



# Great MQ! Now What?

How to make the most of your  
successful assessment

## The hard work starts here

After the inevitable tension and anxieties in the build-up to a major analyst assessment, it's only natural to feel relieved when it's all over. You know a good showing in the Gartner Magic Quadrant or the Forrester Wave is likely to have a massive and beneficial impact on your business in the months to come.

So if you've come out of it well, it's all too tempting to ease up and take your eye off the ball. And that's where all your good work can suddenly go badly wrong.

There'll be time to celebrate later. Right now, there's a lot to be done to make the most of your success.

## Don't rely on the MQ to say it all for you

**Your job is to make sure all your key audiences get the message, loud and clear.**

You need to reach prospects, customers, suppliers, investors, journalists and your own staff. You will need to have one consistent, plausible story, but you need to fine-tune it differently for each of these groups.

The problem, of course, is that the MQ or Wave is not all about you. No matter how much you've managed to impress the analyst, the research report will always be a wide-ranging survey of the market and the significant players within it.

There will be just a paragraph or two of text about you and your products, and a few bullet points.

And, of course, there'll be the Magic Quadrant or Wave itself, the simple, stark graphic that visually defines your place for the next year, or more, among the Leaders, Challengers, Visionaries or Niche Players (in an MQ) or Leaders, Strong Performers, Contenders and Challengers (in a Wave).

MQ and Wave reports are long documents, and few will ever read them from start to finish. If you are to capitalize on a positive analyst assessment, you need to take control of the way your success is represented to each of your key audience groups.



## Handle cautions with caution

No MQ or Wave report is ever going to tell its readers what product or service they should buy. The analysts' assessments are necessarily nuanced and open to different interpretations, recognizing the fact that even within highly specialized technology markets different buyers will have different business objectives and different problems to solve.

Since some aspects of your offering will be particularly strong and others relatively weaker, the analyst's comments will never be an unstinting paean of praise. But sometimes the subtle light and shading turns into something more ominous. Where the word "Cautions" appears, it represents a potential threat – and you must be prepared to move fast to counter it.

Imagine if the situation were reversed. Suppose you were looking at a newly-published MQ that said your nearest competitor's new product was powerful, inexpensive, versatile and a major step forward, bringing fresh capabilities that would be welcomed in the marketplace. You would immediately focus in on any cautions that might blunt the impact of this flattering assessment, any reference to "novel and untried technologies", "complex control interfaces", "potentially high running costs" or anything else that you might be able to use to undermine your rival's appeal.

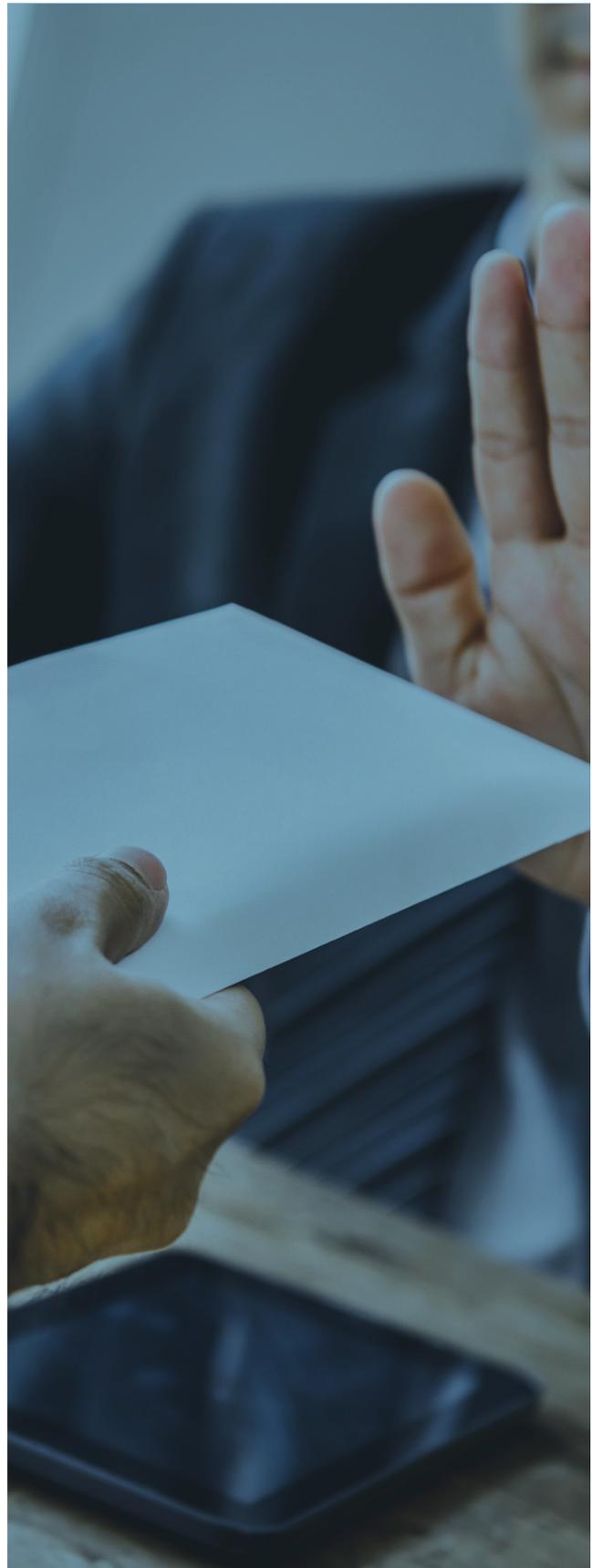
You would be doing everything you could to draw journalists' attention to these cautions. You'd prime your sales teams to use these cautions to sow doubt and emphasize the risks involved. You'd search for evidence that these reservations were only the tip of an iceberg of potentially catastrophic weaknesses that should rightly unnerve any prudent buyer.

