By Richard D. Czerniawski

WAYS TO WIN IN THE MARKETPLACE

With so many product choices today, we truly live in an age of abundance. It is also an age of sameness. Moreover, generally acceptable quality (GAQ) reigns. So, how might we break-out of the pack to win? There are *four ways to win* with our brand in the marketplace. I'm not referring to functional areas such as marketing, finance, manufacturing, or other groups. Instead, I'm thinking "overarching strategy!"

These four overarching strategies are:

1. ***Value*** – There are two ways of creating value. One is to deliver more or create a value perception of more, for the same price, which we see few brands achieve. The other, which is more common, is offer a lower price than competitors. This is the path of "we are the same as the market leader but cost less." It's usually the path of smaller brands and companies that lack sufficient resources to invest as heavily as larger competitors or even achieve the critical mass needed to win. Virtually all constituencies, whether it be consumers, HCPs (Health Care Practitioners), Payors, etc., seek a form of value. Unfortunately, our clients, Fortune Top-100 companies, and leading brands, tend not to pursue the latter and fail with underdelivering on the former. This absence of providing real value puts them in a box where competitors nibble away at their market share (units not dollars). Too bad!

2. ***Muscle*** – This is about overpowering the competition with resources. It may be manifested by having more feet on the street (i.e., more sales personnel), richer marketing budgets, more programs or services, among others. Once again, few brands or companies rely on muscle, particularly when they predicate their business model on launching a plethora of new products every year. We, marketers, flexed our muscle in those categories and markets where we competed both at Procter & Gamble and Coca-Cola USA. We employed critical mass against the most impactful business drivers and rolled-over our competition. But again, few companies have the resources, focus, discipline and patience to be able to build and flex their muscles. Additionally, this can be very inefficient, particularly if you don't know your ROI (return-on-investment) or can't demonstrate "line-of-sight" impact of your strategies and tactics on sales growth.

3. ***Superior Execution*** – Despite the number of places one may win with "superior" execution, this approach is almost laughable if it were not so sad. One might hear senior managers pronounce, "we will win with 'superior execution,'" but it is rarely ever realized. The fog of

war, whether it be managing established businesses or launching new products, is fraught with poor to mediocre execution. Faulty execution may be attributed to a lack of discipline, trying to do too many things, inadequate training, insufficient talent, etc. You can’t achieve superior execution without obsessive, superior performers. Occasionally, I'll encounter good execution. Perhaps, it’s the exception rather than the rule. For in virtually every instance where superior execution is promised, it’s a promise waiting to be delivered.

4. ***Differentiation*** – This is about zagging when your competitors are zigging or vice versa. Again, it is rarely delivered. The tendency is to follow the herd mentality. You'll often hear “that’s the way the business works” as marketers, product development and marketing researchers chase the same target-customers to satisfy the same rather basic needs in the same ways. Then there’s doing and saying “more,” such that any differentiation, should it exist, is diluted.

We marketers can live without muscle. We’ve witnessed smaller, less resourced competitors take-on larger, entrenched competitors and unseat them. Yes, the value route is quite attractive, particularly in this age of tenders, but not the avenue that leads to the same product performance at lower pricing. I, for one, would prefer to deliver more, physically or emotionally, whether that be product performance, or complementary services or perceptions, for the same or lower pricing (as in the case of consumer electronics).

Regardless of whether I can win with either muscle or value, I want relevant, meaningful differentiation. “Relevant” pertains to the target-customer pursued. After all, beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. However, "relevant" is not enough if it isn’t “meaningful” differentiation. It needs to be clear to the target-customer that there is real differentiation, not hyperbole. Finally, despite the difficulties, we should pursue superior execution, in addition to any of the aforementioned ways to win. Superior execution will turbocharge any advantages and help overcome weaknesses. How do we achieve it? By focusing intensely on what really matters, training for the task, setting expectations for performance and, importantly, measuring against those expectations in real time so the team might learn and then adapt to iterate its way to success based upon the learning.

Don't set out to be just another choice in a sea of perceived sameness where customers are satisfied with GAQ. We have enough options already. Aim to be a winner!

Richard Czerniawski

Richard D. Czerniawski

430 Abbotsford Road

Kenilworth, IL 60043

847-256-8820

847-312-8822

richardcz@bdn-intl.com

www.bdn-intl.com