



PitchPerfect™ Message Strategy for More Powerful Persuasion

What you want to say and how you say it are two different problems to solve. It pays to create a message strategy before you create a message. Otherwise, you are aiming your arrows without a bull's-eye. It's possible you'll hit your target, but unlikely. You might even cause some damage. Without a message strategy first, creating marketing communications is "Fire, aim, ready!"

Message strategy The point of one communication to one target market. If you change the target or you change the point, you need a new message strategy.



KEY TERM

PITCHPERFECT™ MESSAGE STRATEGY

Corprov™ Corporate Improvisation Training Class
"Don't bore your employees."

1. **Who are we talking to?** Passionate corporate trainers with tightfisted cynical CFOs and jaded employees.*
2. **What is our point?** Don't waste money trying to *bore* your employees into learning, caring, and changing.
3. **What is the key word in the point?** Bore.
4. **Why should the target care about the point?** Morale is in the tank and budgets are tight. I can't just offer the same old speakers.

*On a normal typed page, none of these answers would exceed one line.

5. Why should the target believe the point?

- No boring PowerPoint lectures. Just fun training games everyone can play together.
- Learn useful business skills like leadership, collaboration, creativity, and flexibility.
- Trained thousands of corporate employees across the U.S. since 1993.
- Testimonials from leading U.S. corporations and graduate business schools.

6. How should the target feel? Fun and smart. Games with a serious business purpose.

7. What do we want the target to do? Contact Barry Callen at 608.347.8396 or corprov.com or barry.callen@gmail.com.

LETTER INSPIRED BY MESSAGE STRATEGY

To: Corporate Training Officer
From: Barry Callen, Cofounder, Instructor
 Nell Weatherwax, Cofounder, Instructor
 Corprov™ Corporate Improvisational Training

Dear X,

Nothing wastes more training dollars than boredom. The speaker drones on to the next PowerPoint slide, and 15 minutes into your training day, everyone's eyes have glazed over and everyone looks at the clock to figure out how long it will be until lunch. In this era of tight budgets and low morale, we can offer you a more effective and fun training alternative.

That's why I started Corprov™, corporate improvisation training.

I was the creative director and vice president at an advertising agency. All my people were burning out under the relentless pressure of deadlines and rejections.

I had taken classes at Second City in Chicago, the improv theater that spawned many of the Saturday Night Live players. I simplified the games we learned there so that anyone who could walk or talk could play them, and we started playing them at lunch to boost morale and creativity.

I never expected my staff to also learn how to lead and follow, how to listen and collaborate, how to think on their feet under pressure, and how to present ideas and deal with change, but that's exactly what happened. In our pressure-cooker business, we had to account for the profitability of every person for every 15-minute increment, so devoting any amount of time to the games had to be worth it.

Over the next few years, demand for the classes spread to other departments, then the entire agency, then to our clients, and finally to organizations like yours. This stuff works.

Since our founding in 1993, we have gone on to teach these games to thousands of employees at leading corporations and graduate schools of business across the U.S., including University of Wisconsin Graduate School of Business Executive Education students and faculty, Credit Union National Association Management Schools, Famous Footwear, Fiskars, Minnesota Association of Government Communicators, and Walker Broadcast Management Institute. We've even trained hundreds of veteran trainers at places like Experience Learning Live in Arizona and The Hoffman Institute in California.

Here are a few of our favorite comments about our classes:

"... superstar ratings. You two nailed it the first time. Bravo." Western Management School

"... the highest praise and the highest marks ever recorded for a Superstar Sellers Training Session, since we began in 1993." Midwest Family Broadcasting

"I liked the fact that I didn't have to sit down and listen to New Age psycho-babble while trapped in a stuffy room." Student Verbatim 2008

Students learn by doing, so their learning translates quickly to the work they are doing, and tends to stick. While the exercises are fun (which also helps with motivation and retention), the objectives are deadly serious. It is impossible to reinvent or improve your business if your employees are burned out, unmotivated, poor listeners, subversive power-mongers, timid order-takers, and unable to innovate in the moment under pressure. These Business Improvisation Exercises keep your employees nimble.

