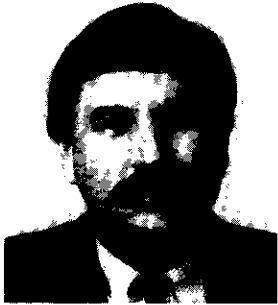


THOMAS J. REYNOLDS
AND
ALYCE BYRD CRADDOCK

THE APPLICATION OF THE MECCAS MODEL TO THE DEVELOPMENT AND ASSESSMENT OF ADVERTISING STRATEGY:

A CASE STUDY



THOMAS J. REYNOLDS currently serves as president of the Institute for Consumer Research, a research and consulting company specializing in the assessment of strategic positionings and the development of strategic communication options. In addition, Dr. Reynolds serves as a professor in the School of Management at the University of Texas at Dallas.



ALYCE BYRD CRADDOCK is senior manager of market research and analysis for Federal Express Corporation where she is responsible for the planning, development, and implementation of all corporate market research programs including research support of advertising and promotion, new service development, international marketing, and pricing/forecasting. She joined Federal Express as a senior research analyst in 1979.

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The identification of viable positioning opportunities is a critical problem for marketing managers. In a mature product class, or one in which products are not uniquely differentiable with respect to product characteristics, the task is particularly difficult. To develop a unique positioning for a product in a competitive, perceptually crowded marketplace, a manager needs research tools and an interpretative framework that helps:

- (1) *Identify* the perceptual orientations or segments that exist in the marketplace, including the personal motivations that provide the underlying basis for interpreting products/services.
- (2) *Specify* the product's current strategic position as well as that of its competitors.
- (3) *Integrate* the consumer perceptual information and the current assessment of strategic positionings into the identification, assessment, and choice of alternative strategies and communication.

The failure of most attempts to resolve this fundamental managerial problem is due to the lack of a framework that permits integration of both consumer research and advertising strategy specification. The problem is confounded by the fact that it is also extremely difficult to think divergently in the creation of

new strategic positions. The ability to develop a meaningful set of advertising strategy options requires a framework that permits the strategist to generate alternatives that are grounded both in consumer perceptions and in the competitive environment of the marketplace.

The purpose of this article is to explain the use of one such framework, the MECCAS model (Reynolds and Gutman, 1984), to specify advertising strategy. To do so, we discuss an empirical application of the method to strategy development in the Overnight Delivery Service (ODS) market.

First, we discuss the theoretical literature and conceptual framework pertaining to the research methodologies that are used. Using examples, we detail how the understanding of the consumer gained from the research can be represented from a strategic perspective. Second, we present the MECCAS model and demonstrate its use to specify the components of advertising strategy. Third, we discuss how competitive advertising strategies can be objectively contrasted using this conceptual framework. Lastly, we demonstrate the integration process by which the understanding of the consumer and the understanding of the competitive advertising can lead to the specification of a new advertising strategy. The example of this process using Federal Express advertising is then con-

trusted on a pre/post basis.

Background

Conceptual Perspective. From a conceptual standpoint, the advertising strategist's fundamental problem is to understand consumers at a strategic level and to use this knowledge as the basis for developing alternative positionings. A practical solution to this problem has been accomplished by adopting an aggregate *means-end* chain approach to understanding consumers (Young and Feigin, 1975; Gutman, 1982). According to means-end theory, people have valued end-states toward which they strive and choose among alternative means of reaching those goals. Products and their attributes are valued because they are instruments—means—to valued ends. Thus the “means that are in the products” have salience only because they help reach the “ends that are in the people.”

The connections between the product and the person represent the personal interpretation that serves to explain *why* a product/service is seen as being different and desirable. (And, as such, should be the primary goal of the communication process.) The linkage of the product to self can be seen to span three basic conceptual thought-process levels or “levels of abstraction.” The product-specific level, attribute, represents both physical and abstract characteristics of the product/service. The person-specific level, personal values, represents the category-specific end states that are desirable. The critical link between these two levels is the consequence (of consumption/use) level, which comprises both positive and negative outcomes—see Table 1 for an example of a partial list of attributes, consequences, and values for the ODS category.

