



## Get the Message

### Developing a corporate message that truly defines your business

Albert Einstein once said that “the formulation of a problem is often more difficult than its solution.”

While marketing and communications aren't theoretical physics, when it comes to clearly defining the essence of any organisation – the core message ‘problem’ – I sometimes glimpse what Einstein meant.

To boil down the core message of a company, organisation, product or service into words that really mean something isn't easy, but it's a job that pays dividends.

Get it right and your staff, customers, suppliers and any other group that comes into contact with you will have a clear idea of who you are and what you stand for. And if this stacks up well against your rivals, it can give you a clear competitive advantage.

But before embarking on a messaging process, it's best to clear up a possible misconception, which is that getting the message right is basically a copywriting job. It isn't. Corporate messaging should come before copywriting and what copywriting produces, such as advertising, brochures and strap lines.

The outcome of a corporate messaging process should be a brief, easy to understand document that becomes a touchstone for all future marketing communications. This process should define who you are, what you do – and why it matters. It is likely to produce a hierarchy of messages that in each case will:

- Identify and address your key audiences – internal and external
- Use plain and simple English
- Identify a small number of killer facts that support what you say

The hierarchy may include top level, corporate messages, through to internal, ‘positioning’ messages, external marketing messages and presentations and specific product and service messages.

Of course, most companies are not starting with a blank sheet of paper, but the process can help to clarify, focus on and document what's important. It is likely to involve interviews with your staff, customers and other stakeholders – as well as desk research to assess what the competition is doing.

If it's to work, the messaging process will need the support of top management as the messages themselves should be both a reflection of and a signpost towards the organisation's strategy.

If successful, the messaging framework will be owned by the whole company, not just the marketing or PR departments. Everyone needs to know, from the receptionist who answers the phone to sales teams in the field.

It's common for companies and organisations to have corporate identity and design guidelines, but much less common, I believe, for organisations to take a similarly systematic approach to what they say about themselves.