All you need to supply for these classes is a private space to move around in, employees in comfortable clothing, and your sense of humor.

To find out more, contact Barry at 608.347.8396 or corprov.com or barry.callen@gmail.com.

Thanks!

The first example is a message strategy.

The second is a cover letter inspired by the message strategy.

The strategy and the execution are two different things.

To improve the power of your communications, separate *what* you want to say from *how* you say it. What you want to say is your message strategy. How you say it is the unexpected creative idea that drives your

ad campaign. What you want to say is the emotional bull's-eye. How you want to say it is the arrows of specific communications that you aim, such as ads, Web sites, and press releases.

The Purpose of Message Strategy

Message strategy helps you find the most powerful thing to communicate to your audience—the *reason for customers to care*. Clear message strategy inspires the creatives who invent your ads, press releases, Web sites, brochures, etc. It provides focus. Taking the time to create a message strategy is one of the best ways a company can prevent wasting time and money on activities that are unfocused and won't grab the attention of the market.

SMART



MANAGING

STRATEGY BEFORE MESSAGE

Create a message strategy before you create a message. Otherwise, you are aiming your arrows without a bull's-eye. It's possible you'll hit your target, but unlikely. You might even cause some damage. Without a message strategy first, creating marketing communications is "Fire, aim, ready!"

What Is PitchPerfect™ Message Strategy?

PitchPerfect™ Message Strategy is a simple, seven-question method for finding the most powerful thing to say. It is the point of one communication to one audience about one subject. It is called "PitchPerfect™" because it helps you sound just the right note to resonate in the heart of your audience. If you have ever been hit by a sales pitch or advertisement that was off-key, you know just how irritating an imperfect pitch can be.

As you begin, you must know who you are selling to (target audience) and what you are selling (product or service). There is a preferred order to the Pitchperfect™ Message Strategy questions. It is best to start with the "who." Then do the "point," then the "key word," and then the "reason to care." After that the order doesn't matter. Some answers will align more easily with others. Some answers may cause you to go back and start over with new understanding. None of the answers may exceed one typed line, except for "reasons to believe": you get as many as four lines. (Fig 7-1 summarizes the creation of a message strategy.)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pick the right people to brainstorm <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approvers Creators Outsiders Market Representatives Wildcard Know-nothings 2. Do a brief set-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain the process and benefits Provide a brief background on the marketing problem 3. Use traditional brainstorming techniques <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderator Scribe with big Post-it® pad and easel Set the rules (no arguing or evaluation) Go for quantity of ideas in sound bites 4. Start with “who” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an individual profile Look at individuals as a whole person, not a target market Explore their joys and sorrows and hidden desires and fears | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Generate a list of options per question <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go in any order Get stuck? Move to another question and come back Try the same answer in different questions Pursue fresh insights 6. Cluster the options in two to five groups 7. Assemble the clusters into two to five rough message strategies 8. Refine the language <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write in sound bites (one line, about 12 words) Write in the market’s language Write in Martian, the language of the heart Don’t perfect, get the ideas down 9. Do an elevator story for each one 10. Evaluate the strategies against criteria 11. Test the stories with the target |
|---|--|

Figure 7-1. The process of creating a great message strategy

THE SEVEN PITCHPERFECT™ MESSAGE STRATEGY QUESTIONS

1. *Whom* are we talking to? (defined emotionally in terms of fear and desire)
2. What is our *point*? (emotional conclusion we want target to draw)
3. What is the *key word* in the point? (unusual, concrete, specific, powerful)
4. *Why* should the target *care* about the point?
5. *Why* should the target *believe* the point? (four lines maximum, in order of importance)
6. *How* should the target *feel* about the message, brand, or product?
7. *What* do we want the target to *do*?



TOOLS

The process involves going back and forth: for each question, you brainstorm options and then choose one option for each answer. When all the questions are answered, you have a rough message strategy. Then, in a second step, you perfect the wording. Once the strategic language is perfected, then the different message strategies can be analyzed and compared. The finished message strategies can be put into a creative brief, handed out when evaluating creative work, or used to create “elevator stories”—audio recordings of the message strategies to test in focus groups.

