

Position for Today's Alternatives—and Learn From Stronger Customer Evidence

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A customer-centered brief on positioning products against today's real alternatives, gathering stronger discovery evidence, and measuring AI through behavioral acceptance. It also covers two product experiments and practical PM learning resources.

Big Ideas

Position for the customer's current decision

April Dunford defines positioning as how a product is best at delivering a value that a well-defined customer segment cares about. Her framework connects five decisions: competitive alternatives, distinct capabilities, differentiated value, best-fit customers, and market category. [1]

Why it matters: In an AI-shifting market, teams can confuse a future product vision with the product buyers can choose now. Dunford's guidance is to position against the status quo and the competitors actually appearing on customer shortlists—while building for future alternatives separately. [1] Hiten Shah similarly argues that AI is reducing the cost for customers to build some software internally, making the customer itself a potential competitor. [2]

Apply it: Explain today's value in today's buying context, but maintain a market point of view grounded in what differentiates your product. Meet customers at their current maturity level rather than leading with capabilities they are not ready to adopt. [1]

Tactical Playbook

Turn customer evidence into positioning decisions

Low-effort inputs—support tickets, reviews, and sales-call notes—can flag something to investigate, but they usually lack enough context to determine what to build. Story-based interviews provide the richer evidence: a specific account of what the customer tried to do, when the need arose, what went wrong, and what they needed. [3]

“The worst thing you could do is never talk to a customer. The best thing you can do is collect a really rich story about their experience.”
[3]

Use the following sequence:

1. **Map alternatives from the customer’s view.** Ask: *If we did not exist, what would they do?* Include both the status quo and shortlisted competitors. [1]
2. **List distinct capabilities, then repeatedly ask “so what?”** Convert feature differences into one to three customer-value themes rather than a long feature inventory. [1]
3. **Identify the customers who value those themes most.** Use that to define the best-fit customer and choose the category context that makes the value understandable. [1]
4. **Keep the model current.** Use advisory boards, executive customer sponsorships, win/loss analysis, and regular positioning check-ins to test whether shortlists, customer needs, or differentiation have changed. [1]

Case Studies & Lessons

Constrained free access outperformed a larger free library

A book-summary app tested three freemium approaches after feedback that users wanted to try the product before paying: one free summary daily with push notifications; 20+ free summaries; and no free option. Each variant went to 33% of users. [4]

The daily-summary variant delivered the best conversion and more daily returns; offering many free options appeared to hurt results. [4] **Lesson:** Test the *shape* of free value, not merely whether a free tier exists. A recurring, bounded experience can be evaluated against both conversion and return behavior.

AI drafts cleared the adoption question at Superhuman

Superhuman’s Auto Drafts 2.0 uses inbox, calendar, and web information to prepare email replies. The team’s initial concern was whether people would send AI-written drafts. [5, 6] It reports that 40% of drafts are sent within a day and 60% are sent unedited. [5, 6]

Lesson: For assistive AI, track behavioral acceptance—not just feature use. Send rate, time to send, and edit rate directly test whether output is useful enough to act on.

Career Corner

Diagnose your PM strengths through scenarios, not self-ratings

Orlog is a free PM personality test built around workplace scenarios. It maps users across Strategy, Builder, Discovery, Growth, Operational, and Founder archetypes, then returns a hybrid type, strengths, and blind spots without requiring login or email. [7]

How to use it: Treat the result as a reflection prompt, not a verdict: assess whether its scenarios and diagnosis match your actual work, then identify one blind spot to validate with a manager or peer. The creator is specifically seeking feedback on accuracy and scenario realism. [7]

Tools & Resources

- **AI PM learning archive:** The Product Compass has released 19 session recordings with timestamps, free templates, and linked resources; it recommends three free sessions as a starting point. [8]
- **A practical Claude operating model:** Former FAANG AI PM Jyothi Nookula’s five-layer approach is: use Sonnet for most PM work and Haiku for scheduled automation; prefer the desktop app for coworking, coding, and design; build a context library and MCP-served skills; connect daily tools; then automate repeatable work with agents. Start at the layer you already have in place and build upward. [9]

Sources

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