

Our Thinking

IS IT EVER TOO EARLY TO START PHARMA BRAND POSITIONING?



**STRATEGIC
NORTH**

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Most good pharma brand leaders would agree that launching a new brand into the market with a compelling, well-differentiated positioning is an important foundation for quick customer uptake and ensuring your brand gets to the right patients who would benefit the most.

However, in our experience many brand teams don't give serious thought or investment to answering this question till fairly close to launch.

Is this the right time? Is there any value in investing time and effort into positioning your brand when you aren't even certain what data you will have to promote on?

In the rest of the article we'll share our views on why leaving it late might be missing a trick, as well as sharing some tips on what you can do early that doesn't have to a big investment of time or money but can pay huge dividends down the line.



STATEMENT OR PROCESS?



Whilst not every brand leader has the opportunity to work in early asset development; this space has the potential to be hugely rewarding and frustrating in equal measure.

The ability to truly shape the direction & focus of an asset. Early positioning discussions can result in a huge amount of complexity, uncertainty and discussion with the sensation of little action delivered...

When working with early asset teams to define the possible opportunities, we often see the discussion defaults to translational science & clinical factors.

This leads to a tendency to take a data-centric view of the asset, at a time where there is frequently a very limited number of certainties. Whilst it is human nature to focus on the certainties rather than the unknown intangibles, this drives a very myopic/one-dimensional perspective on the potential of the asset.

Great positioning should be informing investment decisions, forecast assumptions, & clinical trial design – not post-rationalising the choices already made.

So therefore, when is too early to start positioning? Perhaps the answer lies in the philosophical approach to how brand leaders view the objective of positioning.

Is it thought of as a deliverable or outcome in the development process (during phase III), once we know the finer details about the asset's potential, on which to build the marketing execution?

Typically summarised as a (not so frequently) short statement.

Or alternatively, approached as an active, iterative journey of choice making throughout the development cycle that enables the collective brand team to 'ask the right questions' of the asset?

Positioning is the place in the mind of the customer that you want to own and so therefore should be central to all the decision-making throughout the development process.

If the brand team tried to answer the former, early in the development process, this will undoubtedly lead to circular discussion and lack the ability to make a choice, hence why it's held until much later in the development cycle.

POSITIONING IS THE PLACE IN THE MIND OF THE CUSTOMER THAT YOU WANT TO OWN

SO WHAT ARE THE RIGHT QUESTIONS TO ASK?

We start out with three simple questions to ask of your asset:

WHO IS IT FOR?

This is both the target HCP that would resonate with the benefits the asset can bring and a clearly recognisable patient with an unmet need that will remain unaddressed or sub-optimally addressed in the future market landscape.

WHEN TO PRESCRIBE?

Defining a clear trigger point in the patient journey for the prescription decision to anchor in.

WHY YOUR ASSET?

Articulates the package of benefits that will enable you to credibly deliver to the who and the when. It covers not just the functional and data driven benefits but also the higher order needs distilling the deep rooted need behind how people want to feel or how they want to be perceived when making the treatment decision.

The answers to these three elements integrate together in a concept we call an opportunity space.

By driving early alignment to identify priority opportunity spaces you believe you can deliver against, it enables you to clearly define what is the most impactful & differentiating evidence you can generate both clinical endpoints/ RWE & customer insight to support where you want to play in the future market.

Are you asking cohesive & integrated questions of your asset? What 3 questions could you ask that the answers would enable your team to move forward with a focused choice?

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN THAT JOURNEY?

Adopting an active questioning approach can enable quicker 'no' decisions for assets that whilst technically feasible, are unlikely to bring unique value to a patient as you understand the 'who', 'when' & 'why' as opposed to just the 'what'. Exploring this early in the development process (before you commit to registrational trials) facilitates strong cross-functional dialogue and alignment.

It ensures timely highlighting of any areas of potential misalignment or pivotal challenges whilst there is still time to address them. Enabling individual functional workstreams to be centred on delivering further clarity around the potential in each opportunity, providing a robust platform for strategic choice-making later down the line.