And that, of course, is exactly what your competitors will be doing the very day your own triumphantly positive assessment hits the streets.

In practice, we know that the wording of such cautions is usually the result of some tense negotiation at the draft review stage, a reluctantly agreed compromise between an analyst's reservations and your own, more positive, view of the matter. The analyst may be hard to shift, and the phrasing of a cautionary note can often end up as a subtle, coded criticism that goes some way towards negating a generally favourable report.

Your competitors can't afford to let you get away unscathed. They'll be looking for every opportunity to dent the good impression created by your successful assessment.

We'll explain later how you can deal with this, but the key point is that you need to be ready to defend yourself against this kind of subversive activity. If you just sit there, basking in the glow of your flattering dot position, you may find the whole thing backfires badly, and quickly.



## It's still your story that matters

However positive your MQ or Wave assessment may be, it won't be telling your story the way you'd want it told.

You may have won plaudits for your system speed or the degree of automation you have managed to build in – and there may be figures in the report that prove the point. But out in the marketplace, these numbers aren't important in themselves. What's significant to your customers and prospects is how much productivity is increased or how far costs can be lowered because there is less need for manual intervention. You won't be selling performance; you'll be selling results.

If you've earned your company a favourable assessment and the sort of dot position you deserve, it'll be because you got your story right, emphasized the real priorities and backed them up with the right kind of evidence.

But the analyst is not there to tell the world your story. He or she is there to make judgements and compare one product or service with another. It is your task now to make sure the essence of your story comes across to all the audiences that matter to you, taking full advantage of the credibility conferred on you by this latest MQ or Wave.

## Choose the voice of the company

**Right from the moment the new MQ or Wave is released, you will be dealing with the media. Some people enjoy talking to journalists; others simply hate it.**

It makes sense to nominate one person or a small team to handle the trade press and all the routine media queries that come in. But journos are good at seeing connections and coming up with left-field story ideas. Sometimes they will spot an angle that could put your company at the centre of a completely unexpected commercial or even political issue. There must always be someone of the right level of seniority who is confident, competent and well briefed and ready to speak as the voice of the company.

## A sense of perspective

**In fact, of course, every member of the senior management team needs to know, right from the start, how the MQ or Wave has gone, what it could mean in terms of sales impact and how the company can capitalize on the research results. Follow-up campaigns will have to be approved and budgets agreed, so it is essential that executives understand the new opportunities on offer.**

Expectations need to be set at realistic levels, though, and some managers may need to be disabused of the idea that the analysts can be enrolled to act as corporate cheerleaders. Research company analysts guard their independence jealously. Just because an analyst has delivered a positive assessment, that does not mean that this individual is "on our side" and will be uncritically accepting in future dealings with the company.

What constitutes a good result is also an expectation that needs setting internally. We have seen some examples in the past of C-level complaints, even after a vendor has done very well and improved its dot position. Not everyone can be a Leader, and a company that shows up as a Niche Player, in the bottom left quadrant of the MQ, may well be placed there simply because it doesn't compete in a particular sector or geography.

Similarly, winning an improved dot position in the Leaders quadrant, but behind a major competitor, should not be seen as a disappointment. Senior management may need to be helped to understand why this is so. Buyers are never going to send out just a single RFP to the highest-ranked supplier – and those who have been around a while are well aware of the elements of subjectivity that come into play. MQ dot positioning is not a science.

## Give your sales people what they need

For your sales force, the effect of a good Magic Quadrant or Wave can be galvanizing. There will almost always be a surge of inbound sales enquiries, while field sales people will find doors swinging open that have previously been shut.

To make the most of this momentum, all your teams will need to be supplied with fresh, fully updated sales material, videos and case studies. They must obviously be primed to talk about the strengths and applications the analyst assessment has highlighted. But they will also need to be equipped to respond to any specific cautions that the report has raised, because your competitors are certain to be using these to try to spoil the party.

Managers responsible for briefing sales teams need to take this defensive aspect very seriously. Your product or service would not have been singled out for positive recognition if it didn't have a lot going for it. But a single, tersely worded cautionary comment can sometimes be used by your competitors to raise doubts in a prospect's mind, even if what it is saying is relatively insignificant. The battle may start to get ugly at this point, and it is worth remembering that the competitor's offering may also be carrying the burden of one or more cautions. If they are concerned with the same issues as cautions in your report, they are likely to cancel each other out. If they are to do with other matters, you should at least know about them and make a conscious decision about whether you will refer to them as part of your sales pitch.