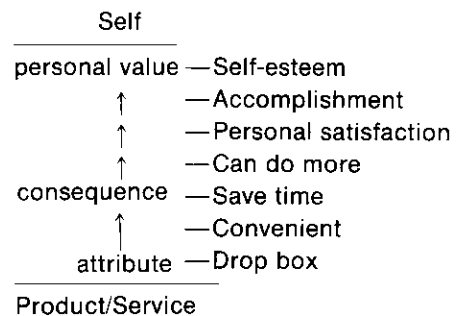
Table 1
Lexicon of Meaning for Overnight Delivery Service Category (for secretaries)

Attributes	
On-time delivery	
pickup	
Drop box	
Consequences	
Reliable	consistent, dependable
guaranteed delivery	
Can do more	more productive
Save time	less time wasted
	more efficient
Makes me look good	I'm credible
Make more money	
Convenient	no hassle
	easy to use
Get promoted	more responsibility
Less worry	makes job easier
	avoid responsibility for errors of others
Avoid looking bad (to boss)	not making mistakes
Values	
Peace of mind	able to cope
Personal satisfaction	happiness
	a better person
In control	avoid taking responsibility
Self-esteem	self-assured
Accomplishment	achieve goals
	success

(Note the relation of the definitions of levels of abstraction to the commonly used concept of benefit, which refers in means-end terminology to a positive

consequence. The avoidance of the contrasted negative consequences, then, are defined as being distinct from benefits. For example, “avoiding a sun burn” would not be considered a benefit in the means-end lexicon of meaning. It would instead be the avoidance of a negative consequence.) Attributes, then, can be thought of deriving their salience because of their ability to satisfy, provide, or avoid a given consequence, which in turn is deemed important because it satisfies a higher level personal value. Figure 1 shows a simple schematic of this relationship and corresponding examples across the levels from the ODS category.

Figure 1
ODS Perceptual Pathway Example



The unique strength of the means-end paradigm is that it shows not only what key elements motivate consumers but also what the connections are between these motives and the tangible product or service attributes.

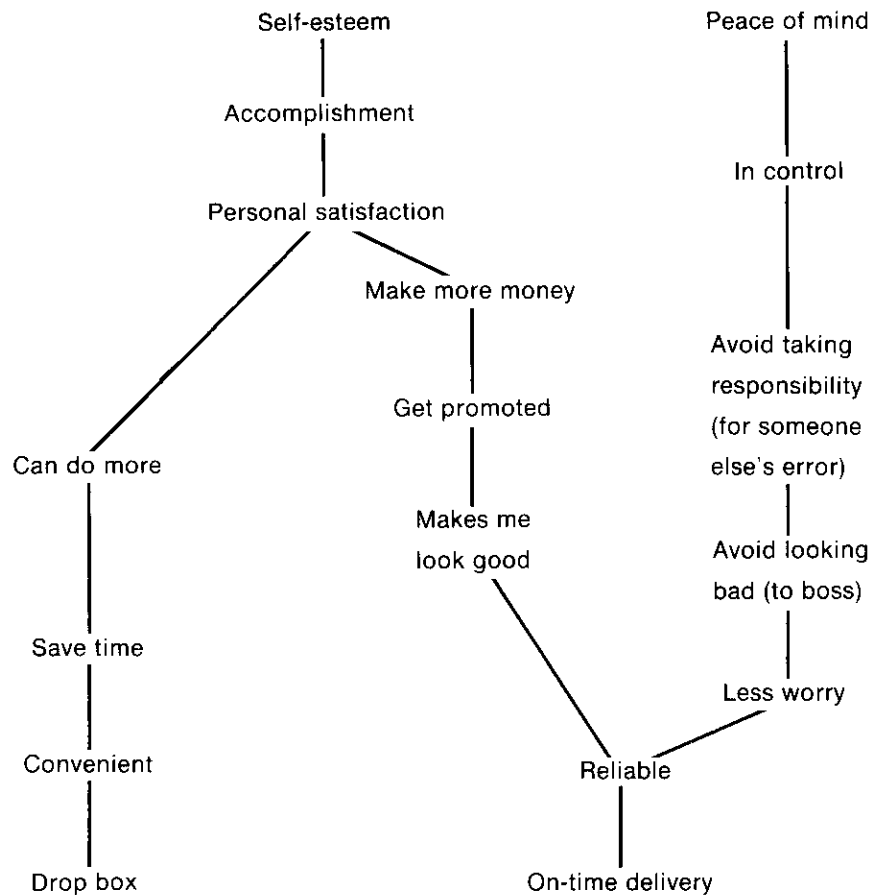
Perceptual Orientations. A perceptual orientation or perceptual segment represents a unique combination of an attribute (A) - consequence (C) - and a personal value (V). It is a unique way in which the product is interpreted with respect to self, through the translation of the A/C/V chain. The schematic in Figure 1 of the translation of “drop box” through “convenience” to “ac-

“accomplishment” and “self-esteem” serves as a prototypical example of this translation process to higher level meanings for one target segment of ODS, secretaries. It is important to note that these hierarchies represent *prototypical* orientations, which means that each respondent need not utilize every level in the respective hierarchy. Indeed, any given respondent is likely to effect a translation using only a subset of the total number of elements represented in the hierarchy.