This message strategy process has been proven to work in hundreds of message strategy sessions, creating thousands of ads worth millions of dollars for hundreds of clients since 1993. It has been used to help major national consumer brands sell millions of dollars worth of products and services, to help nonprofit organizations generate donations and volunteers, to help small start-ups triumph over larger competitors, and to help business-to-business companies increase sales and press coverage.



THE STRATEGY IS NOT THE MESSAGE

Do not confuse strategy and message. They are two different things. In fact, not a single word of the message strategy *must* appear in the message. The message strategy is the emotional takeaway or conclusion of your target audience. This conclusion (this message strategy) is not the words. But it guides and inspires the words and pictures you create for your message.

Here’s another example of using the PitchPerfect™ Message Strategy. Notice how this gets to the heart of potential consumer concerns, problems, and desires:

PITCHPERFECT™ MESSAGE STRATEGY

Lubey-Dooby-Do

“Self-Reliance for Do-It-Yourself Oil Changers”

- 1. Whom are we talking to?** Aging but proud DIY’ers embarrassed when they repeatedly spill oil on their engine.*
- 2. Point?** No smelly engine oil spills proves you are still competent, independent, and self-reliant.
- 3. Key word?** Self-reliant.

*On a normal typed page, none of these answers would exceed one line.

4. **Why care?** “I can’t stand not being able to take care of myself or my car just because I’m older.”
5. **Why believe?**
 - No-Spill Easy-Pour Spout™ virtually eliminates spills, even with shaky hands.
 - No embarrassing burning oil smell or oil puddles on floor.
6. **How they feel?** Proud. Independent. Self-reliant. “I’ve still got it. I can still take care of my own car.”
7. **What to do?** Prove to yourself you’ve still got it.

Can you feel the difference in emotional power and creative inspiration that comes from using this formula and answering these questions? Notice that no answer exceeds one typed line. In fact, the entire strategy fits on one side of one piece of paper. This helps the message strategy get to the point.

AD CREATED BY PITCHPERFECT™ MESSAGE STRATEGY

Photo: Two cars, one old and one new, and in front, an old man smiling holding a grease rag and a young man frowning and looking clueless.



Headline: “95-year-old Buster Kelmer can change his own oil. His 21-year-old great grandson, Ted, can’t.”

Body Copy: Buster has kept his car in top running shape for decades thanks to frequent oil changes—and Ted doesn’t even know how to find the latch to release the hood of his new car. Thanks to our patented No-Spill Easy-Pour Spout, even Ted could change the oil during an earthquake and not spill a drop, if he knew how.

Inset Photo of Oil Can with Logo and Spout Feature

Tagline: The no-spill easy-pour oil.

Pitchperfect™ Message Strategy Requires Forced Choice to Be Effective


Physically, a message strategy is simply seven answers to seven simple questions on one side of one piece of paper. No answer (except one—reasons to believe) may exceed one typed line.

This limit forces choice. It is essential to force choice because the average American will take less than half a second to decide whether to

pay attention to your ad. The forced choice of the message strategy process helps you focus your message so you can communicate it in less than half a second.

Tips for Finding Better Answers to Each Question

To get the best results using the Pitchperfect™ Message Strategy process, you'll want to follow some underlying rules when trying to answer the questions. First, make sure each answer is defined emotionally, rather than rationally, subconsciously, rather than consciously. Second, make sure the answers are defined from the point of view of the receiver of the communication, not the sender. And finally, reduce every answer to one typed line to force choice. Remember, you cannot make a list of answers that will please all of the people involved in the process. What follows are tips for each step.



INCREASE RESPONSE RATES 41 PERCENT

A bank offered a home equity line of credit that most customers used to fix up their kitchens and bathrooms. Because of heavy government regulation, prices and products were virtually identical among competitors.

