer to the problem, need, fear factor, or pet peeves detailed in your persona - find a way to replay that key information.



Engagement message example

Your engagement message will be rooted in the following:

What issue of your target persona's will get their attention/What problem of theirs can you solve?

Below is an engagement message for a fictional jet lag remedy called FlyRight, aimed at a frequent flyer business executive.

Air travel is exhausting and takes a toll on your productivity. You're always on the go and can't afford not to be 100%, especially when your meetings begin as soon as you land.

Your engagement message

Your engagement message will be rooted in the following:



What issue of your target persona's will get their attention/What problem of theirs can you solve?

This is what you will use to build your narrative.



Solution criteria message

Your target persona is starting to investigate possible solutions to their issue.

This is where you help your target audience to better understand the specific nature of their challenges and begin to formulate the ideal solution – curbing your desire to reveal your self- interest.

Your challenge is to build trust by advising and guiding them through a myriad of possible options and highlighting the pros and cons of each, maintaining an independent stance, while steering them towards your solution as the ideal fit.



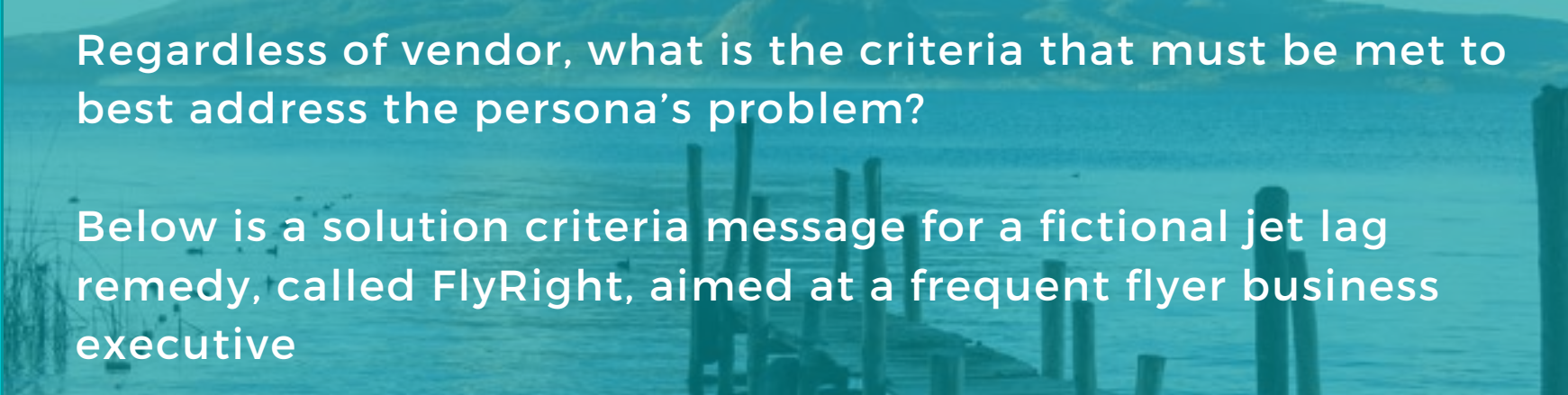
Solution criteria message tips

- It's still about them: The persona has a problem that needs to be solved. There will be a number of options available to them - view it from their perspective.
- Focus: The solution message is about helping them to develop a criteria checklist or set of conditions that must be met irrespective of vendor.
- Agenda setting: This is your opportunity to exercise some thought leadership and guide the persona towards essential criteria they should be considering - keep it concise!
- Hint: Harness the benefits and competitive differentiation you drafted in the positioning statement.



Solution criteria message example

Your solution message will be rooted in the following:



Regardless of vendor, what is the criteria that must be met to best address the persona's problem?

Below is a solution criteria message for a fictional jet lag remedy, called FlyRight, aimed at a frequent flyer business executive