The representation of these perceptual orientations in this way suggests that a summary map can be constructed which would minimize the redundancy between the orientations and thus make them easier to contrast and assess. Such a map is called a Hierarchical Value Map (HVM). The HVM identifies the key content elements of memory and the associations that give meaning to the differences that consumers perceive between and among competitive products (Olson and Reynolds, 1984). The map seen in Figure 2 is arranged hierarchically, with the more abstract values at the top and the concrete attributes at the bottom. It shows three different orientations, each representing a unique type of perceptual orientation toward the product category. The intermediate points within the orientation may be considered to be intermediate subcategories within the three major “levels of abstraction” content categories (See Olson and Reynolds [1984] for a complete review of the various methods by which to classify these intermediate categories.)

To illustrate, “reliable” seen in Figure 2 is interpreted by secretaries in distinct ways, depending on their perception orientation. In this case, they value either the positive desire to “look good” or the ability to “avoid looking bad”

Figure 2
Secretaries Summary Hierarchical Value Map



(negative consequence). This apparently minor nuance, representing apparent bipolar opposites, is critical in that the more personal value orientations, which drive perceptual, are different. The motives of these segments are different and thus offer alternative positioning options. Again using the example, the instrumental level (“peace of mind”), meaning the level just preceding the highest level personal value (“security”), supplies the meaningful interpretation or leverage into this end state. In combination, these high-level connections represent the driving forces that advertising may be oriented toward—the strategic direction.

Communication Perspective.
Product positioning and the

communication strategy that serves as the foundation for positioning, however, go far beyond simply identifying the driving force(s) behind a particular product category. Successful advertising results when the communication operates simultaneously at many levels. In using the MECCAS framework, the researcher learns the elements of consumer motivation in the words consumers use (as opposed to manufacturer’s jargon). The result is that the communication can be better integrated with perceptual keys that are more likely to affect the consumer—verbally (the right message with the right words) and visually (the setting for the advertising or how the characters behave or interact).

A complete strategy must also detail the message elements, which are in great part determined in the marketing environment by asking the question "Who owns what already?" A complete strategy must also spell out the specifics of the translation process across all levels of abstraction. One must also bear in mind the significant contribution the executional format can have in facilitating the translation process. Table 2 defines this communication-as-a-translation-process paradigm which we refer to as the "Means-End Conceptualization of the Components of Advertising Strategy" (MECCAS) (Reynolds and Gutman, 1984).

The strategic framework outlined by the MECCAS model addresses issue 2 above by identifying the position of a product and its competitors. Moreover, it does so in a standard, strategically-based format. Although the analysis is subjective, numerous applications of the model have shown that marketing managers, marketing researchers, their agency counterparts, and agency creatives produce consistent evaluations that can usually be agreed upon by all concerned. A

particular benefit of this methodology is that, because of its standard format for detailing strategy and because consumers supply their own words, it provides a much-needed lexicon which facilitates both client-agency interactions and agency management-creative interactions. This last point is critical. Prior to the MECCAS model no complete communication strategy paradigm existed that was predicated upon positioning the product/service in terms of personal relevance to the consumer.

The identification of strategic alternatives requires a perceptual view of the marketplace within the means-end framework such as that exemplified by the secretaries' summary HVM presented in Figure 2. That is, a value structure map for the target market of concern must be constructed, identifying the key content elements and their dominant connections. Analysis of the current positions of the competition on the value structure map permits the construction of new strategy options in the same framework by locating a hierarchy yet untapped. The strategist can do this either by com-

binning the elements in a new and meaningful way or by focusing on what is currently a unique level, or connection, within the existing hierarchy.

Clearly, the task of assessing and constructing strategies in this way is also subjective, relying on management interpretation. Yet the entire strategy process at present is virtually totally subjective with no real frame of reference for decision-making. The MECCAS model provides a *framework for thinking* which permits managers to consider and contrast various strategic options, thereby significantly reducing subjectivity. Clearly, the key to developing innovative strategic alternatives lies in the understanding of the interaction of the content levels (the translation process indicated by the connections of linkages between concepts) for the consumer.

The process requires, first, that the value structure map be known as well as the complete set of meanings that underlie each content element. The problem then becomes one of identifying in consumer language the key content elements across the levels of abstraction and their respective linkages.

Table 2
MECCAS Model of Advertising Strategy

Level	Definition
Driving force	The value orientation of the strategy; the end-level to be focused on in the advertising.
Leverage point	The manner in which the advertising will "tap into," reach, or activate the value or end-level of focus; the specific key way in which the value is linked to the specific features in the advertising.
Executional framework	The overall scenario or action plot, plus the details of the advertising execution. The executional framework provides the "vehicle" by which the value orientation is to be communicated, especially the gestalt of the advertisement — its overall tone and style.
Consumer benefit	The major positive consequences for the consumer that are to be communicated, verbally or visually, in the advertising.
Message elements	The specific attributes, consequences, or features about the product that are communicated verbally or visually.

