

PATHWAY B2B^{PR}

**YOUR 8-STEP
COMMUNICATION
STRATEGY**





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COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN A NUTSHELL

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Rooted in defined commercial goals, your communication strategy (comms strategy) tells you how you will 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.

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



STEP ONE

Involving the right
people



STEP ONE

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Involving the right people

YOUR TASKFORCE

Complete the table 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.

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

To develop an effective comms strategy, you need collaboration from departmental leads who are experienced, expert and insightful.

Role/Expertise	Name	Rationale
Board Champion		
Customer Service Lead		
Commercial		
Product Development Lead		
Head of Marketing		
Sales Lead		



RECRUIT WITH FLATTERY

Having identified your ideal taskforce, you should send formal invitations. These invitations need to be expressed with authenticity and 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 you think will be the hardest to secure first so any adjustments to your list can be made with each confirmation.

STEP TWO

The Commercial Context





STEP TWO

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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.

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				



STEP THREE

Value Proposition





STEP THREE

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Value Proposition

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 business pitching to potential investors to raise funds – how can you inspire them?

VALUE PROPOSITION TIPS

- **Company name:** This is self-evident!
 - **Competitive category:** Describes the specific, recognisable sector in which you compete 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 you do which may have started as an intuitive behavior 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 on the following page.

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

My Value Proposition:



USING YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION

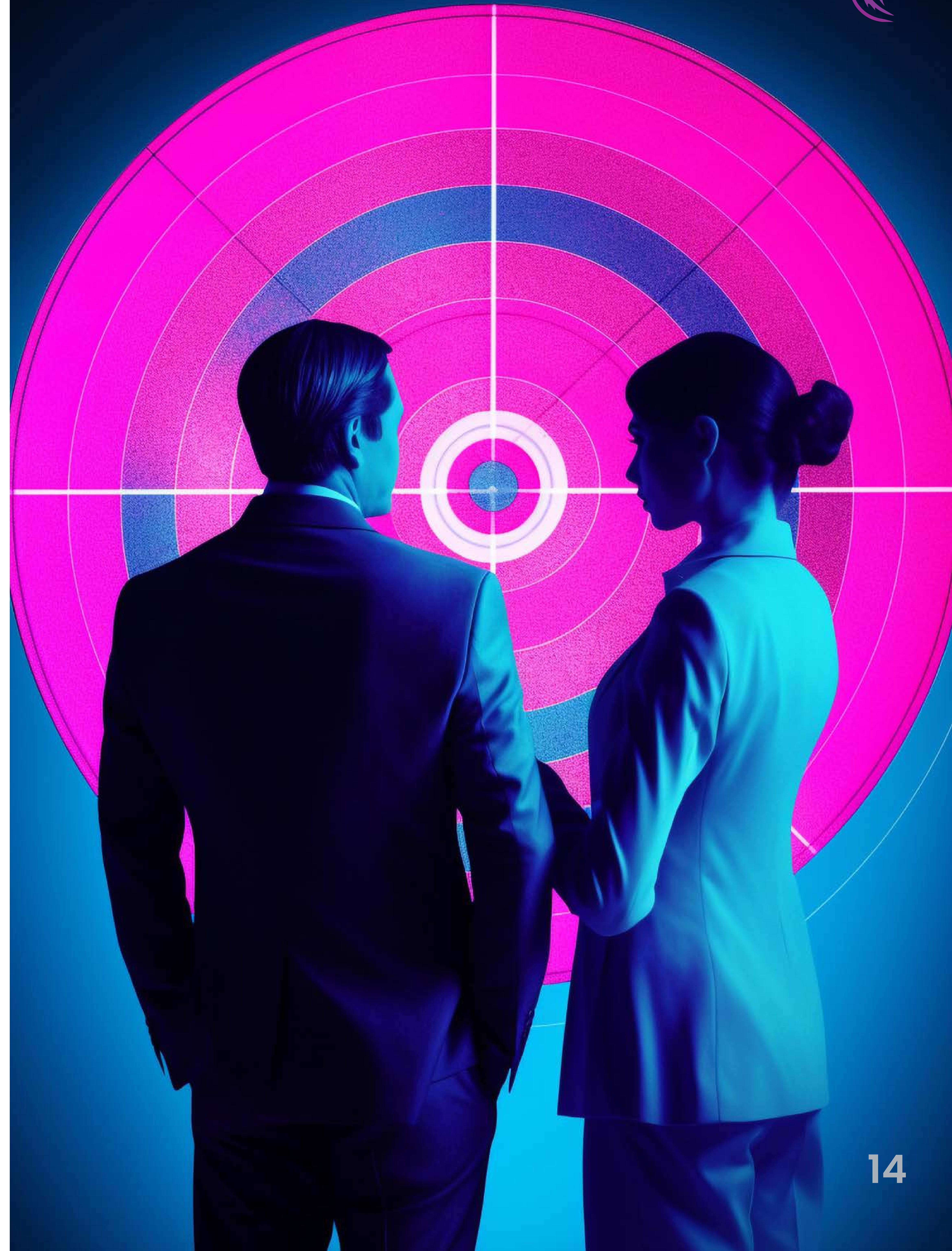
There are hundreds if not thousands of articles telling you how to create a value proposition but very few on how to use it. So here are some pointers:

