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FREE WORKBOOK

POSITIONING WORKSHEET

The Positioning Worksheet: Ries & Trout's Method for Owning One Spot

Find the one spot in your buyer's mind you can own, then write it in one sentence. 6 questions, a fill-in statement, a ladder map, 20 brands that went narrow and an SEO agency rewrite.

09	57	2026-11
SECTIONS	IDEAS, TOOLS & TEMPLATES	LAST CHECKED



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Tested, not guessed.

INSIDE THIS WORKBOOK

Six questions that show which spot in your market you can actually own, a ladder map of your competitors, and a fill-in statement to lock it down. Plus 20 brands that won by going narrow, a full before-and-after SEO agency bio, and a copy-paste prompt to pressure-test your answer.

> **WHO IT'S FOR**
>
> Founders, freelancers and agencies who sound like everyone else in their market, or whose bio would still make sense with a competitor's name on it.

01 **If you only have 15 minutes**
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08 **Common positioning mistakes**

09 **Copy-paste prompt: pressure-test your position**

HOW TO USE IT

1

Only 15 minutes? Do the quick start. It gets you a first positioning sentence.

2

For the full version, answer the 6 questions in writing, then fill the ladder map with your top 3–5 competitors.

3

Write 3 positioning statements, pick the narrowest one you can prove, and use it to rewrite your headline and bio like the SEO agency example.

01

If you only have 15 minutes

The big idea from Al Ries and Jack Trout's Positioning: you don't win by being better. You win by being first in a spot inside the buyer's head. These steps find that spot fast.

1 **Minute 0–3: The swap test**

Copy your bio or homepage headline. Paste a competitor's name in place of yours. If it still reads fine, you don't have a position yet.

2 **Minute 3–7: Name the leader and its word**

Who is No. 1 in your market? What one word do buyers link to them (cheap, fast, safe, premium, biggest)? Write it down. That word is taken.

3 **Minute 7–11: Shrink the market until you're first**

Add one filter at a time: a type of buyer, a city, a platform, a problem, a price. Stop when you can honestly say nobody else claims that spot.

4 **Minute 11–15: Fill the one-line statement**

'For [buyer] who [need], we are the [category] that [only-us difference].' Then do the swap test again. It should fail for competitors.

02

6 questions that find the spot you can own

Ries & Trout's central point, in our words: positioning isn't something you do to your product. It's what you set up in the mind of the person buying it. Answer each question in writing.

1 **1. What spot do you already own in the buyer's mind?**

Ask 5 customers: 'How would you describe us to a friend?' Their words are your real position today, even if you don't like it.

2 **2. Who owns the top spot, and what word do they own?**

Name the leader in your market and the one word buyers link to them. You won't take that word by shouting louder. The book's advice is to stop fighting for it.

3 **3. What spot is empty?**

Look for a gap nobody claims: a type of buyer, a problem, a speed, a price point, a platform or a way of working.

4 **4. Can you be first in a smaller category?**

If you can't be first in 'SEO agencies', be first in 'SEO for dental clinics'. The book argues being first in the mind beats being better.

5 **5. What will you give up?**

Owning a spot means saying no to other buyers or services. If you won't give anything up, you don't have a position.

6 **6. Can you hold it for years?**

Do you have the proof, money and patience to repeat this one idea for a long time? Positions are built by repetition, not by one campaign.

03

Ladder map: where you stand in the buyer's head

Ries & Trout picture each product category as a ladder in the mind, with one brand per rung. Fill this for your market. The empty cells are your openings. Example rows are illustrative.

Rung	Brand (yours + competitors)	The word buyers link to them	Can you take it? (yes / no / only narrower)
1 (leader)	[Biggest competitor]	[e.g. 'biggest', 'safe choice']	No. Don't attack the leader's word head-on.
2	[Next competitor]	[e.g. 'cheapest']	[your answer]
3	[Next competitor]	[e.g. 'fast']	[your answer]

Rung	Brand (yours + competitors)	The word buyers link to them	Can you take it? (yes / no / only narrower)
Empty rung	[You?]	[a word nobody owns: a buyer, a city, a problem, a platform]	[yes if you can prove it]
Example: SEO in Pune (illustrative)	Big national agency / cheap freelancers / Your agency	'big clients' / 'cheap' / ???	Empty rung: 'SEO for dental clinics in Pune'

04

Fill-in positioning statement

Positioning statement

For [who: one type of buyer]
who [need: the problem they want solved],
we are the [category: the box they put you in]
that [difference: the one thing only you can claim].
Unlike [main alternative: competitor, DIY, doing nothing],
we [proof: the fact that backs the difference].

> If a competitor could paste your statement on their site unchanged, it's too broad. The 'unlike' and 'proof' lines are where most statements break.

Example (illustrative, not a real company)

For dental clinics
who want more patients booking from Google,
we are the SEO agency
that works only with dentists.
Unlike general agencies that also do bakeries and gyms,
we have built pages for every common treatment and know which ones patients search for.

> Only write the proof line if it's true today. If not, the position is a plan, not a claim. Build the proof first.

Short versions to use everywhere

Headline: [category] for [buyer].
Bio: I do one thing: [category] for [buyer].
Intro line on calls: We only work with [buyer], so we already know [specific thing about them].

> Use the same words everywhere. Repetition is what builds a position.

05

Decision table: which way should you go narrow?

