

**Choosing the Right Strategy for Your Business.
It's a Matter of Survival.
By Claire Ratushny**

Today, businesses find themselves at crossroads, faced with many challenges and uncertainties, yet, full of possibilities. Recent economic downturns, increased competition and the rising cost of doing business always create concern in companies large and small.

We're currently in a period transition. Inevitably, tremendous opportunities arise in times of transition. Is your business in a position to take full advantage of potential opportunities?

It's Strategy time with a capital "S" and no business that doesn't have a plan is going to succeed in today's business arena. Taking the time to put together a marketing plan isn't a luxury; it's a necessity and a matter of survival.

A marketing plan enables the business owner to answer crucial questions:

- Who am I and what do I offer my customers? Translation: what is my company's reason for being in business and which services do my customers repeatedly purchase from me?
- What do I offer uniquely? What is my unique selling proposition? What is that "one thing" that customers feel I offer them, that none of my competitors do?
- Who are my target customers? Am I trying to sell my products or services to everyone, or am I honing in effectively on my specific audience?
- What are my company's core values? Are they expressed in all of my interactions with my customers?
- How do I offer my customers more value than my competitors can? What can I do to make my business more *relevant* to them, that is, how can I better address their needs and solve their problems than any of my competitors can?

With clear answers to these questions, a solid marketing strategy can be developed. Many business people confuse tactics with strategy. All marketing communications, brochures, advertising and web site information are *tactics* that should be employed to implement an underlying marketing strategy.

A strategy gives a company owner a foundation on which to build his or her business. It clearly delineates the point of differentiation that can then be marketed to achieve a unique brand identity and image for any business. A brand is not a logo. A brand is the sum of your customers' and prospective customers' perceptions, and overall experiences with your company.

With a uniquely crafted image in place, effective written and oral communications can be strategically developed and aligned to the company's core values and message. By playing to your business's core, by offering unique and relevant value to the customer, your company becomes a stand-out, no matter how many competitors you have.

Of course, that means you have to get the word out. You can't do that unless you communicate to your audience. Consistent communications that faithfully represent your brand are essential here. Failure to do so gets many businesses into trouble. In fact, companies routinely go out of business because they either do not own a unique brand presence, or they fail to communicate those differentiated brand values.

By owning a unique brand, and working to faithfully represent it each day; by delivering on the promise of your brand to your customers, you can, no matter how small your business, be effective and successful. It will take time, patience and commitment, but with a great strategy, everything is possible.

Claire Ratushny is the founder of Write Strategy, www.WriteStrategy.biz. She offers her clients over 25 years of marketing and professional writing experience, and assists them in the development of clear, concise business and marketing communications.

Without strategy-based communications, businesses lack the visibility, differentiation and marketing value they need to be competitive.

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