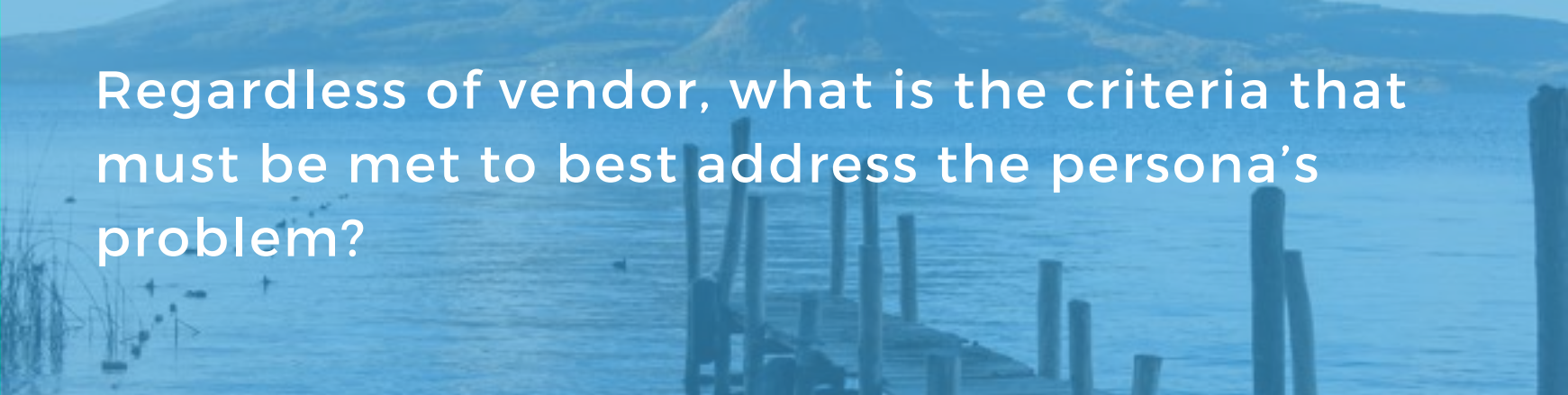
Frequent flyer business executives like you need to arrive at their destination feeling their best.

Passengers want to:

- *Land feeling energised*
- *Be immune from sick passengers*
- *Minimise jet lag symptoms*

Your solution criteria message

Your solution message will be rooted in the following:



Regardless of vendor, what is the criteria that must be met to best address the persona's problem?

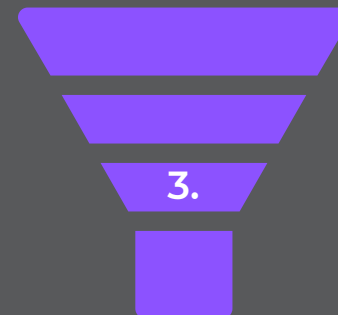


Reinforcement message

At long last, it's ok to talk about you and put your brand on a pedestal.

This stage is all about reinforcing, in the mind of your target audience, how your offering is the most desirable for addressing their specific needs.

If you have spent time nurturing them through phases one and two, this will be a logical progression of the conversation.



Reinforcement message tips

- Now - it's about you: You've set the context, now is the opportunity to state why your product or service is the best for meeting the solution criteria indicated in the solution message.
- Be concise: Avoid long lists. Three is usually the magic number!
- Hint: What is the one liner you want your persona to remember?



Reinforcement message example

Your reinforcement message will be rooted in the following:

Describe your solution and how and why it is the best option for addressing the solution criteria. Highlight the key points of differentiation.

Below is a reinforcement message for a fictional jet lag remedy, called FlyRight, aimed at a frequent flyer business executive

FlyRight helps you to hit the ground running.

- *FlyRight ensures good energy upon landing, with complete immune system support.*
- *We have an all-natural blend of 12 organic herbs that's safe, effective, and in an easy-to-take capsule form*
- *FlyRight has no side effects, eliminating the crash that comes after poor alternatives like drinking sodas or coffee, or the fog following a sleeping pill.*

Your reinforcement message

Your reinforcement message will be rooted in the following:



Describe your solution and how and why it is the best option for addressing the solution criteria. Highlight the key points of differentiation.



Value message

This is the close, the finesse. At this stage, the prospect is considering two options – you and one other.

