



HOW TO WIN THE MARKETING WAR

In the battle for customers, winners and losers are determined by market share, growth and profitability. Are you prepared for combat?

BY HARVEY F. GOLDGLANTZ

Marketing and war: A strange juxtaposition of concepts in one sentence? I think not.

In Jay Levinson and Seth Godin's bestseller, *The Guerilla Marketing Handbook*, the authors clearly imply that using "guerilla warfare" as a tactic to conquer adversaries (competitors) will lead to overwhelming victory.

Each year, landscape contractors prepare to go

to war against competitive forces in the marketplace. The winners and losers are determined by market share, growth and profitability. One thing is for certain: A battle plan is imperative for success.

THE BIG PICTURE

Some companies grow; others do not. Many companies remain stagnant, year after year, and lament the reasons why.

The fact is that the big picture matters. The macro always precedes the micro.

If you don't plan for, prepare for and finance your war, you are doomed to defeat before the first salvo is fired. On the marketplace battlefield, preparation is the key to predictable success.

Planning: The military defines planning as a continuous process of preparation for future assigned or assumed tasks. The business world defines planning as identifying the goals to be achieved and determining the appropriate means to meet those goals.

Leadership & Vision: Both military and business planning — and success — demand effective leadership, which at its core requires vision. Vision is the sense of the future. Its power gives leaders a basis for positive actions, growth and transformation.

Converting Vision to Action: To achieve that vision, leaders must possess certain characteristics: ethics, professional skills, processes and organization. All effective leaders use these basic characteristics to implement and sustain their vision. The implementation of the leader's vision requires the use of these characteristics to develop the strategies to plan, and guide the direction of an operational plan.

DEFINING & UNDERSTANDING STRATEGY

Strategy is used during the planning phase. It is not a learned process of planning and acting, but a combination of planning, interaction, evaluation and adjustment. Strategy is continually reshaped as market conditions change. This requires making decisions and taking action to anticipate and respond to customer needs.

One essential part of strategy is the speed of reaction. An organization must be able to understand customer needs, and must also be able to move quickly while maintaining strength and

continued on page 116

continued from page 114

stability. Strategy lays out the goals that need to be accomplished, and the ideas for achieving those goals. Strategy can be complex, multi-layered plans for accomplishing objectives, and may give consideration to tactics, which refer specifically to action.

In the strategy phase of a plan, the thinkers decide how to achieve their goals. In other words, they think about how people will act (tactics). They decide which tactics will be employed to fulfill the strategy. The tactics themselves are the things that get the job done.

Strategies can comprise numerous tactics, with many people involved in attempting to reach an overall goal. While strategy tends to involve the leaders of an organization, tactics tend to involve all members of the organization.

PREPARING TO GO TO WAR

Now that I have outlined the fundamentals of what it takes to prepare for our marketing war — leadership, vision, strategy, tactics, action, flexibility and speed — let's proceed by taking a historical look backward at what worked, what didn't, where we came from and where we want to go.

The last few years has been challenging, to say the least, for most businesses. Yet, a funny thing happened on the way back from the Great Recession; companies became leaner and meaner. Revenues may have sagged, but profitability soared in many sectors. Progressive companies demanded accountability in all departments, including marketing and advertising; they trimmed excesses in favor of fatter bottom lines. The "troops" had to regroup, so to speak. But it appears we are heading out of the recessionary abyss and into recovery. Are you prepared to go to war?

THE FIRST BATTLE: THE COST OF WAR

War is not inexpensive. If you are to go to battle, you must be prepared to finance marketing and advertising costs. Many less intuitive companies have cut back on marketing budgets during the past few years. More progressive companies actually maintained or ramped up budgets. Those that were more aggressive are now in a position to reap the rewards of a proactive sales and marketing thrust. Those that took conservative positions will have to wait until new opportunities and

market timing presents itself.

Who won this first battle, you or your competitor? Coming out of this recession, I suggest that most small to mid-sized companies' marketing/advertising budget be in the 7.5% to 9% of projected revenue range for 2010.

THE SECOND BATTLE: THE MARKETING PLAN

Those who shoot from the hip almost always miss their target. Make certain that your marketing plan is well thought out in advance. Setting up goals and methodologies to meet those objectives should be plotted by date, media and projected budget cost.

THE THIRD BATTLE: LOOK BEHIND YOU BEFORE YOU PROCEED

History is the great predictor of future successes. Look back at what marketing programs were successful and those that failed. Make certain that you were fastidious about tracking both successes and failures. Don't repeat costly mistakes by placing precious dollars into programs that didn't produce at least a 2:1 return on investment (ROI). To win the war, you must keep accurate records of which battles you won (produced desired results) and those you lost (cost you money).

THE FOURTH BATTLE: DEFEND THE HOMELAND AT ALL COSTS

Your current customer base is your most precious asset. You must do everything possible to keep this revenue source contained. Customer cancellations and skips must be within acceptable industry standards.

Because most companies are now providing quarterly perimeter service, personal customer contact has become more challenging. It is therefore imperative to implement and maintain contact systems that encourage and sustain ongoing company-to-customer contact between visits. Examples include quality control calls, personal thank you notes, broadcast emails and e-newsletters.

THE FIFTH BATTLE: PROTECT YOUR TROOPS

The past few years have presented the industry with the opportunity of taking a good hard look

at staff. The cream has generally risen, and the slackers have, for the most part, been eliminated.

Because there is a direct relationship between employee turnover and customer turnover, it is critical to limit turnover in both. Competitive salaries, generous benefit packages, regular praise, training programs and opportunity for advancement will help to sustain and invigorate the troops.

THE SIXTH BATTLE: PICK YOUR BATTLES WISELY

An effective marketing plan is a well balanced one. Once your budget is completed, make certain that your distribution of funds includes internal (current) and external (prospective) customers. Internally, this can include newsletters, flyers, quality control surveys, calls, etc.

Externally, you should distribute your funds into previously effective vehicles, as well as a smattering of new media. That said, while most companies are wisely investing in efforts such as



search engine optimization, pay-per-click, social networking sites, Internet Yellow Page sites, blogs, e-zines and broadcast emails, it is important not to place all of your eggs in one basket.

Going into war — even in marketing — requires a well-executed strategy.

READY TO GO TO WAR

Once your strategy is in place and your battle plans are in order, it is time for action. A well prepared and executed marketing plan will lead to victory. And to the victor go the spoils! **LJM**

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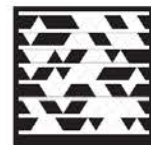


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