

## Key Messages For Your Theatre's Brand: Messaging Strategy & Exercises

Capture the unique value your theatre provides to its target audiences in messages that shape your marketing, sales, and communications

**Key messages** are central to your theatre's marketing and sales communication. They serve as a concise summary of the most important values you provide to your customers.

We tend to think of “brand” as a product, like soap. But every theatre has a brand—and it's more than just a name, logo, or offerings. It's the overall perception and feeling customers have about a company, its productions, programs, or services. It's the cumulative experience and impression that forms in consumers' minds and hearts. Essentially, a brand is a company's reputation, built through various elements like visual identity, messaging, and customer interactions

To help you establish—and maintain—your brand, you need key messages that you use consistently with whatever customers you need to reach. Collectively, your key messages should represent all of the most critical parts of what you provide. They serve as the foundation of your overall messaging strategy.

### The Hierarchy of elements in your theatre's brand:

- **Positioning Statement:** Captures the full strategic intent of your brand— your target customer(s), how you differ from your competitors (not only other theatres, but other sources of entertainment, recreation, and personal growth), and your unique benefits
- **Key Messages:** Distill your positioning into *bite-sized ideas* that serve as the bridge between your strategy and your marketing and sales copy
- **Copywriting:** These are the final customer-facing messages you see on your website, sales materials, ad campaigns, social posts, etc.

Key messages also provide shared reference points for everyone involved in your theatre's programming, marketing and sales activities, to ensure consistency across all communication—as well as your board, support staff, and volunteers.

There is no one-size-fits-all—the *process* described below may be the same for any organization, but the *results* will (and should) reflect what is unique about your theatre and what it offers to your community.

## 6 Qualities of a Strong Key Message

1. **Short:** Focused on one key aspect of your brand's value
2. **Memorable:** Taps into a hook or idea that separates the brand from competitors
3. **Simple:** Conveys the message in words that are easy to understand
4. **Specific:** Highlights a unique, distinct quality of the brand
5. **Repeatable:** Constructed in a way that your team can easily share and discuss
6. **Engaging:** Triggers some kind of emotional reaction or connection in people's minds

## Key-Message Exercises

To help create key messages for your organization, you need to understand what unique value you provide. This first exercise consists of two parts that help uncover those unique qualities of your brand's offering and translate them into key messages.

### 1. From Features to Benefits

1. Define the Highlight Features of your offering. These are features that are unique, differentiated, or help your offering stand out in the minds of your customers.
2. Next, translate each of the highlight features into a benefit statement relative to your target customer.

<b>Features to Benefits</b> <i>Translate your Offering's highlight features into customer benefits</i>	
<b>Highlight Feature</b>	<b>Customer Benefit + Description</b>

## 2. From Benefits to Messages

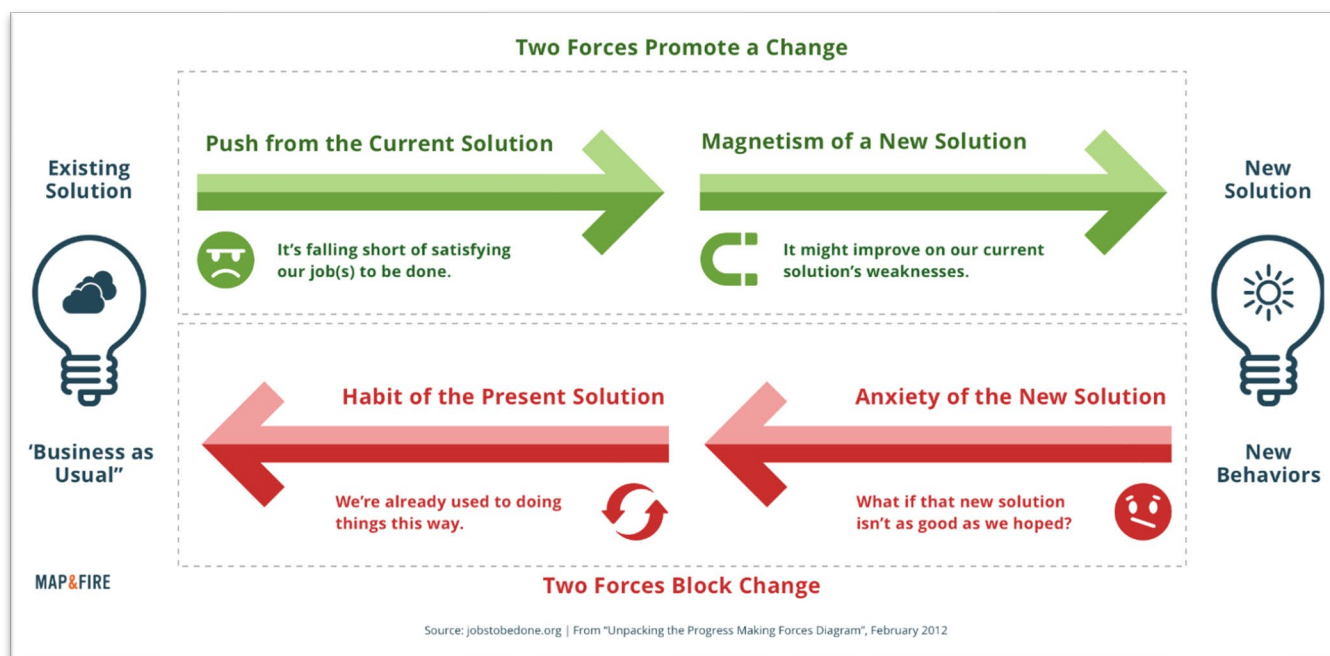
1. Copy your benefit statements from the previous exercise into the first column.
2. Now, translate each benefit into a key message concept for your theatre's brand. For example, if you have an educational program, you might say that it provides supervised activities that help young people in working with others, developing self-confidence, and doing so while parents have time to themselves to follow their own projects or interests.