- 1 Use it to assess whether a proposed new feature, product or service adheres to the implicit promise made in your value proposition. Does it reinforce or dilute your positioning?
- 2 Hardwire it into your customer service processes and employee performance reviews.
- 3 Feature a version of it on the home page of your website and link to case studies and testimonials which help evidence your promise.
- 4 Make it loud and proud in your sales collateral, presentations, and events.
- 5 Make it loud and proud in your sales collateral, presentations, and events.
- 6 Use it to brief your agency partners to make sure all your communication, content, and campaigns are aligned and elevating your point of difference.



STEP FOUR

Target Sector prioritisation





STEP FOUR

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Target Sector prioritisation

PRIORITISE, PRIORITISE, PRIORITISE.

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

Identifying your target audience's 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



STEP FOUR

PATHWAY

Target Sector prioritisation

WHO IS YOUR TARGET MARKET?

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

Who is your target market?

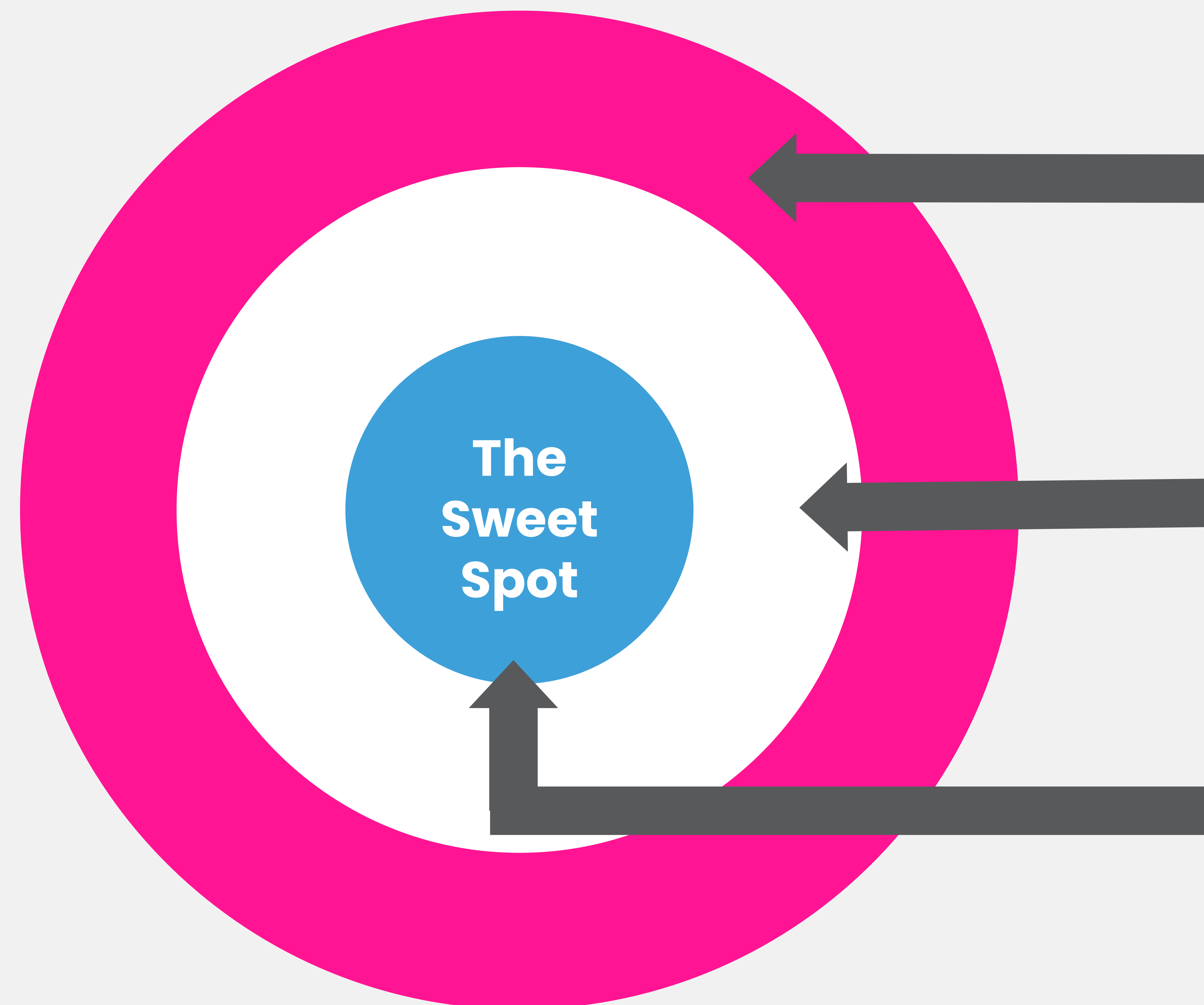


SWEET SPOT TIPS

- 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, that aligns with your business approach?
- Are they early adopters, part of the majority or market laggards?
- Are they predisposed to your type of solution?
- Do they need to be educated?



Who they are:

- IT leaders (executives and influencers who were 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.

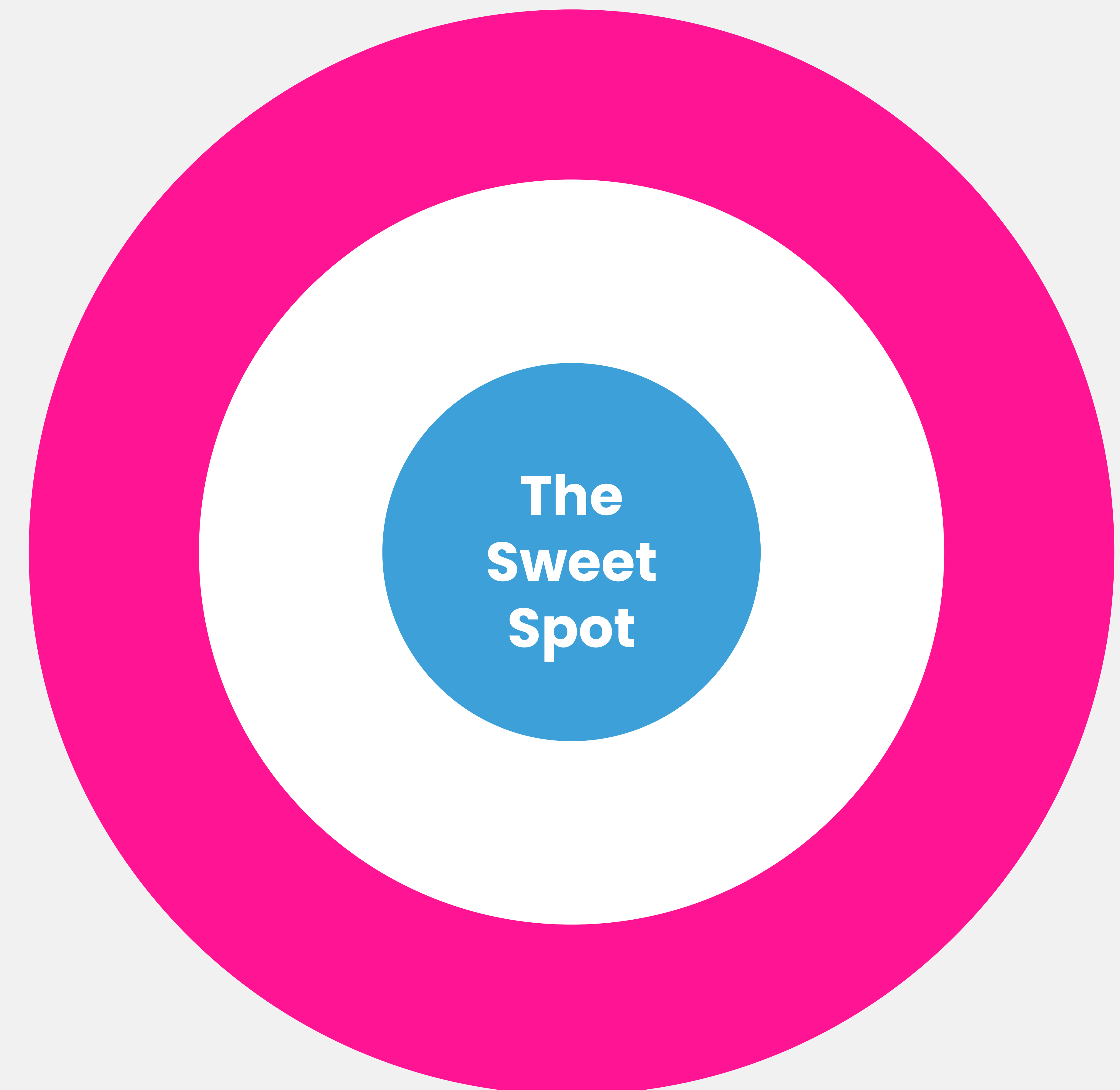
Where they work:

