

SMALL BUSINESS

How Can Small Companies Compete With Giants? The Secret Sauce Is Positioning

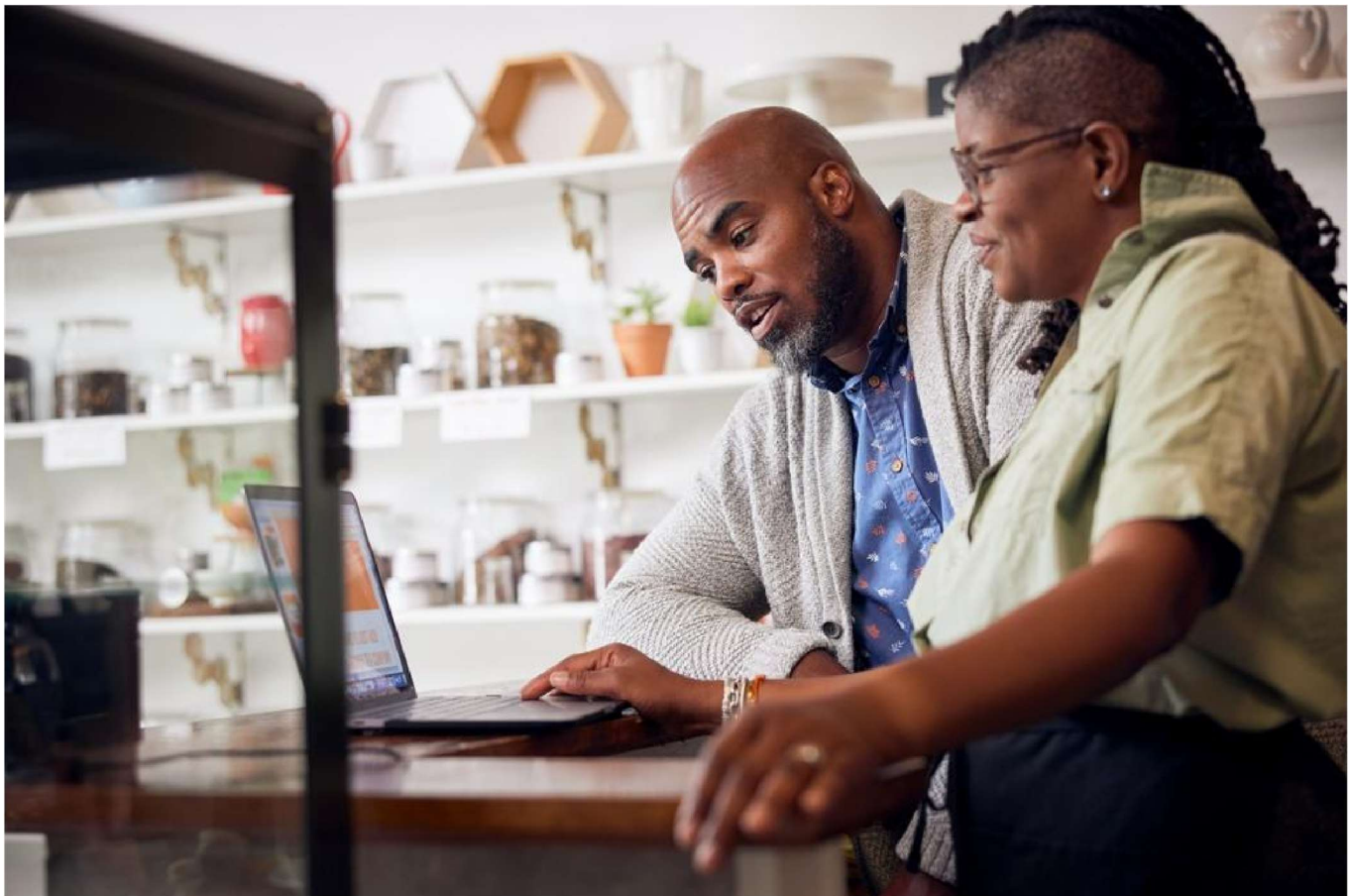
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for Forbes Business Council, **COUNCIL POST** | Membership (fee-based)

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Susanne Mueller Zantop, Founder and Chairwoman of [CEO Positions AG](#), enthusiastic about positioning and reputation building.



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Positioning can make a big difference in how companies are perceived.

When your company is precisely positioned, customers come to you almost by themselves and pay an adequate price for your expertise. Customers know for a hundred percent what you do, why you do it and that you will confidently deliver the right solution for them.

Consider the recent positioning of Kraft Heinz and Newman's Own. Kraft Heinz is a giant company whose [net sales decreased 3%](#) in 2024 and whose sales operating income shrunk by 63.2% in a market that is [growing more than 5% annually](#). In August 2025, investment powerhouse Berkshire Hathaway sold a significant amount of Kraft Heinz stock, taking a [\\$5 billion write-down](#) on Kraft Heinz shares and citing "other-than-temporary" factors for the loss.

Meanwhile, Newman's Own, founded by actor Paul Newman, sells their products into the same market segment and [just announced](#) their plans to bring back a fan-favorite product. I think Paul Newman's portrait on their products, combined with a strong charitable message ("Let's give it all away"), is hard to beat for many customers, despite the slightly higher price for organic ingredients.

The Tangible Value Of Positioning

Years ago, [McDonald's](#) repositioned itself, "transforming from a 'junk' food destination to a fast casual place serving healthier food." This aligned with many consumers' desire to eat healthier food.

And Adidas' focus on "[brand revival](#)" in recent years has come alongside increased sales and operating profit.

How Management Can Contribute To Positioning

The quantitative value of positioning projects is measurable and can show immediate payoffs. For example, within 12 months, I've found it's possible to see meaningful improvements in management reputation score, monthly online mentions and average LinkedIn followers per leadership member.

Another successful outcome is for external and internal appearances of individual team members to rise. When these opportunities are distributed more evenly among all members, they can help with increasing visibility for all.

An engaged management team builds visibility, influence and attention, thus providing a buffer for a company in case of reputational crises, securing market share.

Positioning Best Practices

In my experience, winning positioning projects follow three best practices:

1. Always include the whole executive team.

Even if your team consists of many people, it makes much more sense that the whole leadership team is positioned well. Imagine a CEO with a polished LinkedIn profile, very positive sentiment and high visibility, whereas their deputy does not even have a LinkedIn profile picture and their visibility is practically nonexistent. Not only does it look bad, but it's likely that every company critique will be poured directly onto the CEO, regardless of who is "guilty."

2. Where possible, opt for 360-degree positioning.

For example, working just on your LinkedIn profile will make your LinkedIn look good and create disappointment everywhere else (website, industry portals, Wikipedia, Google, ChatGPT, etc.). Positioning requires a multidimensional approach.

3. Invest some time.

Positioning is not a magic button that you press and start receiving dividends; it requires time to master the necessary skills. But be sure, it can pay off soon enough.

Conclusion

"The better you are grounded, the higher you can climb." I think this old proverb sums it up perfectly. If you are perfectly positioned (i.e., well grounded), you could safely reach heights you never thought possible. Don't wait until your sales figures start to drop.

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By [Susanne Mueller Zantop](#), **COUNCIL POST** | Membership (fee-based). Susanne Mueller Zantop, Founder and Chairwoman of [CEO Positions AG](#), enthusiastic about positioning and reputation building. Read Susanne Mueller Zantop's full executive profile [here](#).

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