There are a few ways to make your market smaller. Pick the one where you already have proof.

Narrow by	Example	Pick it if...	Watch out for
Type of buyer (industry)	SEO for dentists	You already have 2+ clients in one industry	Too small a market in your area. Check how many exist.
Place	Web design for Indore businesses	Buyers want someone local they can meet	Online competitors who also target that city
Platform	SEO for Shopify stores	You know one tool inside out	The platform's own changes can hurt you
Problem	We fix sites that lost Google traffic	You've solved one problem many times	One-off jobs. Plan what you sell next.
Price / speed	Logo in 48 hours	You can deliver it every single time	Hard to hold if a cheaper player arrives
Against the leader	The Uncola (7-Up)	There's a clear giant everyone knows	Needs budget and boldness to repeat it

06

20 brands that won by owning a narrow position

Real brands and their best-known positions. Slogans are the companies' own ad lines. Some are

from the past; years are given where it matters.

Brand	The spot it owned
Avis	Owned 'number two'. In 1962 it adopted 'We Try Harder', openly admitting Hertz was bigger.
7-Up	Positioned against all colas as 'The Uncola'. A classic example in Ries & Trout's book.
Volvo	Owns safety. It introduced the three-point seatbelt as standard in 1959 and kept repeating the one idea for decades.
FedEx	Owned overnight delivery with its 'absolutely, positively overnight' ads.
Domino's	Owned fast delivery with a 30-minute promise from 1973. The guarantee was later dropped after lawsuits.
BMW	'The Ultimate Driving Machine': the car for people who love to drive.
Southwest Airlines	'THE low-fare airline': cheap, simple, short flights.
Walmart	Owned low prices with 'Always low prices'.
M&M's	Owned not-messy chocolate: 'Melts in your mouth, not in your hand.'
Head & Shoulders	Owned dandruff: a shampoo built around one problem.
Crest	Owned cavity fighting, backed by the American Dental Association's seal.
Enterprise Rent-A-Car	Owned the home-city renter with 'We'll pick you up', while others fought at airports.
Maytag	Owned dependability with the 'Lonely Maytag Repairman' who never gets a call (campaign from 1967).
Hertz	Owned leadership: No. 1 in car rental.
Geico	Owned saving money fast: '15 minutes could save you 15% or more on car insurance.'
Burger King	Owned customization against McDonald's: 'Have it your way.'
Subway	Owned fresh, made-in-front-of-you fast food: 'Eat Fresh.'
Hallmark	Owned the premium card: 'When you care enough to send the very best.'
Red Bull	Created and owned the energy-drink spot in Western markets from the late 1980s.
Duracell	Owned long life: the battery that lasts longer, shown with the Duracell Bunny.

07

Before → after: a generic SEO agency

Illustrative example. The 'after' only works if the agency really does work with one industry.

	Before	After
Homepage headline	We are a full-service digital marketing agency delivering results-driven SEO solutions.	SEO for dental clinics. More patients from Google, from people searching 'dentist near me'.
Instagram bio	Digital marketing | SEO | PPC | Social | Web | Helping brands grow 🚀	SEO for dentists only. Free 5-point clinic Google check below.
About paragraph	[Agency] is a passionate team of experts offering SEO, PPC, social media and web design to businesses of all sizes.	[Agency] does one thing: SEO for dental clinics. We know which treatment pages patients search for, which ones bring bookings, and how to get you into the local map pack.
Services list	SEO, PPC, social media, web design, branding, content, email	Clinic SEO, Google Business Profile, treatment pages. That's it.
Swap test	Passes for any agency (bad)	Fails for general agencies (good)

08

Common positioning mistakes

- ☐ **You attack the leader on the leader's own word.**
  If they own 'biggest', you won't win 'biggest'. Take a different rung.
- ☐ **Your position is a value everyone claims (quality, passion, results).**
  Nobody remembers a word every competitor uses.
- ☐ **You keep adding services 'just in case'.**
  Every new thing you add blurs the spot you own. The book warns against stretching one name over too much.
- ☐ **You picked a niche with no proof.**
  Claiming 'SEO for dentists' with zero dentist clients won't hold. Pick where you have evidence, or build it first.

- [ ] **You changed position after 3 months of silence.**
  Positions take repetition. Give it time and the same words everywhere.

- [ ] **You used a name that doesn't say what you do.**
  Ries & Trout spend a whole part of the book on names. A clear name makes the position easier to remember.

- [ ] **Your website, bio and pitch say different things.**
  One position, said the same way in every place.

09

Copy-paste prompt: pressure-test your position

Paste into ChatGPT, Claude or Gemini

```
Act as a positioning strategist who follows Al Ries and Jack Trout's book Positioning.

My business: [what you sell]
My buyers: [who buys today]
My top 3 competitors and what they're known for: [list]
My draft positioning statement: [paste]
Proof I have today: [real clients, numbers, years, work samples]

1. Tell me which rung of the ladder each competitor owns.
2. Say if my statement passes the swap test (could a competitor use it unchanged?).
3. Suggest 3 narrower positions I could be first in, using only the proof I listed.
4. For each, list what I must give up and one risk.
Do not invent proof or results.
```

> Then ask 5 real customers which of the 3 sounds most like you. They decide, not the AI.

Sources

Every claim in this Workbook traces back to one of these. Checked 2026-11.

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