- 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, little education, tech-savvy, value innovation.
- 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.
- They are already considering adding wireless access.

SWEET SPOT EXAMPLE





BRAINSTORMING YOUR SWEET SPOT

Just some space to jot down some thoughts.

1

WHO ARE THEY?

Identify a target segment

2

WHERE THEY WORK

New prospects or current customers

3

WHY THEY ARE A GOOD TARGET FOR US

Add psychographics to the mix.



YOUR SWEET SPOT

1

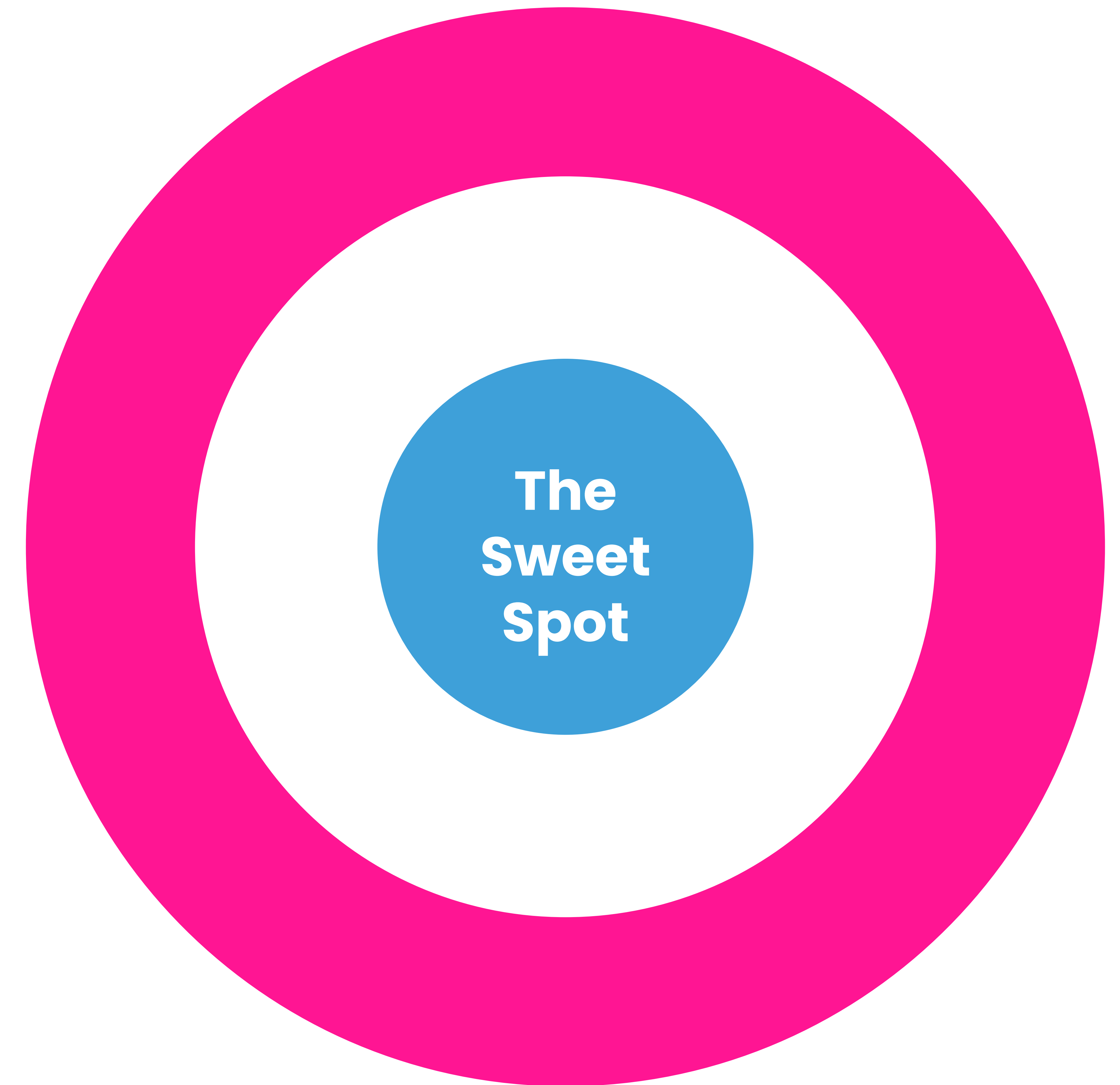
Who are they?