The best early positioning conversations galvanise the organisation around where you intend to focus & make choices and drives real clarity of direction to senior stakeholders, who are often removed from the detail.

Developing a brand strategy that explains the why behind those choices (beyond technical feasibility & commercial opportunity) will embed the clinical program in future unmet needs, targeting endpoints that translate to a **meaningful jobs to be done** for the physician in the ideal target patient, as opposed to simply demonstrating efficacy in the most efficient and de-risked patient population.

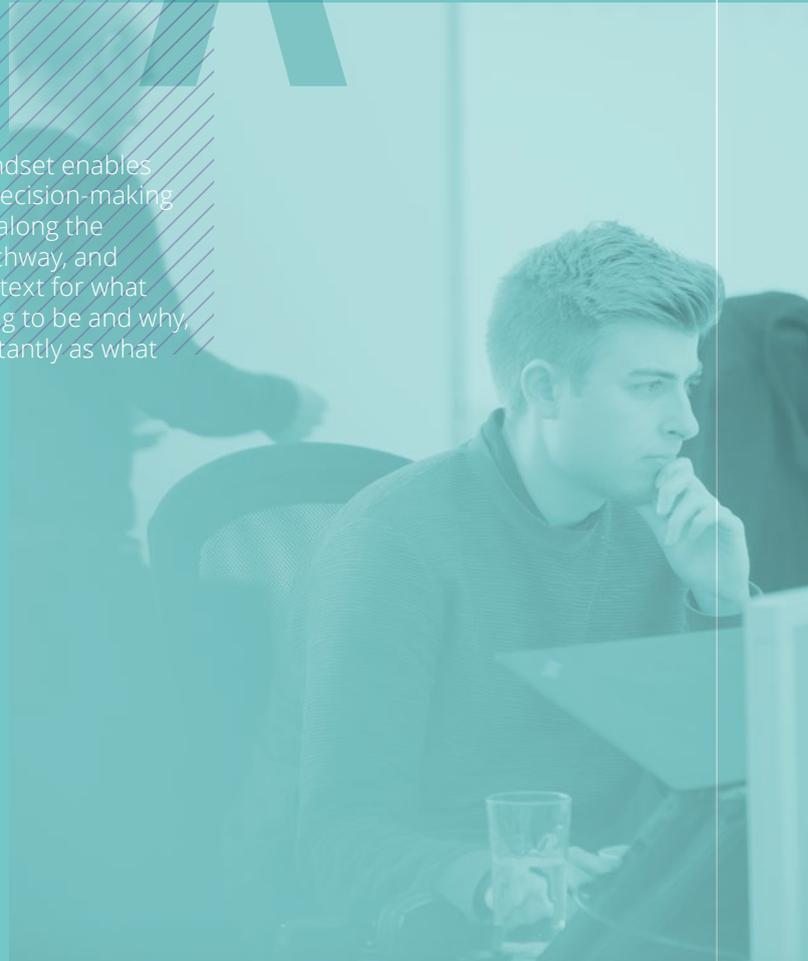


THE PAYOFF

Early positioning is about defining what your potential future choices are and therefore quickly anticipating, exploring and validating how to deliver a winning proposition in that space, beyond demonstrating the table stakes of safety and efficacy ultimately avoiding a sub-optimal launch into the market. It embeds these decisions in the strategy at the heart of the brand.

We believe positioning is never 'one & done', it is an evolving & adapting process. As you learn more about your assets ability to deliver against the opportunity spaces, you as a collective brand team, can define/rule out the uncertainty and complexities that were troublesome initially. Adopting the mindset that positioning is a process and not a single deliverable is crucial to bringing the team along on the journey.

Applying this mindset enables informed, agile decision-making as you progress along the development pathway, and provides the context for what you are 'not' going to be and why, equally as importantly as what you 'are'...



If you are currently working through these types of challenges with your team and asset, reach out to us to start a conversation:

hello@strategicnorth.com

If you'd just like to find out a bit more about who we are and what we do, then we're right here.

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