(Source: Reynolds and Gutman, 1984)

Research Methodology

A method which has been successful in providing the necessary content and linkage information in several varied product and service classes is a technique termed laddering (Gutman and Reynolds, 1979; Meyers, 1984; Peter and Olson, 1987). The technique requires in-depth interviews in which respondents are confronted with products with which they are familiar. They are asked to make personal distinctions with respect to differences in perception or preference between or among competitive

products. The researcher uses a series of directed probes to discover *why* these distinctions are personally relevant to them. The goal is to understand the links that connect the basic perceptual differences to the highest levels possible. The strategist seeks to understand the personal value which represents the underlying consumer motivation component.

Thus, two components of the laddering process are apparent. The first involves the elicitation of perceptual distinctions between and among products, using, for example, the triadic sort (Kelly, 1955) where the respondent is asked for some overall way within a three-product set in which two of the products/services could be considered different from the third. For example, when a secretary was asked to distinguish between Express Mail, DHL, and Federal Express, the basis of her developing a distinction is the perception that Federal Express has a "drop box" and the other two do not. Once both poles of the distinction are elicited ("drop box" versus "no drop box"), the respondent is asked which pole is preferred. It is this preferred pole that serves as the basis for the second component of laddering, which is the probing process. The process uncovers the personal connection or relevance of the attribute distinction in terms of what it means to the consumer.

This questioning process is personalized for each respondent, in an attempt to move continually higher, thereby uncovering the reasons that give each preceding level meaning and importance. The purpose of laddering can thus be seen as forcing the consumer up the "ladder of abstraction," uncovering elements across all attribute, consequence, and value levels. Typically, for each re-

spondent several ladders can be elicited, representing the translations of the key salient attributes.

The development of an aggregate hierarchical value map across key target segments, which is usually based upon 50 to 100 respondents, is accomplished by a two-step analysis that first requires a traditional content analysis of all elements elicited by the laddering procedure. Summary codes, representing the content categories output from the content analysis corresponding to the unique categories of response, are then used to summarize and codify the original ladders (see Table 1). The second step involves scoring and summarizing the dominant connections between key content elements (see Figure 2). It is this summarization that yields the hierarchical value map (see Reynolds and Gutman [1988] for a complete exposition on both the laddering interviewing procedures and analysis methodology).

The value structure map or hierarchical value map once constructed then provides the ability to integrate in the same theoretically-based, consumer-driven framework the perceptual orientation information and the assessment of the current market-

place environment, from an overall strategic perspective. This permits the development and specification of advertising strategy alternatives (denoted earlier as issue 3).

Having come full circle in terms of specification and explanation of both the theory and research framework, the three highly interrelated issue areas can now be further explained by way of an example.

Federal Express Advertising Strategy Research and Implementation

Although Federal Express was the initiator of the overnight delivery business and had award-winning advertising on-air, the entry of serious competition in the marketplace (DHL, UPS, Purolator, and the U.S. Postal Service's Express Mail) caused some serious questioning in the spring of 1983 about the long-term appropriateness of their advertising strategy. This questioning, focusing primarily on strategic issues, suggested the use of MECCAS as an approach to offer both assessment of the competitive environment as well as stra-

Table 3
MECCAS Representation of DHL

Primary target:	Business executives / "generators" of ODS
Driving force:	Achievement / success
Leverage point:	Trust in (service of) company re: in control
Executorial framework:	A. C. Nielsen, chairman of A. C. Nielsen Company, explains that American businesses count on his Nielsen ratings. He discusses reasons why he counts on DHL for time-critical overnight deliveries.
Consumer benefit:	Reliable/can count on convenience
Message elements:	Thirty-thousand locations More on-time deliveries to more places around the world than anybody
Tagline:	"Next best thing to taking it there yourself"

tegic direction.

The output from the consumer research phase was to be used in two ways. The first was to build a set of statements to be used to objectively assess, on a strategic level, the competitive advertising. (In addition, a substantive issue emerged on how the humor trademark that Federal Express was known by would fit into the MECCAS framework.) The second research issue concerned the specification of HVMS for each key target market, namely, secretaries, traffic managers, and executives of small and large corporations, as well as an overall value map across all groups. It is these maps that would serve as a basis of developing an understanding of the consumer orientations to the ODS market, which would then serve as the framework to specify the components of advertising strategy.

A total of 81 two-hour laddering interviews were conducted across the four target segments, the only additional screening requirement being that the individual was the primary decision maker as to what air express company was selected. Half the interviews were used for the purpose of developing a strategy assessment instrument. Following a procedure suggested by Gutman and Reynolds (in press), statements were generated that corresponded to each concept elicited by the respondents at each level of abstraction. These statements were then used in the remaining interviews to assess the commercials.