2

Where they work

3

Why they are a good target





STEP FIVE

Target Personas





STEP FIVE

PATHWAY

Target Personas

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 will likely be because they are a best-fit target for your business product/service.

For each target buyer, you must create a persona using the template overleaf. Make sure you complete every box in detail because you will use 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

Type of information	
Gender & Age	
Education/Qualification experience	
Key responsibilities (relevant to you)	
Ideal company demographics & region	
What role do they play in the purchase?	
Professional aspirations or ambitions	
Fears, significant concerns, and drivers	
Critical pain point (that you can solve)	
Values - what cultures & behaviours are important to them?	
Pet peeves or professional irritations	
Information sources, where do they go for professional insight?	
What's their memorable name e.g Governance Gavin, Data Dave, Strategic Sarah	



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 and provide male/female splits. Why do we need this information? Men and women consume information differently.
- **Role in purchase:** Role in purchase: Identify whether they are the decision maker or influencer and whether there are any interdependencies.
- **Values:** Avoid generic features. See complete persona example overleaf.
- **Title/Responsibilities:** In the sweet spot exercise, we asked you to ignore job titles. However, if you have identified a job title cluster, include it here.
- **Ideal company profile:** Ideal company profile: Where is our richest opportunity?
- **Visual representation:** To bring the persona to life, find an image or caricature to best represent this person.



STEP SIX

Positioning statements





STEP SIX

PATHWAY

Positioning statements

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 on the following page.

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 Template:



