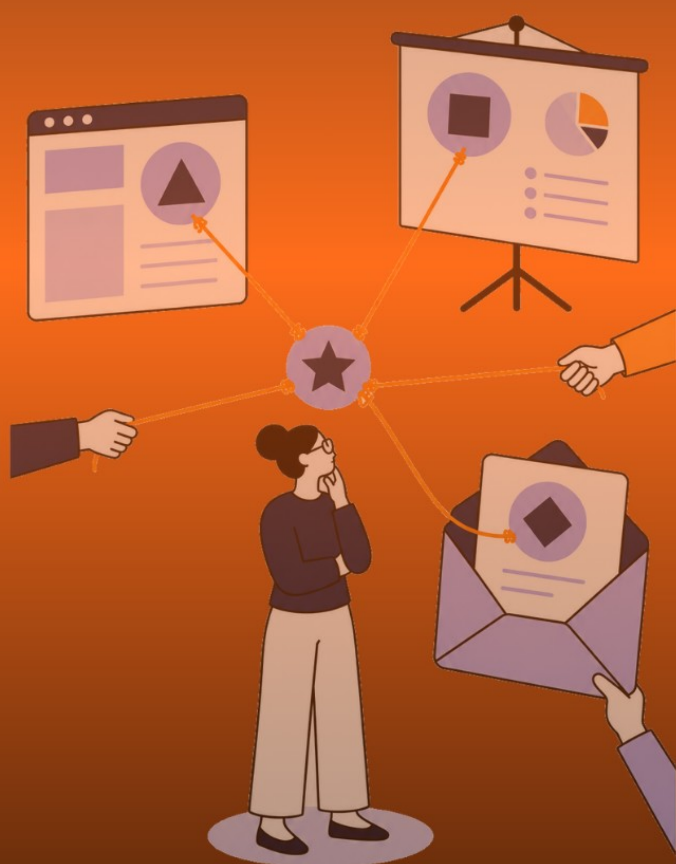
THE DECISION SEQUENCE

MARKETING BUILT AROUND HOW PEOPLE DECIDE

Your brand is arguing with itself |

How to keep your channels telling one story



What it costs when the deck, the site and the email describe three different firms

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How to keep your channels telling one story

What it costs when the deck, the site and the email describe three different firms

Gates. Relevance: secondary. **Credibility: primary.** Proof: no. Safety: no. Access: no.

A buyer labels your firm the first time they encounter it, then reads everything afterward through that label. Three excellent messages that disagree with each other cost more than one adequate message repeated.

Nothing about that requires anyone to have made a mistake.

The symptom

The prospect had read the website. They'd worked through the entire email sequence. They sat through the pitch. And then they arrived at the first real meeting unsure what they were evaluating.

Nobody could point at anything wrong, which is what makes this so hard to catch from the inside. The site is good. The sequence was written by somebody who knew what they were doing. The deck is clean, current, and better than what two competitors sent over. Every individual piece survives inspection.

So the meeting opens with the firm spending fifteen minutes explaining itself, and nobody in the room logs that as a symptom of anything. It reads as normal. It reads as the buyer being slow to catch up.

Why it keeps happening

Fragmentation has a shape, and the shape depends on the firm.

Law practices fragment across practice groups. Each one has its own rainmaker, its own budget, and its own idea of how the firm ought to sound. The group with the revenue gets the say, which is just arithmetic wearing a suit.

CPA firms fragment across service lines. A business owner who talks to three partners in the same building gets three framings of what the firm is worth. Every one of them can be excellent. The aggregate reads as confusion.

Consulting firms fragment across artifacts. The deck, the site and the LinkedIn presence get built at different times by different people, and each one preserves a different era of who the firm thought it was that year.

Here's the qualification, and it changes what you do about this. None of these firms did anything wrong. Every fragment was produced by somebody competent, doing their job, in good faith, without a copy of the specification. There wasn't a specification.

We’ve produced the fragment ourselves. Good work, on brief, delivered on time for one practice group, that made the whole firm harder to understand. It still turns up in work we’d defend line by line.

