

Creating A Breakthrough Strategy

Any good strategy, implemented diligently, will increase your success in the market, even in this tough environment. If you simply do what your most effective competitor does, you will reduce his market success and increase your own. However, breakthrough strategies do more than this. They help you grow your business rapidly, surging past competitors because you do something distinct that captures strategic advantage.

As you might expect, breakthrough strategies are difficult to develop and may not even be possible some of the time. They are certainly more possible than most people believe, however. At any given moment in any business, at least one competitor is probably benefiting from such a strategy. This fact begs the question: If one competitor can, why can't my company?

To develop a breakthrough strategy you must identify unique, or at least unusual, markets you can serve, services or products you can provide, vehicles for developing your reputation, and channels that will provide you success. Developing a breakthrough strategy requires creative thinking. Often this kind of thinking is best done with a group, so if you are the CEO, you should probably involve others in the process. But whether it's you leading the process or a qualified outside facilitator, your brightest minds should collectively try the following exercises, which should require no more than two hours for your first try.

Brainstorm on markets and services

Make a list of as many fundamental changes occurring in your market as you can think of. Changes in product, manufacturing, distribution, customer service, technology, competitors; reactions to changes in laws or regulations; changes in the degree of vertical or horizontal integration; and any others you can think of.

Next, for each item on the list, ask yourself what needs these changes will create that your business doesn't address, or addresses only at low levels. Which of these services or products might you be able to provide as a means of true differentiation?

Make a second list of the information you collect as a by-product of your core services. Who else in your channel would benefit by these services or products?

When you have completed this exercise, set it aside while you complete the following actions. You will come back to it later.

Look for marketing voids

Make a list of all the services prospects ask for that you don't provide. Add to your list each time you get a request. Review the list and ask yourself how you would provide this service if you had to. If there are aspects of your services that you think no one in the industry performs well, look at them carefully. Any aspect of your services that members of your business talk about during a sales meeting is a candidate for review. What would you have to do to enhance these aspects?

Next, create a list of all of the truly creative marketing ideas that you can think of regardless of what service or product they supported.

Every time you hear of a clever marketing idea, add it to your list. (You should review this list from time to time, also. When you do, ask yourself whether the concept underlying the idea has been tried within your business environment. Assume you had to apply it to your business, what would you have to do to make it work?)

Set the results of this exercise aside and go on to the next action.

Break the rules

Make a list of the rules that govern the marketing of your services or products. They exist in every field. Listen for them when you talk to others. For example, "you can't sell accounting services by cold calling"! A rule like this if broken can give a company a competitive advantage because most think you can't break the rules.



Companies that want to be competitive in this tough business environment must break the rules. Think about this exercise, do your homework and don't be afraid to do something different.

If you try to imagine the future and are willing to break the rules you may have the basis for a breakthrough strategy.

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