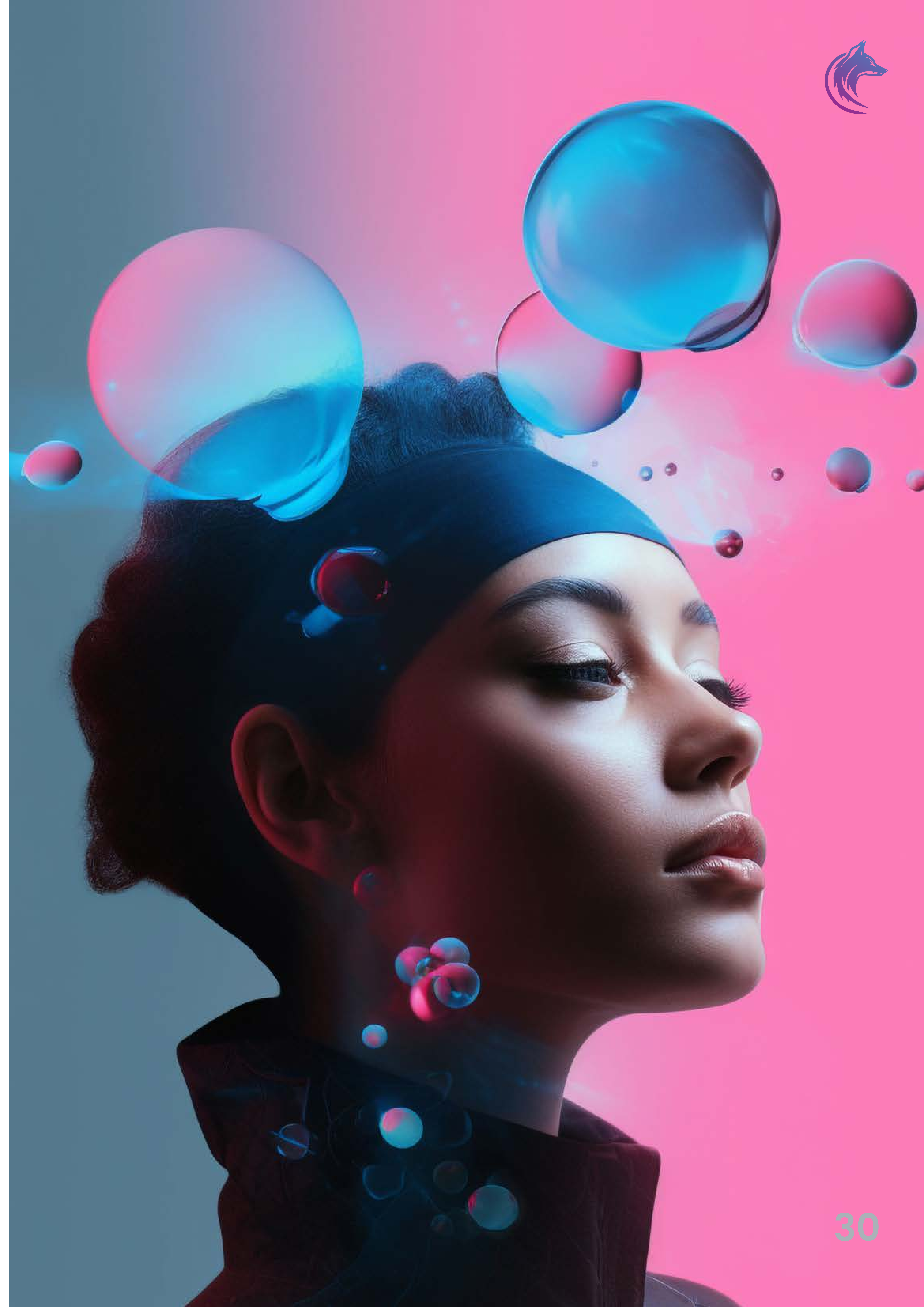
POSITIONING STATEMENT TIPS

- **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 genuinely 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.
- **Focus on what the customer values:** Best practice focuses on the 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.



STEP SEVEN

Messaging





STEP SEVEN PATHWAY

Messaging

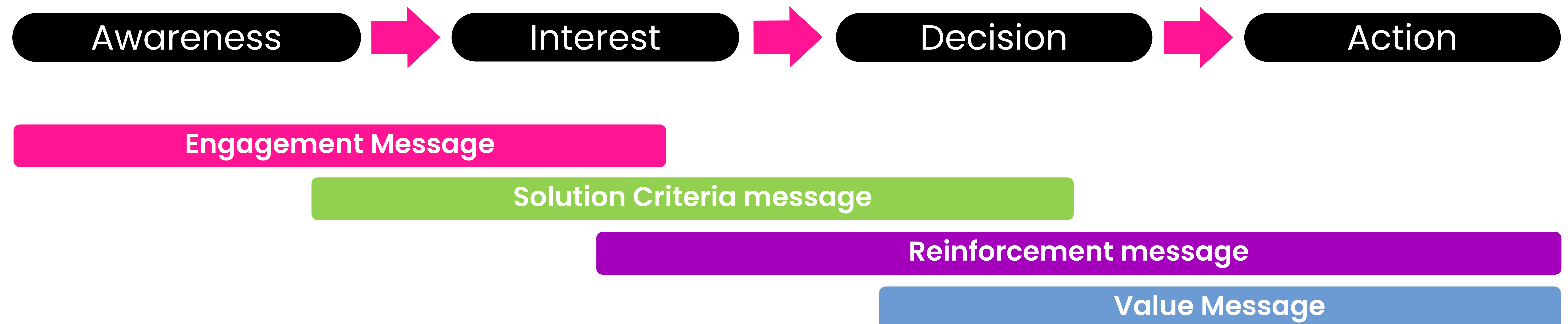
WHO ARE YOU AND WHY SHOULD I TRUST YOU?

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 MESSAGING BOX





THE MESSAGE BOX





STEP SEVEN

PATHWAY

Messaging

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 with an in-depth understanding of their pain point/challenge.

This is not about flogging a solution or your brand, but positioning yourself as an authority 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 critical pain point, need, fear factor, or pet peeves detailed in your persona - find a way to replay that key information.