The specific research and assessment findings presented in the following sections have been limited in terms of the target group (secretaries, "facilitators" of ODS) and the advertising reviewed. This was done due to the proprietary nature of such strategic findings.

Strategy Assessment. The

Table 4
MECCAS Representation of Express Mail

Primary target:	Secretaries/"facilitators" of ODS
Driving force:	Accomplishment
Leverage point:	Personal satisfaction re: in control
Executional framework:	Secretary in office with her boss, sitting in the background. Boss appears rather frantic. Secretary mimics a client who demanded a package overnight from her boss. She recites a mocking dialogue she had with her boss relating to her choice of overnight delivery service. The client calls the secretary about receiving the package. With signs of relief, the boss confidently retorts back to secretary.
Consumer benefit:	Makes me look good Less worry Reliable
Message elements:	Deliver 70,000 packages on-time every day Two-pound package just \$9.35, about half of what most others charge
Tagline:	"We make you look good for less."

MECCAS summary of advertising strategy for two competitors and the then current Federal Express campaign appears in Tables 3, 4 and 5, respectively. The specifics of the execution are also expressly detailed so that the reader can recall or at least visualize the actual advertising. The examples of how MECCAS is utilized in the specification of the

strategic components follows, prior to a more objective assessment of the ads. The understanding gained by first becoming completely familiar with the MECCAS framework is essential in that the formal specification of a new strategic direction requires a working knowledge of the interrelation of the various components. MECCAS is thus

Table 5
MECCAS Representation of Federal Express (1983)

Primary target:	Business executives / "generators" of ODS
Driving force:	_____
Leverage point:	In control (weak)
Executional framework:	Humorous execution. Executive telephoning delivery service agent about the urgency of receiving package at specific time in the morning. The package contains slides for a major business presentation. The agent repeatedly responds that the package will arrive on-time while background co-workers are ineptly working. The next day the executive calls inquiring about undelivered package. With the failure of delivery, the executive reverts to performing hand animations on the projection screen in meeting room while waiting for the package.
Consumer benefit:	Less worry Avoid looking bad
Message elements:	10:30 AM delivery
Tagline:	Next time send it Federal Express—when we say "you got it, you'll get it."

viewed as a framework of thinking in consumer-based terminology, one that mirrors the translation process that communications are intended to facilitate.

Basically, DHL's use of a credible spokesperson, Arthur Nielsen (who is relatively well-known for his business requirements of accuracy and reliability), provides an excellent executional frame that serves to communicate both the credibility of the com-

pany and the rationally-based reasons why the company is superior, namely, "key service facts" including the vast number of "delivery locations" served. The primary target of this ad would appear to be businessmen or "generators" of documents, with office workers or "facilitators" as secondary. This DHL execution appears to work well, at least subjectively assessed, at all levels of MECCAS and can be viewed as successful in trans-

lating the service attributes to personally relevant characteristics contained in the higher order value orientations.

Paradoxically, the obvious strength of the ad and the potential weakness of the strategy is in the choice of Arthur Nielsen as the spokesperson. The assessment summarized with the other two ads in Table 6 shows that the advertisement clearly benefits from Mr. Nielsen. A nearly identical DHL execution of the same executional format (and strategy) with Ted Turner as the spokesperson performed significantly worse (in terms of subsequent strategic communication assessment) than the Nielsen spot. Clearly, in this case, the spokesperson to a great degree is the strategy. Therefore, this strategy suffers from potential lack of recognizability by primary and secondary target markets. In addition, the ability to find other spokespersons as credible as Mr. Nielsen is of issue.

The Express Mail ad from the U.S. Postal Office, apparently targeted at "facilitators," secretaries and office help, clearly stresses price as their superior point of differentiation. "Looking good" reinforces the secretarial benefit as does the "hectic situation" portrayed. Ultimately, the personal satisfaction obtained from being "in control" of the situation as well as reinforcing the key role the secretary plays in the office-to-office communication process pays off in the feeling of "personal/job satisfaction." Overall, the ad communicates the competitive advantage on price of this overnight service quite well, with the higher level meanings being represented, albeit not very powerfully.

