

Strategy Comes First – Always

Recently I was a guest speaker at a graduate marketing seminar talking about marketing plans and setting product strategy. The students were divided into teams for a term project charged with creating a marketing plan for a product or service they were building for a fictitious (or maybe real) company. Part of my task was to help them create a strategy for their own products.

“Strategy comes first – always,” I told them. You need an overall strategy for your product to differentiate your company from the competition and claim an uncontested place in the market.

In my own business, I consult with many small companies who want a new collateral piece to showcase their services or who want me to design a marketing campaign that will generate sales and make them profitable.


When we sit down together to review their plans, we begin by talking about their overall design for the product/service. What is the market need for the product? Who is their target market? Who is buying their product today? Often clients are quick to say who they think is buying their products. Frequently they’re unsure about their target market and what need the product fulfills.

So we take a step back and examine those questions. How does their product address needs in the marketplace? How are they doing with their current product line? Are customers buying from their company? Who are these customers and where are they?

What percentage of their business comes from the same customers? Does any one client account for more than 50% of their business?

Most businesses easily answer all of these questions. When we drill deeper into segmenting their markets, most businesses begin to get a different view of where they are and are frequently surprised by the result.

“What does this have to do with my brochure?” they ask.



Everything. If you haven't thought through these questions and are able to answer them for your business, the brochure or desired marketing campaign cannot generate the expected results.

Going through the strategic planning process is analogous to holding up a mirror that reflects how the firm is conducting business today. Sometimes companies don't like what they see. That's okay because as the students in the graduate marketing class discovered, we can take a step back and do a strategic plan for the business. We can reassess the marketplace and figure out what our strategy will be for our company, for our product.

It's the same for a graduate marketing class, small businesses, a department in an established business or a corporate division. Taking the time to craft a plan that determines the value of your product/service to the market you're targeting will mark the difference between a mediocre market launch and a market winner.

Strategy comes first – always.