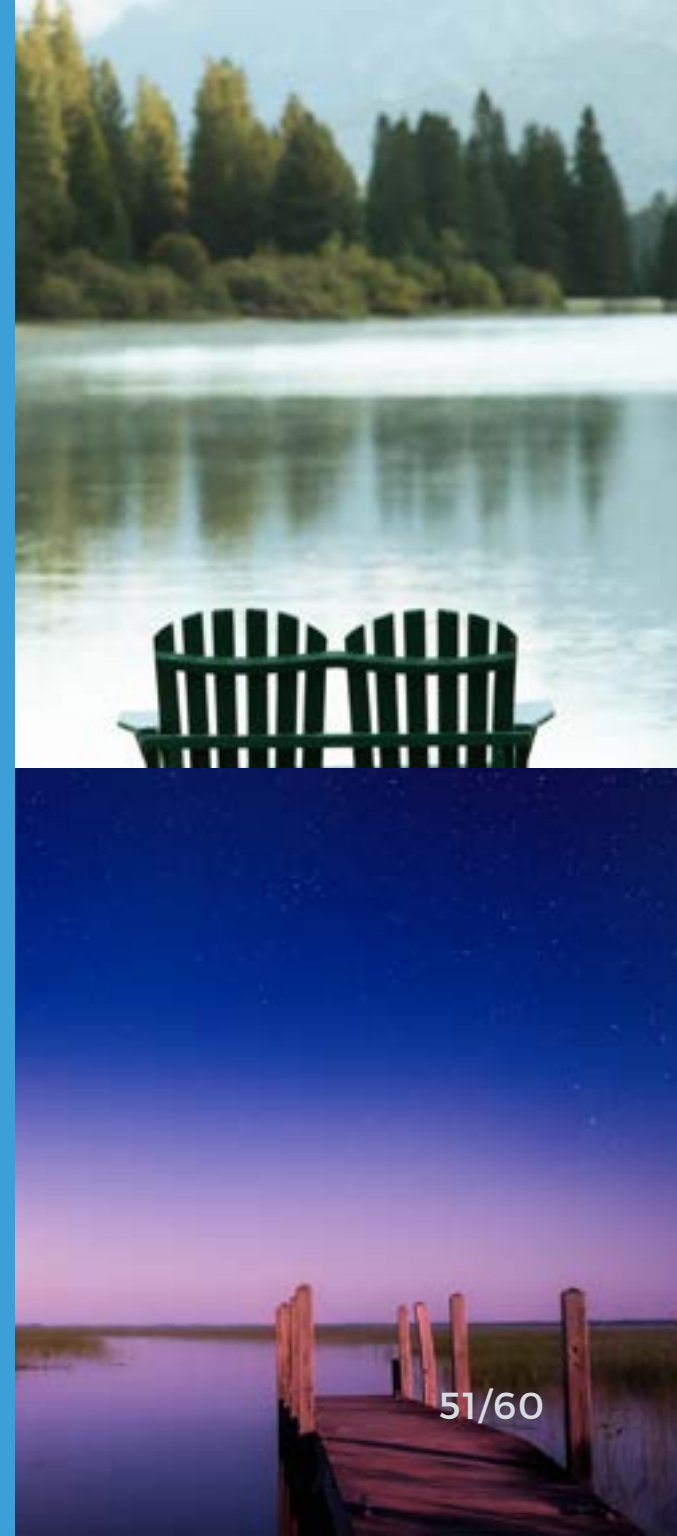
Relentless telephone calls and emails are not going to nudge you over the line. Your buyer needs metrics and case studies.

This phase is about communicating the value you can add, the successes you've delivered to other businesses and by shining a light on the advantage of working with you over anyone else – in specific regard to the problems they're addressing.



Value message tips

- Hint: Draw on customer references, third party endorsements and any other evidence you can draw down.



Value message example

Your value message will be rooted in the following:

As a result of implementing your offering, how will their life be better than before? This must include metrics that prove the value of your offering.

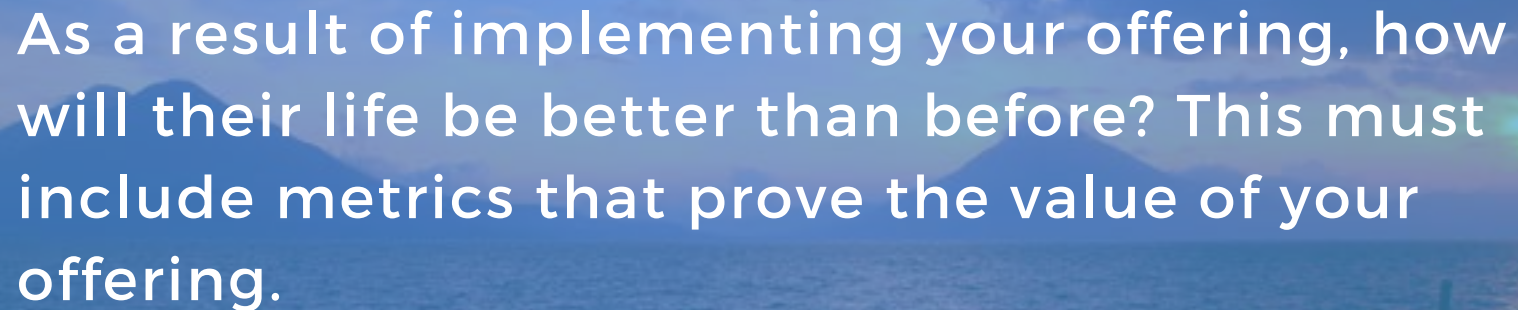
Below is a value message for a fictional jet lag remedy, called FlyRight, aimed at a frequent flyer business executive.