The classic Federal Express advertising is summarized in Table 5. The communication of "on-time delivery," leading to the consumer benefit, "dependable

Table 6
Statements Distinguishing Selected ODS Advertising Strategies
(percentage statement endorsement: 0 = 0%/10 = 100%)

Statements	DHL	Express Mail	Federal Express
<i>Driving force</i>			
Self-esteem	5	1	1
Peace of mind	6	2	1
Accomplishment	[7]	1	1
<i>Leverage point</i>			
Trust in company	[9]	3	[4]
In control	[7]	3	2
Personal/job satisfaction	4	[5]	2
<i>Executional framework</i>			
Ad shows reality	[7]	4	4
Can laugh at situation	0	4	[7]
Ad too cute	0	4	1
Demonstrates personal service	[8]	2	2
Characters believable	[9]	4	2
Situation demeaning	0	[5]	2
Situation hectic	1	[6]	[9]
<i>Consumer benefit</i>			
Convenient to use	[8]	2	2
Makes me look good	5	[7]	3
Dependable service	[9]	1	[7]
Less worry	[8]	5	4
Inexpensive	0	[9]	0
<i>Message elements</i>			
Numerous delivery locations	[9]	3	3
Relevant service facts	[8]	[7]	4
Gives actual prices	0	[9]	0
On-time delivery	1	6	[8]

service," is humorously portrayed in the clever executional frames. It serves to provide the key communication elements of the overnight delivery category. The higher levels, representing the personal meanings, however, are not as well communicated as in the other two competitors' strategies. Clearly, the humor and identification with Federal Express, together with the fact that the name Federal Express had become virtually a synonym for overnight delivery, has resulted in great equity both in the advertising and in the name. The great strength of the initial dramatization of negative consequences through humor had been a great success in building awareness for this new service. But with the new competitive environment, the question about a long-term strategic focus is raised.

The importance of operating at all levels was considered to be important, thereby ensuring as much personal relevance as possible that can be translated to the product as well as bolstering the rational foundation, message elements, that permits positive product/service differentiation. This latter point, given the price superiority that virtually all the competition enjoyed and their ever-increasing, on-time performance statistics, put Federal Express in a potentially vulnerable position. And finally, although a stronger strategic frame (calling for a new strategic focus) at all levels was apparently desirable, it was also clear that the consumer equity of the humor in the executions should not be abandoned.

The examples of the initial, subjective MECCAS assessment detailed above can now be contrasted with the objective summary presented in Table 6. In addition, the results of simple percentage endorsements of

statements corresponding to the key concepts for all three ads can now be used to contrast the communication effectiveness of the respective executions on a strategic basis. Note that these simple percentages represent only a subset of the actual statements used. In empirical application, strategic assessment of this type requires typically from 50-60 such statements. The key statements used in the assessment of these ads are bracketed. A brief summary of the interpretation follows.

At the message element level, the Federal Express ad does communicate "on-time delivery," which can be seen as the fundamental basis for any use of ODS. The fact that the competition, as noted earlier, is reaching an equivalent level of performance on this dimension suggests that finding another basis that is not as potentially vulnerable is advisable. The DHL ad uses as an attribute basis, or reason to believe, the "numerous delivery locations" which serve to give them credibility as being a viable alternative to Federal Express. The Express Mail ad focuses on price as a leverage at the attribute level, which is apparently considered a "relevant service fact."

The summary assessment of items at the consumer benefit level reveals the translations of the attributes or message elements into personally meaningful terms. The "on-time" delivery for Federal Express corresponds to "dependable service." The DHL ad communicates even more strongly "dependable service," as well as "less worry" and "convenient to use." The effect of Mr. Nielsen as the spokesperson is seen to have a direct influence on the assessment of the service. The price message in Express Mail is translated, as expected, to "inexpensive," while the secretary-based

execution also results in the communication of "makes me look good."

Executionally, the trademark of humor in the Federal Express advertising is evidenced by the strong joint endorsement of "situation hectic" and "can laugh at situation." The inferiority of Federal Express on "demonstrates personal service," however, as compared to DHL can be seen to be problematic. The use of a realistic situation in the DHL ad ("ad shows reality") and "believable characters" permits not only the consumer benefit of "dependable service" to be communicated but also serves to provide the basis for higher level meanings to be communicated. The Express Mail execution demonstrates an interesting problem. The endorsement of the "hectic situation" statement reflecting the executional frame probably influences the strong endorsement of "dependable service" at the consumer benefit level, but due to the fact the secretary is apparently in charge of the boss, the statement "situation is demeaning" is also endorsed. This leads one to speculate whether the ad may be serving to alienate one potential target market, the "generators."

Evaluation of the higher levels, leverage point and driving force, shows the failure of Federal Express to move beyond and translate their executional humor into anything personally relevant, at least in reference to the "facilitator" target group. This is also true of the Express Mail ad. In contrast, DHL, again due primarily to Mr. Nielsen, does communicate "accomplishment," through being "in control" and "trust in company."

Overall, the DHL strategy appears as the most integrated across all levels, thus providing the best translation into personally relevant terms. The Express

Mail ad focusing on price works well at the service characteristic levels. The executionally-driven Federal Express ad, however, appears not to be as firmly grounded in the basic characteristics of the service and does not permit the higher levels to be reached. The question, then, is what options for the modification of strategy exist, while retaining the basic humor trademark?