The client used direct response and measured every response down to the penny. Two ads were used: the message strategy for one was “fix up your dream home at a competitive rate,” and the message strategy for the other was “fix the things around the house that are bugging you.” The resulting newspaper and direct mail campaign showed a kitchen with an avocado-colored refrigerator from 1970, torn tile, pliers on the stove dial, and other problems.

The “bugging” message strategy—with no major change in product, price, or media—sold 41 percent more than the “dream home” message. It was a great demonstration of the use of message strategy to find the most powerful thing to say.

Question One: Whom Are We Talking to?

This is the single most important question. It frames all the other answers. As much as half the time of a message strategy session can be spent on this question. The trick is to go beyond simple demographic categories (e.g., women 18-40, men 50-65) and beyond buying behaviors (e.g., drivers who buy premium tires) and define your target as a charac-

FIND AN EMOTIONAL COMMONALITY

If you don't have the marketing dollars to target each market segment, you can try to find a common emotional message strategy. That will enable you to invest in a single ad for all markets. Here's an example from health care:

Due to budget limitations, a health care provider needed to reach both moms and business CFOs with a single mailing. Those market segments seemed worlds apart, but message strategy enabled us to discover an emotional commonality and craft a single "whom" statement for the message strategy: Chief Health Officers burdened with the responsibility of making tough trade-off health care decisions for people they care about.



TRICKS
OF THE
TRADE

ter in a story, full of hopes and fears (e.g., middle-class professional fashionistas who crave the comfort of squishy-soled shoes but fear looking dowdy and old). This enables you to identify your target customers' greatest emotional needs and dilemmas and attract their attention by solving their problem. It inspires better creative work.

Question Two: What Is Our Point?

When choosing a point, I often ask people to use this criterion. If a genie gathered all your target prospects in one place and magically made them believe one sentence from you, what would that sentence be? I tell them that the genie will also give their competitors the same opportunity. What point would you make?

So how do you pick the right point? Go back to your "Whom?" question, and identify which emotional drivers are the most powerful. Is it more powerful to feel confident or to not be afraid? The two promises are very different.

Look for the best balance of power and believability. "We cure cancer free" is a powerful statement, but hard to believe. "Eat noodles if you like them" is easy to believe, but not very powerful. This balance is not easy.

Question Three: What Is the Key Word in the Point?

The human brain tends to turn bulls into bouillon cubes. We take complex information and simplify it. You can either let your target customers (or your competitors) do that for you, or you can do it yourself by choosing a powerful key word. Think of the key word as the point of the arrow. Without one, it won't stick.

SMART



MANAGING

FORBIDDEN MESSAGE STRATEGY WORDS

Here are some examples of BS words that are *forbidden* to be used in message strategy: *solutions, partnership, quality, scientific, engineered, stylish, convenient, trusted, service, best of breed, leader, advanced, intelligent*, etc. These words often create the opposite effect. If a car dealership is called “Quality Cars,” it sends up a flag that these cars are not very high quality.

Here are some examples of key words that were used in actual message strategies and have power: *bulletproof, bugging, screw, crave, ritual, speedseeker*.

It is worth spending some time on finding the most powerful key word. Often, a single point contains several good possibilities.

It is worth spending some time on finding the most powerful key word. Often, a single point contains several good possibilities.

In general, choose the key word that:

- is the most unusual
- makes you feel something
- creates a concrete image: you can see it or draw a picture of it
- highlights the chief brand difference
- is believable
- is ownable
- makes people laugh at the truth of it
- is forbidden: it would be really bad to say it out loud to the target customers

One rule: your key word must appear in the point of your message strategy. For example, if your point is “Avoid even feeling the slightest panic before you speak,” you can choose your one key word from among “avoid,” “slightest,” “panic,” and “speak.” Those are the most powerful words in that sentence. You must choose one.

Even something as complex as a Web site will end up owning one word in the customers’ minds. What is your word?

Question Four: Why Should the Target Care About the Point?

With the exception of genuine news, such as a hurricane or an unprecedented technology (Introducing ... the telephone!), you will not be able to *make* a reason to care about and *insert* it in their brains. Instead, you must find something they already care about and build on it. Their reason to

care already exists; you don't have to create it. You just have to find an underlying emotional commonality or desire that all target customers share.

