



## **Four Steps into the “Crystal Ball” of the Customer’s Mind**

*By Charlene Andersen*

In a scene from the classic movie the Wizard of Oz the Wicked Witch of the West looks into her Crystal Ball and peers at Dorothy and her friends following the Yellow Brick Road. The Crystal Ball allows the wicked witch to see the “wants and needs” of Dorothy her and friends as they make their way through the forest and helps determine how to get the ruby red slippers from Dorothy.

Imagine if you had a “Crystal Ball” to see the wants and needs of your target market. Imagine what the sales at the Farmers’ Market could be! Imagine your target market purchasing a greater percentage of their fruits and vegetables from the farmers’ market instead of the local grocery chain. Imagine the vendors receiving direct sales dollars – the happy faces skipping down the yellow brick road. Imagine....

Okay, the analogy may be a little corny, but wouldn’t it be nice to have a “Crystal Ball?” I can’t offer you that miracle, but I will offer you a proven marketing concept that will get you closer to the crystal ball – The Positioning Strategy.

The Positioning Strategy allows the farmers’ market or any business to differentiate itself from the competition in your customer’s view. The positioning strategy focuses on your customers, not service or products. It focuses on how your target market thinks of themselves and their lifestyle, or more simply, their needs and wants.

There are four steps to developing a positioning strategy. It requires gathering information about the competition, the target market and the products and services. If a positioning strategy is developed without this information it will most likely be ineffective. A positioning strategy is a long-term investment and requires effort to develop.

### **The Steps**

There are different methods to developing a positioning strategy; I will discuss one process that can be used. A business plan for the farmers’ market is highly recommended because you must have your business objectives clearly developed before you can begin to work on a positioning strategy.



### Step I - Identify Competition

Identify the two or three top competitors to your specific farmers' markets. Find out all information you can about their products and services. Look at how they market themselves and the message they are sending to their customers. Once you identify this information, determine the differences between each of your competitors and your farmers' market. Develop a list of seven categories consisting of product and service attributes, new products or improvements, packaging and appearance (for example displays), reputation, distribution, price, and advertising. Input the farmers' market information into each category. Hold onto the competitor information, you will be using that in Step Three.

### Step II - Target Market Wants and Needs

This step will be the toughest because you must determine the wants and needs of your target market beyond who they are or where they live. To accomplish this step you must utilize market research data or conduct your own market research. The information you need to determine is why a person will or will not spend their money at your market. You must answer questions relating to what, where, why, when and how the target market purchases and uses fresh fruits, vegetables, baked goods, etc.

### Step III - Match Product/Service to Target Markets Wants and Needs

Once you have conducted the first two steps begin matching the category information from Step One that your farmers' market has in relation to the target markets' wants and needs. Using the information you gathered on your competitors in Step One take the matched items you listed above and cross out any that your competitors also have. This enables you to narrow your matched category items to focus on those that are different from you and your competitors.

### Step IV - Prepare A Positioning Strategy

You will develop three different positioning strategies from your narrowed category list. Typically, you will want to develop the three positioning strategies based on each of the following: product advantage, target market benefits and competitor weakness. Once you have the three written, determine which one will best enable you to get in and stay in the target market's mind. To determine which positioning strategy to select, use your information from your business and marketing plan to assist you.

In conclusion, a farmers' market brings quality, value, beauty and friendliness to the customer, but how you get and stay in their mind over your competition is the ultimate challenge. A good positioning strategy will set you apart from your competition. Although it is often a search for the obvious, going through the process allows you to



look into that “crystal ball” and understand the wants and needs of your target market thus enabling you to capture those “ruby red slippers”.

You and your vendor’s know you have the freshest and highest quality fruits and vegetables. Yet, the consumer continues to “run to” the grocery store. These stores are changing to meet the customers’ needs and wants for fresh fruits and vegetables, which heightens the challenge for farmers’ markets. Yes, Dorothy “we’re not in Kansas anymore” effective market positioning won’t occur by tapping your heels. By using the four-step process described above, you can position your farmers’ market apart from the competition and into the mind of your target market when they are deciding where to shop.

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Kamigo Marketing LLC, 54 Garland Road, Nottingham, NH 03290, 603.942.7160  
[www.kamigomarketing.com](http://www.kamigomarketing.com)