## Marketing must take the lead

Marketing's job is to set the scene for your sales efforts and to provide the ammunition for the sales teams to fire.

As soon as your company knows, from the discussions with the analyst at the draft review stage, that it is on its way to a positive assessment, preparing new marketing materials is a top priority.

With far fewer live events and face-to-face meetings taking place, there is much less emphasis than before on printed brochures and sales support materials. But web pages and case studies need to be updated immediately, with powerful, well-thought-out and convincing text that reflects and builds on your MQ or Wave success.

New prospects will be coming to your website, driven by press coverage or prompted by your SEO and SEM activity. This is a major lead generation opportunity, and these potential customers need to be met with intelligent, informative copy that excites their interest and answers their most pressing questions. (After your home page, the busiest part of your site is always likely to be the FAQs section, so it is worth making a special effort to get this right and anticipate the queries that will be uppermost in a new prospect's mind.)

All your new marketing material should take full advantage of your assessment results, making the most of the analyst's praise.

Direct quotes from the Magic Quadrant or Wave report are a key element in this, though you should stick to the rules and avoid alienating the analyst by overdoing it. Gartner, for example, specifies that you should not quote more than 10% of the MQ text and that its research should not account for more than 30% of any document you produce. That's easy enough to comply with – and short, punchy, selective quotes will always get your point across much better than long, rambling excerpts from the report.

But some of the other rules are quite extraordinarily specific, like the one that says that the word "Gartner" must not be used as the first word in a press release or newsletter headline or even in the subject line of an email. Gartner lists 101 different rules and restrictions on its website, insisting for example, that you can use the words "placed", "evaluated" or "recognized" when talking about your MQ positioning, but not "featured" or "highlighted".

It's a minefield – and you may feel it's simpler to pay the research company for licensed reprints of the whole document to send out to existing customers or confirmed prospects. But this is expensive and is not always the best approach.

Your aim must be to shape and control the narrative around your products or services, which won't be achieved if a prospect only receives a reprint of the MQ. So you should never send out a reprint unaccompanied. If you do decide to distribute licensed reprints, you should make sure you only do this alongside your own carefully constructed and targeted messaging.

## Now get your skates on

There is plenty of other work to be done in the wake of a positive analyst report – and most of it needs to be done quickly.

You will want to contact other interested parties, such as your suppliers and investors, and let your partners know about your success – not least because there may be opportunities to create joint campaigns or launch special offers based on the research.

Every single member of your own staff, from top to bottom, should be made aware of the MQ or Wave results and updated on any new shift in the company's messaging and positioning. Getting the word out is not just the responsibility of your sales and marketing people. Every employee has business and social contacts, in life and on social media, and a surprising number of leads are generated just through chance remarks people make to people outside work. Staff webinars or less formal online meetings can be used to make sure that everyone is on the same page.

Finally, it is important to remember that this year's Magic Quadrant or Wave is not the end of the story. There will be another one coming along in a year or so's time and it is highly likely that you will be dealing with the same analyst again. So it makes sense to take the opportunity now to start deepening your engagement with this individual who has the power to influence your future.

The first step should be to set up a call to thank the analyst and explain how you intend to interpret and use the research results. Analysts like to be consulted and they don't like to feel that you're exploiting their comments in ways that misrepresent their views. If you take the opportunity to discuss with them what's fair and how your positioning statements will reflect the assessment, you can avoid any ruffled feathers and set the tone for a constructive relationship over the next years.

This will also give you a chance to explain how your product development roadmap will be addressing any issues or reservations the analyst hinted at in the report. An analyst who feels you are taking account of his or her views and incorporating them into your planning is likely to stay in touch and take a particular interest in your progress over the coming months, which will do you no harm at all as you approach next year's assessment.

## Here's your 6-point action plan

Taking all these things together, you can create a five-point action plan to guide your response to your MQ or Wave success:

1. Prepare as early as possible and move fast to engage with your internal and external audiences.
2. Make a decision as to whether you feel that there is positive return on investment (ROI) from paying for a reprint of the research to access as a piece of marketing collateral.
3. Produce appropriate messaging for each audience, emphasizing the positive but including any necessary response to cautions in the report.
4. Make sure senior management understands the sales value of your MQ or Wave success, approves of any adjustments to your positioning and backs your ideas for follow-up activity.
5. Involve the analyst. Discuss how you'll use the research, acknowledge any cautions and lay the foundations for year-round engagement.
6. Above all, own the narrative. The audiences that matter to you will hear several interpretations of MQ or Wave research. Make sure your story comes through loud and clear – credible, uncluttered and compelling.

The Skills Connection's team consists entirely of former senior Gartner analysts, so we have a thorough understanding of the analyst's role and requirements. We are here to help our clients align their messaging with the needs of the analyst – to ensure the best outcome for both parties.

## About the Skills Connection

The Skills Connection is a specialist analyst engagement firm whose consultants have all been senior Gartner analysts. We help firms ranging from fast-growing start-ups to high-flying market leaders capture the analysts' attention and achieve consistently positive comment and assessments.

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