Question Five: Why Should the Target Believe the Point?

You are allowed to list up to four reasons to believe. You should rank the reasons, putting

the most powerful first, the second most powerful second, and so on. You need not have more than one. Your goal is to have the most powerful and most believable answers. Don't try to list four for the sake of having four. A weak reason is a negative communication cue. The target customers assume, "If you think that reason is good, you must be desperate."

A great question to explore is "What do people need to believe in order to justify their view of reality or their perception of themselves?" Since they have already made a commitment to believe certain things, if you can tie your point to their current beliefs, you are one step ahead of the game.

Question Six: How Should the Target Feel About the Message?

There are several places you can go to look for guidance in choosing the answers to "how should the target feel?" Positioning and branding usually dictate a set of adjectives around a brand personality. What you use in your message strategy should be that or, at the very least, be congruent with that. Cue testing of words, pictures, ward-robe, music, style choices, etc. can provide strong guidance in defining feeling as a zone. The style choices of the type of individual you profile as representative of the target market can also provide clues: the magazines they read, the music they listen to, the way they decorate their homes, the cars they drive, etc.

Question Seven: What Do We Want the Target to Do?

Why are you sending your target customers this message? Here are a few examples of actions you may want from your target market:


GUILTY OR NOBLE?

In a United Way campaign, the main message was "No matter what you believe, you can act on your beliefs by giving to United Way." In that message there were several potential reasons to care: "You'll feel guilty if you don't," "You'll feel like a good and noble person if you do," and "You were raised to believe giving back is what you should do." The most powerful reason to care turned out to be #3.



- Trade up, upgrade, or make an expanded purchase from your product line.
- Become aware of our name
- Become an advocate or ambassador for your product
- Believe you are worth checking out: change their attitude or belief about you, find out more information (Web, phone, free booklet, etc.).
- Put you in the considered set for purchase (i.e., put us on the short list)
- Pay ahead of time and save

Avoid the temptation to have a list of calls to action. To the target customers, getting several calls to action feels very demanding and very confusing. Pick one and emphasize it.



BE CREATIVE IN YOUR CALL TO ACTION

A major boat manufacturer invented a new hull material that was virtually indestructible. The company wanted to get lots of trade press coverage at the annual boating trade show. So it invited boating magazine editors to come to the show by sending them a baseball bat and encouraging them to whack away at the hull of a sample boat and write about the result.

A typical call to action for the press release would have been “Write about our interesting new technological breakthrough.” But editors get tons of such requests. Instead the call to action was “Beat the living day-lights out of our new boat hull and write about whatever happens.” This resulted in a publicity bonanza for the new boat.

Put It All Together

Check your answers for alignment. Usually you have multiple answers to each question to choose from. Some answers tend to fit better together than other answers.

Experiment with using an answer for one question as the answer to another. In essence you are changing the function of the information. It is common for the main point and the reason to care to be easily exchanged to achieve a different meaning.

Replace weak words (abstract, unemotional, general) with powerful words (concrete, emotional, specific).

Make sure that no single answer exceeds one typed line and that the one-word point is in fact one word.

Use evaluation criteria to compare and select the best message strategies to test (Figure 7-2). Then create an “elevator story” from each strategy to test (Figure 7-3). Make sure you write the elevator stories in an equally interesting way, so that your clever, creative writing doesn’t interfere with the way in which the focus group participants react to the story.

Put the final message strategy into the creative brief for creatives to use to make new ads (Figure 7-4).