Strategic Direction. The second objective of the consumer research, the determination of key linkages across content elements (Table 1) representing perceptual communications for different target markets, serves as the framework for evaluation of strategic alternatives. For purposes of illustration, only the secretaries' HVM presented in Figure 2 will be used as a basis to demonstrate how this approach, based on understanding consumer motivation, can be used to provide strategic direction. For brevity, the evaluation of the critical target market considerations central to any strategy will be left out of this discussion. For purposes of exposition, the focus will be limited to the secretary's perspective detailed in the example date.

Prior to the detailing of the manner in which the maps can be interpreted, a few general comments about MECCAS need to be made. The best analogy for overviewing communication as a translation process is that of the brightness of an electric light and the circuit that provides it the energy to burn. It is assumed in the MECCAS framework that the more tightly a product or service is linked to self, thereby achieving personal relevance, the more likely the product or service will be preferred. Like electric current, then, the wiring or linking of strategic elements (A/C/V) from the product to the person must be solidly connected

across all intermediate points. A loose connection allowing only part of the current to be passed on results in a weaker light and, analogously, a weaker strategy. Further, this analogy suggests that if one level does not exist, the connection cannot be made.

In our example, all levels need to exist to make the best connection between the product and self. Of course, the analogy offered here is meant to be interpreted on a conceptual level. Clearly, this simplified device does not imply that managers should ignore concepts such as the product life cycle, the current market, and the communications environment. However, as a basic perspective, this analogy would appear to have merit and can serve as a fundamental way of thinking about communication strategy.

Another general rule of thumb concerning MECCAS is that a firm foundation or point of differentiation at an attribute level is a necessity. This attribute level basis, however, may be explicitly or implicitly communicated. Without a solid attribute foundation, the circuit can be envisioned to have no source and thus no chance of providing the necessary current to the light. Although the bases of preference have been shown to be driven at the higher levels of abstraction as compared to attributes (Reynolds, Gutman, and Fiedler, 1984; Reynolds and Jamieson, 1984; Jolly, Reynolds, and Slocum, in press), the attribute-based "reason why" is required by the consumer to rationalize his or her choice behavior. To reinforce this fact, the consumer decision makers in the above-mentioned studies consistently rated the relative importance of the attribute levels, in terms of preference, significantly higher than either consequences or personal values. This was true even

though the research showed their preferences to be driven by higher level concepts.

The rational hook to justify choice, in particular in a category such as this where justification of choice may be required, should be considered a critical basis of any strategic positioning. And, more specifically, the strategic issue at hand given the major price differences that exist in the marketplace makes this perspective gain more validity.

In the following section, we will attempt to review each of the components with a brief rationale as to the underlying basis of the strategic considerations. Given the logical rules of MECCAS, the first place to assess and contrast the relative strengths and inherent weaknesses of the 1983 Federal Express advertising strategy would be at the message element level.

Contrasting the two competitive ads to the Federal Express execution reveals that the communication of "relevant service facts" for the competition lends the basic support for delivering the respective consumer benefits. The rational "reason why" gives the consumer a foundation from which the service can be interpreted with respect to self. From a strategic perspective, there existed a need to investigate unique service facts that (1) positively differentiate Federal Express from the competition and (2) are not things that can be attacked or potentially dominated by the competition. Thus, a directed effort at finding such a fundamental basis for differentiation was undertaken.

The resulting answer to this issue was to focus on the advanced satellite communications system upon which Federal Express bases their unique service features. The viability of this approach, which led ultimately to its implementation, stems from

the fact that it was generalizable due to the numerous facets or components of the network that could be portrayed. Additionally, the ability to tap into various target segments and job roles corresponding to the relevance of these network components also played a role in its ultimate acceptance.

It was decided that at the consumer benefit level "dependable service" was basic and must therefore be maintained. In addition, however, a strong desire to permit a more personal interpretation was also sought. "Less worry" became a second strategic element within the consumer benefit component that was decided upon as desirable and thus was included as a strategic goal.

Moving to the higher personal value levels, a strategic goal of "peace of mind" was thought to fit well with the ultimate translation of "advanced satellite communications" to "dependable service" and "less worry" and thus became the driving force component. The selection of the leverage point, though usually the most difficult specification, was in this case relatively easy. The success of communicating "trust in company" and being "in control" in the DHL advertising was seen to be a natural bridge to the already specified components, one that could be grounded in more specific, more relevant message elements.