Now you can arrive feeling as clear and as sharp as when you left

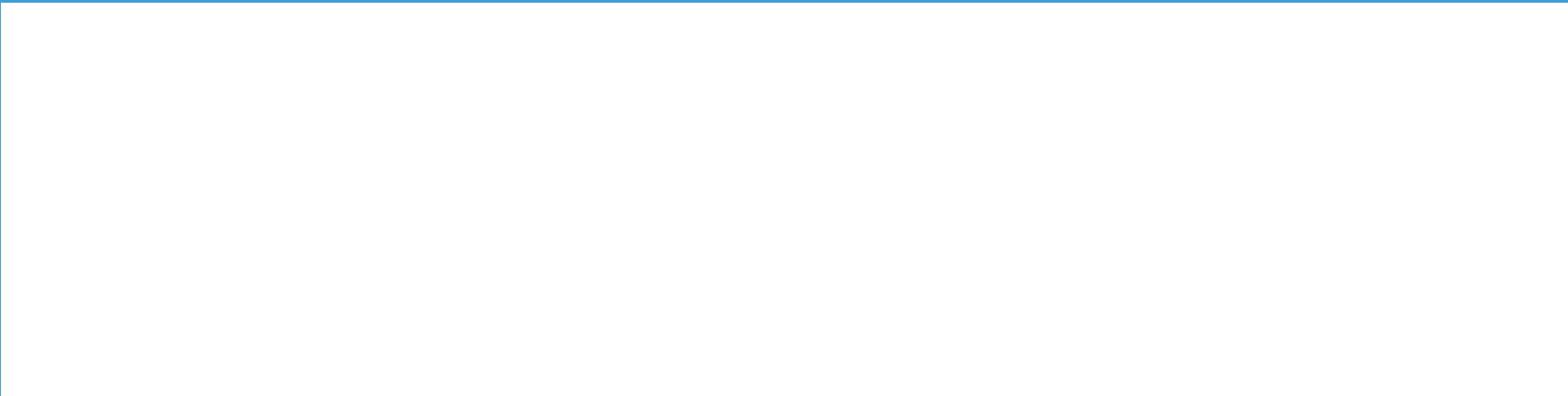
- FlyRight is the single most effective way to improve productivity while travelling across the country or around the world*
- Join the flight crews from leading airlines that have tested our product and trust it to keep them healthy and productive*

Your value message

Your value message will be rooted in the following:



As a result of implementing your offering, how will their life be better than before? This must include metrics that prove the value of your offering.





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8/ VALIDATION

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Don't take our word for it!

Once you have completed the first iteration of your communication strategy, validate it with a small group of trusted customers. This will give you confidence that you have a robust plan.

It will also give you the opportunity to test any assumptions you have made and fill any gaps in your knowledge regarding the personas you have created.

Listen closely to what your customers have to say and how they describe your strengths and weaknesses.

Make sure you pay particular attention to the language they use and use the feedback to refine and finalise your comms strategy.

On the next page we have provided question areas to help you structure your conversations to get the very best out of them.



Validation question areas

1. What was the issue or challenge you were trying to address before you discovered our company?
2. Describe your relationship with us; has that evolved or changed?
3. What are we like to work with?
4. What do you think is our greatest strength?
5. What other options did you consider before choosing to work with us?
6. What was your main reason for selecting us?
7. What do we do better than the alternatives you considered?
8. How could we improve our service/performance?
9. If you ran our company, what would you do differently to help it grow?
10. In your role what causes you the greatest concern or worry?
11. What do you think will be the biggest issue/talking point in the industry over the next 5/10 years?
12. Where do you go for your industry information?
13. Does the following statement resonate with you? (only do this for your VP &/or Engagement message)



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THE LAST WORD

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Activating your communication strategy

Once you have a fully validated strategy, the time has come to deploy it around the business.

Get the taskforce to introduce it to and embed it in their respective departments.

Conduct a marketing asset audit to make sure you're serving up each of your messages to your various target personas.

Use it as a briefing tool to inform all your marketing initiatives and branding requirements.

In our B2B PR Campaign Planning guide, we show you how to activate the Communication Strategy and develop PR campaigns designed to educate, inform and persuade.



With special thanks

And, finally the credits. We, at EC-PR, have been developing our approach to communication strategy since 2004.

In our messaging lab workshops, we facilitate multiple exercises to stimulate 'the little grey cells' - some of which we have developed ourselves, while others are drawn from expert sources.

The most recent iteration of our approach has been with the help of US marketing guru, [Michael J Gospe](#). Specifically, the Message Box has been adapted and developed from [The Marketing High Ground](#) Series, which is recommended reading!

Contact us

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At EC-PR we are passionate about B2B communication. We believe your work is amazing and we want to help you tell the world how extraordinary it is.



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