	Weight	Strategy A	Strategy B	Strategy C
Compelling				
Ownable—different from competition				
Believable				
Works across products				
Works across markets				
Long life				
Motivates employees				
Consistent with positioning, brand personality, culture				
TOTAL				

Figure 7-2. Tool for evaluating message strategies

Enhance the Experience (High, Zen, Therapy, Escape)

I can lose myself for hours in the simple joy of gardening. It’s not just a chore; it’s almost my form of meditation or therapy. I’m a million miles away from ringing phones and urgent messages, getting my hands dirty, using my muscles, smelling the earth and the flowers. I get into a rhythm, and before I know it, hours pass by like minutes. The right tool adds to the pleasure. If it feels good in my hand, if it cuts effortlessly, if it doesn’t punish me physically, or break on me, then I can stay in the flow of gardening almost without thinking. I recently found this fine line of garden tools that are so ergonomically designed and so

(continued on next page)

Figure 7-3. Message strategies can be tested as audio recordings called “elevator stories.”

(continued)

lightweight and strong, they feel like an extension of my own hand. They really enhance the experience of gardening for me.

Less Effort, More Productive (Pride of Accomplishment)

Gardening doesn't have to be hard and brutal work. With the right tools, it can be a rewarding labor of love. I garden because I like to keep busy. I enjoy getting outside and getting things done and seeing the results of my efforts. I recently found a new line of gardening tools that help me get more done in less time. They have a lighter weight, an easier grip, and an ergonomic design that's easier on my body. I can use less effort and keep going longer. They are strong and durable so I don't have to waste my time racing to the store to replace a broken tool. It's a great feeling when you're done, if you can stand back and feel proud of what you've accomplished in a day. With these gardening tools, it takes a lot less effort to feel more productive.

Revolutionary Performance (Creative Self-Expression, Beauty)

I recently came across these garden tools that were so revolutionary in their design. I'd never seen anything like them. They certainly didn't look like those old heavy tools in my grandfather's shed. When I picked one up, I immediately felt the difference. Their lightweight metal was a lot stronger and tougher than it looked. They were precision-engineered to give more power in less effort. They were ergonomically designed to fit my natural hand and body movements. Using them in my garden, I felt like an artist creating different compositions with different paintbrushes. I often forgot how hard I was working and concentrated more on what kind of effect I wanted to achieve. The way these garden tools perform is truly revolutionary.

My Favorite Tools (Simple, Honest, Physical Labor)

I have my favorite garden tools ... the ones I use the most. We're as comfortable as old friends. In this age of speed and quantity over quality, there's just something simple, honest, and noble about a well-crafted hand tool. I choose garden tools with my hands. I feel the balance, the heft, the weight, the precision action, the durability, and the strength. Many of my favorite tools are from the same line. They tend to be very well made. You can tell that somebody who actually works in a garden put some real thought into their design. Whether I'm busting up sod all day, or down on my knees pruning, they help get a lot more done with a lot less pain. Gardening keeps me grounded. And it's way more fun when I can use my favorite tools.

Multiple Message Strategies

Most brands need multiple message strategies because they change the target audience or what they are selling. For example, they may need to

Before Message Strategy	After Pitchperfect™ Message Strategy
Target: Meeting planners and CEOs who want to have a good meeting	Target: Businesspeople who want to inspire coworkers who hate meetings
Target: Big-box music software retailer buyers	Target: The teenage boy inside the adult retail buyer who always wanted to be a rock star
Promise: #1 leader in mobile storage for institutions	Promise: A bulletproof shelving recommendation for secretaries afraid of losing their job
Promise: Great loan rate to fix up your dream home	Promise: Fix the things around your house that are bugging you
Promise: X Life Insurance offers a wide choice of payments, premiums, benefits, and riders.	Promise: With X Life Insurance, I can feel good about being indecisive today because I can be decisive tomorrow.
Reason to Care: Save 50% on any second purchase of name-brand shoes.	Reason to Care: Finding the right shoe at the right price is better than sex.
Reason to Believe: Cool contemporary famous musicians use this backpack.	Reason to Believe: If you have to wear a backpack to be cool, you're not cool.
Call to Action (PR): Write trade journal articles about our revolutionary patented new damage-resistant boat hull.	Call to Action (PR): Use this baseball bat to repeatedly beat our new damage-resistant boat hull as hard as you can—and then write about what happens in your trade journal.

