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PREPARE FOR FAILURE TO HELP ACHIEVE SUCCESS

The following is an excerpt from my new book, *AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing*. It's taken from Chapter 10: Overstating Your Capabilities and Underestimating the Competition. Learn more here: <http://bdn-intl.com/avoiding-critical-marketing-errors>

Failure may very well come from "snatching defeat from the jaws of victory." Success seems certain. When doesn't it when we go forward with our planning and to execute the approved plan? However, an unanticipated failure due to internal or external factors can bring our expected success down—snatching defeat from victory's jaws. Anticipating and planning for failure is essential if it is to be avoided, and it must be closely monitored and quickly remedied before it spins out of control.

The Premortem

The way to prepare for failure is to identify those places where the brand is likely to fail and where the impact is meaningful. I like to use and recommend the *premortem* in our consulting practice. We're all familiar with the postmortem. It occurs following death to ascertain the causes. In the premortem, the marketing team identifies where failure may occur before it strikes and damages or destroys the brand. In aviation, it could be that failure occurs on take-off—it could be engine failure, fire, or a bird strike that cripples one or more engines.

Consider Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger's successful landing of US Airways Flight 1549 in the Hudson River following the loss of both engines (i.e., all of his aircraft's power) to a bird strike. Thanks to his and his crews' actions, all 155 souls on board were saved. For the marketer, it could be a failure to gain a specified level of access, insufficient manufacturing supply, quality issues, absence of compelling messaging, mistargeting, competitive oppositioning, etc., that snatches defeat from the jaws of victory.

- *Start the premortem by identifying all the things that might go wrong.* With your team, visualize everything from pre-launch through year-one, or from last quarter of the current year and into the next planned year, that could go wrong. It is also wise to study past launches to identify what, if anything, went wrong with them. These are typically not rare occurrences but will more than likely point out weaknesses within the organization that we must address to avoid repeating them. Otherwise, in the words of the New York Yankee great and Baseball Hall of Fame catcher Yogi Berra, it's "déjà vu all over again."

- *Weigh the likelihood of occurring and the potential impact of each.* One may use a simple 3-point scale where: “3” means it is “*very likely*” to happen and have a *significant impact*; “2” is “*somewhat likely*” to happen and *modest effects*; and “1” is “*not likely*” to happen and *no tangible impact*. If something is rated a 1 or 2 for likelihood but a 3 for impact, then one better prepare for it. The possibility that Canadian geese would collide with Flight 1549 was not likely to happen, but if so, the impact could prove disastrous. If an item measures 3 for likelihood and impact, get all appropriate hands-on-deck to prepare and solve for it!
- A helpful way to identify those that warrant a 3 for impact is to ask and determine “what keeps you up at night?” Is it failing to get FDA approval for the label you are seeking? Is it that the sales force call pattern does not align with the target customer-segment you need to win? Is it the looming specter of receiving a black-box warning from the FDA? Or, perhaps, it's that your brand positioning strategy is undifferentiated than your competition? What!?!
- Next, *identify potential actions you might take* if an impact item occurs and *choose the most appropriate one*. By the way, the response (not reaction) could be recommending or alerting management of, a reduction in forecasted revenue.

Using Captain Sully's incident as an example, here's how it might look (note, in this instance, there isn't one action but many “sequential” actions, and procedures, that he and his crew had to take):

Prepare for Failure What could go wrong?	Likelihood – Occurrence	Likelihood - Impact	Avoid/Remedy Failure Action(s)
Bird strike on take-off with engine failure(s)	“1”	“3”	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fly the aircraft (many aircraft crashed when the pilots tended to the emergency but ignored flying the plane) 2. Identify the situation correctly (what do I have here – what’s working and what’s not?) 3. Take decisive action (based upon the appraisal of facts coupled with <i>proven</i> practices) 4. Talk (i.e., notify and prepare crew and passengers for action)

In a business enterprise, reporting may precede taking action, as approval may be needed. However, when reporting to senior management, the marketer should recommend specific actions and the basis for the recommendation. Don't make it your proposal alone but gain the experience and insights of those most familiar with the subject under investigation (e.g., sales, manufacturing, regulatory, etc.). Unlike the Flight 1549 incident, the marketer is planning how to respond to a potential occurrence, not reacting in the moment.

The OODA Loop

Another approach to augment the premortem is the OODA loop. OODA is an acronym for observe, orient, decide, and act. It was developed by John Richard Boyd, an Air Force fighter pilot, and military strategist. *Observe* what ills have struck other brands in your company and those of the competition. *Orient* is about understanding the implications for these occurrences and maneuvering into a position to deal with the situation. *Decide* to pursue a specific action to remedy or avoid the situation. *Act* is

to follow-through with execution. OODA can be reduced to OA: Observe – Act, when one has the experience and the foresight to prepare for what might go bump in the night.

The premortem and OODA loop are sound practices for avoiding the mistakes of overstating your capabilities and underestimating the competition; they also help you to be prepared to respond to challenges in a way to keep your brand marketing on track.

Achieve success by avoiding failure—if you can. “Snatch victory from defeat” by anticipating and preparing for failure. Yes, plan for success but prepare for failure.

Take a giant step in avoiding marketing errors—of both omission and commission—that can lead to failure. Don't let critical marketing errors snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. Read AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing. Learn more here: <http://bdn-intl.com/avoiding-critical-marketing-errors>

Stay SAFE, and be well!

Peace and best wishes,

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