<b>Benefits to Messages</b> <i>Translate your core benefits into key message ideas</i>	
<b>Customer Benefit</b>	<b>Key Messages</b>

## Four Forces of Change: Key Messages Exercise

1. The second exercise to use in creating key messages comes at it from a slightly different angle. Rather than starting from the basis of your offering and features, look through the lens of what would motivate your *customers* to switch from the provider they currently use to what you offer, instead. (You may have more than one type of customer: those who buy tickets to your productions, a parent looking for an educational program for their child, a teenager wanting to perform with other youth, etc.)
2. To do this, you use a framework that explores the Four Forces that affect customers when changing behavior.
3. The Four Forces framework comes from [The Rewired Group](#). The framework defines two forces that *promote* customers to change, and two forces that *block* customers from change.

4. The graphic below shows each of the Four Forces, and how they impact customer decisions.



#### Some Takeaways:

- The likelihood that someone will buy is based more on *perceived* value than actual value.
- Consumers use a reference point—something they already know and use—as a way to compare a potential new purchase.
- This reference point acts as a way to judge the new option. If the new option is perceived to be better than its reference point, it'll be viewed as a positive or a gain. If it's perceived to be relatively inferior, it'll be seen as a negative or a loss.
- Losses have greater psychological impact than similarly sized gains, and will therefore lead people to value that which they already own or use. Buyers value losses at about three times the rate of gains.
- Anything new is ultimately judged as a series of trade-offs. A consumer will gain something here, but lose something there. If, in aggregate, the gains outweigh the losses, the new thing can win a convert.

Below is a template you can use to work through your brand's key messages for the 4 forces:

Key Messages		
	Force to Address	Your Message
1	<b>Push from the Current Solution</b>  Emphasize shortcomings of what they currently use to show why it's not satisfying their job sufficiently.	
2	<b>Magnetism of a New Solution</b>  Highlight the key benefits of your Offering (Features, Value Proposition).	
3	<b>Anxiety of the New Solution</b>  Emphasize how trying your Offering is quick / easy / cheap / guaranteed / etc. to limit their risk and ease their anxiety.	
4	<b>Habit of the Present Solution</b>  Highlight a specific way that your Offering improves on a core feature or attribute of their current solution.	

## Questions For Developing Key Messages

Here are four questions to consider as you refine and iterate on your brand's key messages:

1. How can you speak to *the core benefits you provide in an emotionally engaging way*?
2. How might you *describe your core benefits to a 6th grader*? Or to a parent (or grandparent) who has no knowledge of your job or industry?
3. Can you *describe the benefits that you provide without relying on cliches or jargon*?
4. What's *one idea related to the benefits you provide that will pique someone's interest enough to keep them on your website and continue reading*?

These are just part of the ongoing process of creating key messages that highlight your strengths and how these relate to your customers' wants and needs.