Figure 7-4. Before and after application of the PitchPerfect™ message strategy

communicate their positioning or their brand, and then to advertise a promotional sale, and then to recruit or motivate staff, and then to introduce a new product, and so on.

To have a single coherent brand, these various strategies must support each other, instead of contradicting. For them, you need a Meta-Message Strategy (MMS). The MMS is the roof that all the other messages support. The MMS can be used as a filter to determine whether a particular message strategy is on-brand and on-positioning.



MAINTAIN CONFIDENTIALITY ABOUT HARD TRUTHS

Keep your creative brief and message strategy notes confidential. You would not want any hard truths to leak into the press or get out to your target customers. And, of course, sometimes you must be extra careful that the things you discuss in a message strategy session will not wind up in the actual message.

For example, people may choose cardiac care because they are afraid of death, but they don't want to think about death. A headline or a visual about death would scare them away. Understanding this deep-seated fear would help guide the creative team to make the ads more powerful and honest. However, you would not want this message strategy to become public.

Sometimes it helps to think of all your messages as a house you are building (Figure 7-5). The Meta-Message is the roof supported by all the messages. All the messages are built on the same foundation of *positioning* and *brand personality*.

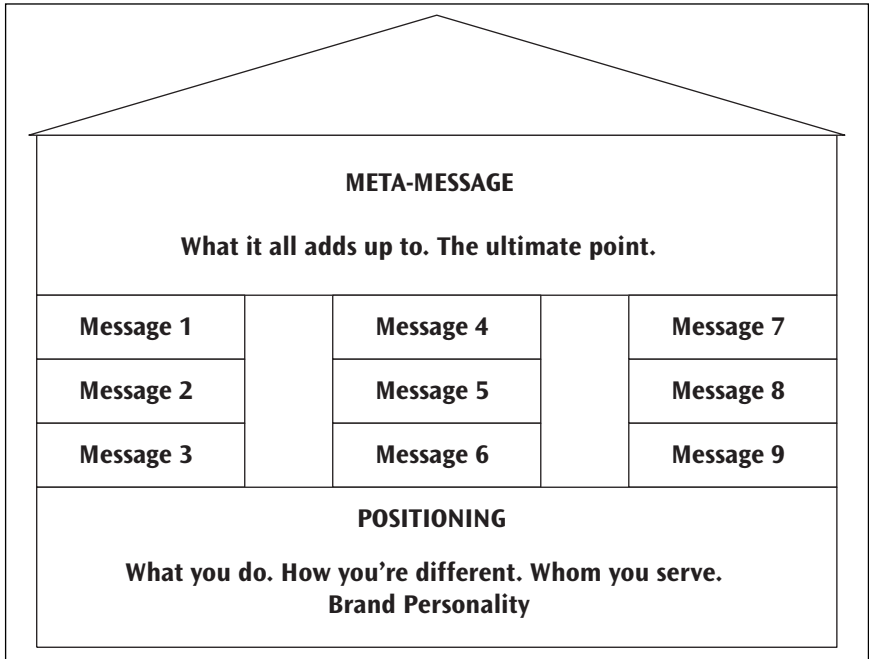


Figure 7-5. House of multiple message strategies

Differentiating Message Strategy from Messaging, Positioning, and Branding

There is a lot of confusion about *message strategy*, *creative*, *positioning*, and *branding*. It helps to understand the difference.

Message strategy is *not* the message. It is *not* the ad, press release, speech, Web site, brochure, billboard, or TV spot. It is *not* the headline or the visual. Those are *executions* of the message strategy.

Message strategy is *not* positioning. Positioning should precede message strategy. The message strategy should be congruent with the positioning. What makes this confusing is that sometimes you may want to communicate your positioning and nothing else. In that case, you need a message strategy about your positioning.

Message strategy is *not* branding. The brand personality should precede the message strategy. If necessary, you can add a question to the message strategy to guide the creation of the communications: “How should the brand feel?” What makes this confusing is that sometimes your message strategy should be about communicating your brand.

Think of ideation as a conveyor belt (Figure 7-6). Each piece is built upon the previous piece. Note that message strategy is the critical bridge between the business process and the creative process. It’s a hybrid of both.