Since all components of the communication strategy except for the executional framework were specified, the sole remaining task was to bring the strategy to reality. The major constraint of this process was to maintain the look of the traditional Federal Express ads, specifically the humorous style, while building key linkages from the new message support to the personal interpretation. The summary of the specification of

Table 7
MECCAS Representation of Federal Express (1986)

Primary target:	Secretaries/"facilitators" of ODS
Driving force:	Peace of mind
Leverage point:	In control re: company can trust
Executional framework:	Humorous execution with a secretary working hard at finding status information of an ODS. The boss and employee are interrupted and taken by guide to view Federal Express satellite communication system used to track exact status of overnight letters and packages. Secretary realizes the benefits available in using Federal Express.
Consumer benefit:	Reliable/dependability Makes work easier
Message elements:	Superior tracking system Integrated satellite communications network
Tagline:	"Why fool around with anyone else?"

the strategic components and its specific implementation executionally is reported in the MECCAS summary of 1986 advertising seen in Table 7.

The common executional frame utilized in all the ads generated from this strategy was to show a typical ODS crisis, show a hand outside the scene interrupt, and have the voice to which the hand belongs explain why the integrated, satellite-based, communication network that Federal Express has permits the resolution of the problem of interest. Thus, much of the executional humor stemming from the situation and the characters portrayed was still maintained, but the new "reasons why" Federal Express was superior to the other ODS alternatives could be communicated.

Table 8 shows a comparison of the key strategic components of 1983 and 1986 Federal Express advertising. One statement was added to the 1986 research, namely, "advanced communication system," this being the new message element component of the strategy. A review of the gains in degree of endorsement percentages made across the levels, with very few sacrifices,

indicates more the creative expertise in developing the new ads. From a strategic perspective, the new strategy delivers well at all levels, delivering an integrated communication to the consumer.

The success of the new communication strategy for Federal Express, as measured by its ability to meet *pre-specified* objectives, is seen. The relevant communication of a differentiating message element and its linkage across the levels of abstraction that correspond to the perceptual orientation of the facilitators' target group, secretaries, is achieved.

Conclusion

As marketers, we believe that choices of strategic positions that result from the understanding of consumers' perceptions, preferences, and buying motives will in general be superior to those that do not. As managers, we recognize that the strategy is the important thing, and insist that programs we develop and implement support that strategy. In this article, we discuss a framework that encourages the integration of consumer research into

Table 8
Statements Distinguishing Federal Express Advertising Strategies
(percentage statement endorsement: 0 = 0%/10 = 100%)

Statements	1983	1986
<i>Driving force</i>		
Self esteem	1	1
Peace of mind	1	[5]
Accomplishment	1	2
<i>Leverage point</i>		
Trust in company	[4]	[7]
In control	2	[5]
Personal/job satisfaction	2	[5]
<i>Executorial framework</i>		
Ad shows reality	4	[6]
Can laugh at situation	[7]	[6]
Ad too cute	1	1
Demonstrates personal service	2	5
Characters believable	2	4
Situation demeaning	2	4
Situation hectic	[9]	[7]
<i>Consumer benefit</i>		
Convenient to use	2	5
Makes me look good	3	1
Dependable service	[7]	[9]
Less worry	4	[9]
Inexpensive	0	0
<i>Message elements</i>		
Numerous delivery locations	3	0
Relevant service facts	4	[7]
Gives actual prices	0	0
On-time delivery	[8]	5
Advanced communications system	*	[10]

* Not asked in the initial 1983 assessment

advertising strategy specification. While developing advertising strategy is never an entirely objective task, the use of the MECCAS framework is seen to provide an objective basis upon which the strategic process can be grounded.

In marketing practice, the ability to use as much detailed consumer input as possible as an aid in the strategic process is

considered crucial, and thus drives significant marketing research programs. A problem arises when the knowledge base gained from consumer research is to be translated for application to strategic planning and decision making. Traditional marketing research does not have a framework by which the understanding gained can be either (1) directly assessed for the develop-

ment of strategic options or can be (2) specified in a consumer-based strategy format. The result of not having such a consumer-based strategy framework is undue subjectivity in the translation process of research findings underlying the development of advertising strategy.

Although the MECCAS model illustrated in this article derives its primary research input from the laddering component, the opportunity to perform strategy specification in consumer terminology can be seen to have broad value in terms of potential application. Having a framework that condenses the knowledge base of consumer meanings, including the particular ways in which consumers' interpret relevant product information with respect to higher level personal motivations, provides a simple structure which can be used to focus on the specific strategic issues. The framework, then, is the key to managing the development and assessment of strategic alternatives.

The MECCAS framework, grounded in consumer perceptual theory, appears to offer marketing management four key advantages. First, MECCAS permits the exact specification of how the product is to be positioned with respect to the consumer, by explicitly showing the motivations that drive product perception and preference. Second, MECCAS provides a common communications framework for the discussion of strategy issues among the client, the agency, and their respective research groups. Third, the MECCAS framework provides a common basis upon which the competitors' advertising strategies can be discussed. Finally, MECCAS can be used not only to develop advertising strategy but also to assess the creative product on a strategic level. ■

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