ENGAGEMENT MESSAGE EXAMPLE

What issue of your target persona's will get their attention, and 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

What issue of your target persona's will get their attention, and 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 the 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

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

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 shine a light on your brand.

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

Describe your offering 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

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 will not 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 shining a light on the advantage of working with you over anyone else – specifically regarding 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

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.*



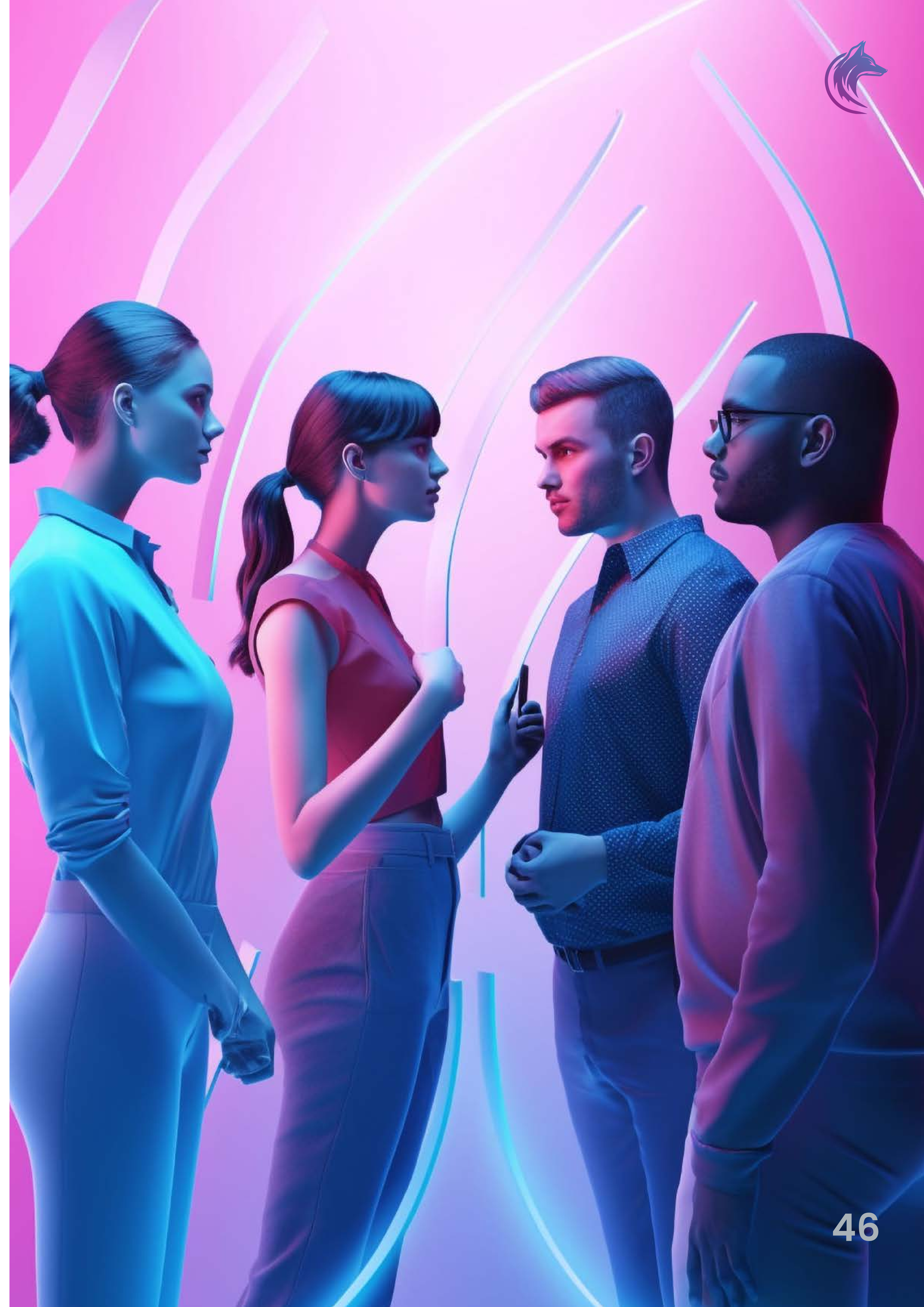
VALUE MESSAGE EXAMPLE

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.



STEP EIGHT

Validation





STEP EIGHT

PATHWAY

Validation

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.