1. **Business problem:** Define the job that communication is to do. The client brings symptoms, like “sales are down.” Our job is to figure out the cause and find the solution that offers the highest ROI.
2. **Positioning strategy:** Define who the client’s true customers are, what job the client does for them, what the client is best at doing, and ...
3. **Brand strategy:** ... What is the brand personality or style of the client or product?
4. **Message strategy:** What is the most powerful point we can make to the target market in the communication? What objective do we want the communication to achieve? Awareness? Attitude? Action?
5. **Concept creative message:** Using the media designated, conceive a driving campaign idea in rough form.
6. **Execute creative message:** Using various crafts (e.g., writing, pho-

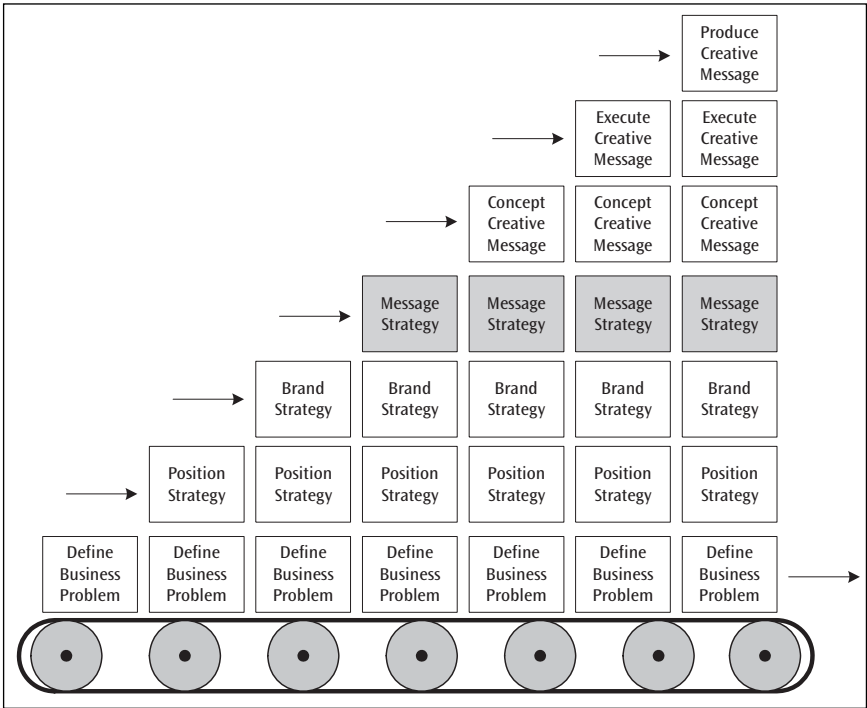


Figure 7-6. The flow of ideas: how a business problem becomes marketing communications

tography, design, music, etc.), improve the quality of the execution. Finesse, tweak, finish. Adjust positive and negative cues.

7. **Produce creative message:** Prepare final files, and send them to the printer, dub house (video duplication service), server, etc.

Manager's Checklist for Chapter 7

- ✓ Message strategy is the point of one communication to one target market. Change the point or the target and you need a different strategy.
- ✓ Message strategy can make your marketing communications more effective at a lower cost.
- ✓ The message strategy is not the ad itself. It is the emotional conclusion you want the target market to draw.
- ✓ Message strategy can be used to get everyone on the same page, to

guide and inspire your creative team, and also to evaluate their creative ideas.

- ✓ The PitchPerfect™ Message Strategy consists of one-line emotional answers to seven questions, from the target's point of view:
 1. *Whom* are we talking to? (defined emotionally in terms of fear and desire)
 2. What is our *point*? (emotional conclusion we want target to draw)
 3. What is the *key word* in the point? (unusual, concrete, specific, powerful)
 4. *Why* should the target *care* about the point?
 5. *Why* should the target *believe* the point? (four lines maximum, in order of importance)
 6. *How* should the target *feel* about the message, brand, or product?
 7. *What* do we want the target to *do*?