What the buyer is doing at the Credibility gate

Deciding whether these people understand the problem well enough to be taken seriously.

Inconsistency answers that question badly without anybody ever making a false claim. The prospect doesn’t sit down and audit the discrepancies. Something feels off, the firm gets filed under not quite right, and the filing happens before any rational evaluation begins.

First framing carries because it decides which mental label the firm receives, and every later touchpoint gets interpreted through it. Reinforce the frame and each contact is worth more than the one before it. Contradict it and you’re paying money to manufacture confusion. That’s how a firm increases its spend, its output and its channel coverage, and goes backwards.

There’s a second reader now, and it never gets bored. Consistency of positioning across a firm’s own published material is one of the signals a sorting model weighs when it decides which firms a buyer ever sees. Every contradiction sitting in the public record, the outdated specialty page, the partner bio written under two positioning strategies ago, is noise the machine averages into the firm’s introduction. A firm that reads as generic to a human reads as nothing at all to a machine.

The correction

It starts with a table and about forty minutes.

Pull the last piece of messaging material each practice group, service line or owner produced. The most recent one, whatever it happens to be: a capability statement, a landing page, a one-pager from a conference. Lay them side by side where people can see all of them at once.

Then look for one thing. A shared core sentence. Some version of who the firm serves and what it does for them that appears, in recognizable form, in all of them.

If it isn’t there, stop commissioning content. That’s the fix-first item, and it outranks the campaign, the site refresh, and whatever’s queued for next quarter. Assets built without a core sentence add volume to the confusion and get billed as progress.

Write the sentence. One sentence, plain language, and get it agreed by the people who hold the budgets rather than by a committee assembled to be inclusive. A committee produces something everybody can live with and nobody will use. Budget holders produce something that survives, because they’re the only ones with the standing to kill it later and they’ve already declined to.

Then make it the check. Every new asset, before it ships, gets held against the sentence: does this reinforce the frame, or introduce a different one? That’s the whole gate, and it takes about a minute.

A one-page narrative lock beats a fifty-page brand guide nobody opens. Disconnected content proves you’re publishing. A coherent body of work creates recognition.

Before and after

Before. *Site: “Trusted advisors to growing businesses.” Deck: “Specialists in complex cross-border transactions.” Email sequence: “Your partner for compliance peace of mind.”*

After. *All three, underneath: "We help owner-managed companies handle the financial decisions that have outgrown their in-house team." The tax group says what that means at year end. The transaction group says what it means at a sale. Same sentence carrying both.*

The hard call

Somebody's framing loses. The core sentence can't be the union of three good descriptions, and the group with the strongest internal brand is usually the one asked to give up the most ground. That conversation is unpleasant and it's still cheaper than the alternative, which is three budgets competing to shape the same prospect's understanding of one firm.

Run this on your own material

Ask three partners from different groups to describe what the firm does. Separately, in writing, two sentences each. No conferring, and no sample answer from you, because a sample answer tells them what to say and you'll learn nothing.

Give them a day. Then put the three responses next to each other on a single page and read them the way a prospect would who received all three in the same week.

If they share a core, you have a lock and a maintenance job. If they don't, you have the thing to fix before another dollar goes into content. It costs you nothing except the asking.

Signals you've cleared it

Advance when the three descriptions come back sharing a recognizable core. When a new asset can be checked against the sentence in under a minute. When somebody outside of marketing sends a draft back for drifting off it, which is the signal that matters most, because it means the sentence stopped being a marketing document and became how the firm describes itself.

Hold when the three answers arrive excellent and different. Hold when the agreed sentence is broad enough that every group can carry on doing exactly what it was doing, because that's a committee outcome wearing a lock's clothing. Hold when the sentence lives in a document and nobody can say it out loud from memory... which is the same as not having one.

Where this connects

Engagement Success in an AI World · Proximity Is No Longer Measured in Miles. A coherent body of work creates recognition, and disconnected content only proves somebody is publishing.

Research Library · Entry 02, heuristics and cognitive biases.

Next move · Go to *How to describe who you serve*.