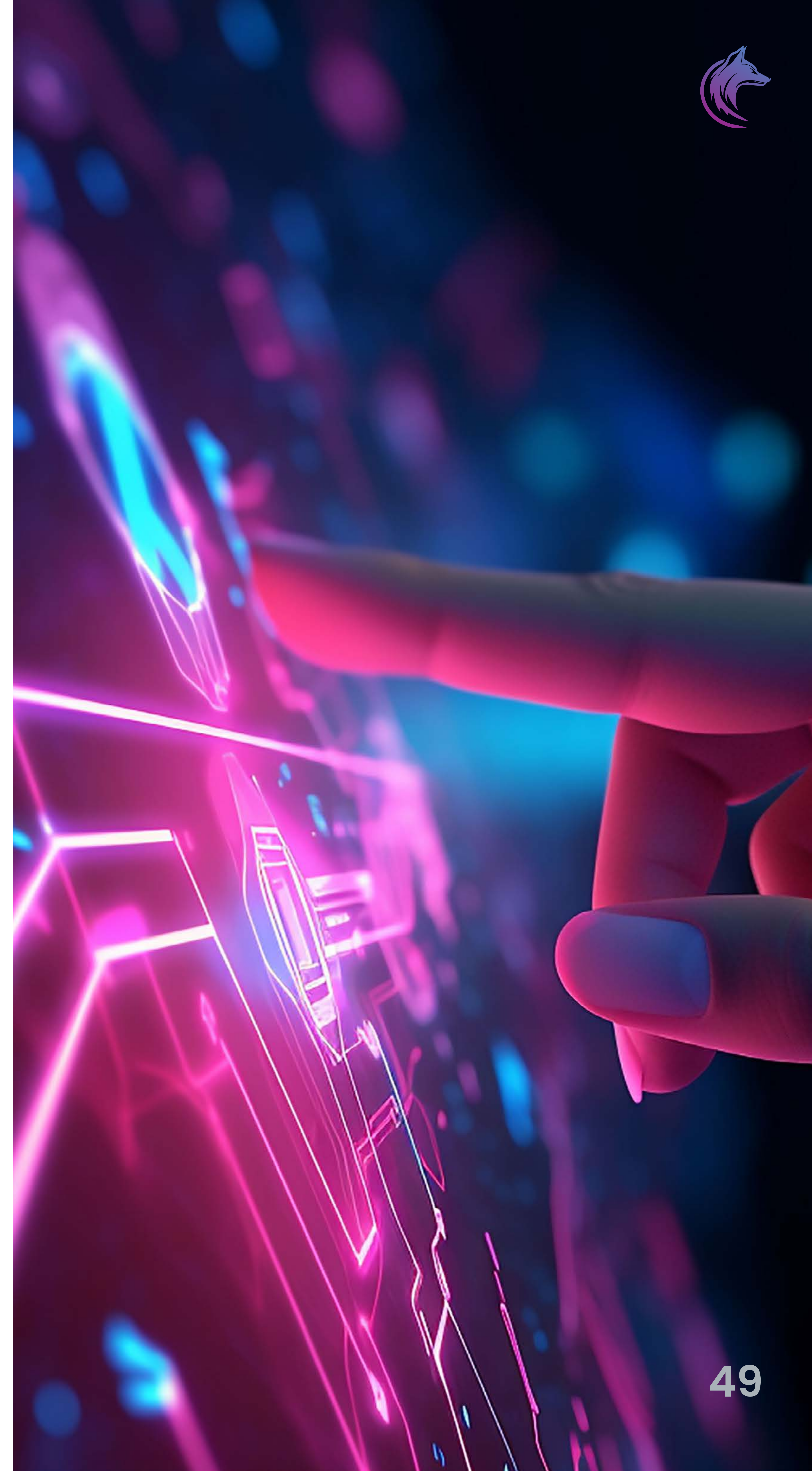


VALIDATION QUESTION AREAS

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 value proposition and/or engagement message)



THE FINAL WORD





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 **ACTIVATE**, 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 created with the help of US marketing guru, **J. Michael Gospe, Jr.** Specifically, the Message Box has been adapted and developed from **The Marketing High Ground Series**, which is recommended reading!

Call: 0203 740 6080

At EC-PR, we are passionate about B2B communication and pursuing our instinct to make tech brands distinct. We believe your work is amazing and we want to help you tell the world how extraordinary it is.



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