



1Q-2007

The Competitive Agenda

Jack Zimmanck, www.stratuspartners.com

In every environment, living organisms compete to survive, grow and thrive. In times of plenty and stability, organisms tend to over-specialize and become competitively weak. In times of change and scarcity, the most adaptable and competitive organisms invariably flourish at the expense of the weak and inflexible.

Decade of Change

Over the past decade a new level of intense competition has evolved that is changing the way businesses operate. Three major shifts have converged to create this competitive environment. No market is unaffected. No business is immune. There is no going back.

- **Pace of Change** – The accelerating pace of change in technology, communications and global econo-politics is reshaping the business landscape daily, and there is no end in sight.
- **Intensity of Competition** – The evolving democracies of developing countries have now become fiercely competitive market economies, ready to attack markets that were once technologically or geographically secure.
- **Fast, Inexpensive Transportation** – Even with rising fuel costs, a competitor can deliver almost any manufactured product to your customer anywhere in the world by next week...or worse...by tomorrow.

Survival of the Fittest

These converging shifts present business with the same harsh realities outlined by eighteenth century naturalist, Charles Darwin...Adapt and compete or suffer the consequences. Darwin was explaining the process by which living organisms adapt to the relentless changes around them in a never-ending struggle for survival and dominance...Sound familiar?

How these shifts affect your business

This new environment is one of rapid change, where markets and opportunities rarely remain still for long and last years' advantage may be next year's liability. These shifts are so powerful that companies that have enjoyed market leadership for decades often find themselves scrambling just to stay in the game.

Benefiting from the shifts

By contrast, companies benefiting from these shifts have evolved a new competitive model with a more flexible view of how to shape the future. Responsive strategic thinking now augments more structured planning helping these companies sort through the vastly increased number of consistently moving parts. This flexibility allows them to change paths along the way while still keeping their objectives clearly in sight.

Competitive Agenda

We call this strategy of adaptability; ***Competitive Agenda***.

Your Competitive Agenda

Companies like GE, Nokia and HP are leading their industries into the twenty first century with *Competitive Agendas* that help them to adapt and leverage the inevitable shifts in markets and business climate to achieve their objectives. Borrowing ideas from their success can help any company develop their own ***Competitive Agenda***.

Traits of Top Competitors

Traits shared by many of these industry leaders contribute to their competitive strength.

- **Powerful desire to achieve / grow / succeed** – The cornerstone of each company's *Competitive Agenda* is a relentless desire for greater accomplishment, growth and success.
- **Create customer value** – Concentrate on customer issue and creating new customer value. Continually enhance products and services serving current and evolving customer needs.
- **Know where you are** – Develop and apply a set of key indicators of the condition of your business that are updated daily...or better yet on a real-time basis. Review them daily.
- **Know where you are going** - Establish a clear vision of what the enterprise wants to achieve and what it is to become in the future.

- **Believe in the future** – Economic uncertainty is now a fixture of the marketplace. Know with absolute certainty that the desired future is built on today's business decisions and actions.
- **Understand the landscape** – Cultivate an objective perspective of market conditions and a feel for the direction of forces affecting your marketplace. Avoid a one-industry viewpoint.
- **Seek opportunities** – Look for benefit among the changes. Consider how to harness changes to gain advantage.
- **Core Values** – Clearly communicate what the company stands for to: employees, customers, investors, media, community and anyone else who will listen.
- **Make selling easy** – Update aging sales practices, sales tools, marketing strategies, distribution networks and support technologies.
- **Adaptable Plan** – Develop a *Competitive Agenda* that provides clear strategic direction but is flexible enough to quickly adapt to unforeseen threats and fresh opportunities.
- **Invest in the Future** - Establish a level of growth investment the enterprise is willing to commit to and invest it carefully.
- **Keep it simple** – Think big but break large initiatives into easy to implement steps that deliver near-term results. Treat each piece as a stand-alone building block of the larger plan.
- **Innovate** – Try lots of new ideas. Keep what gets results. Modify or discontinue what doesn't. Borrow and adapt what has worked outside your industry.
- **Team culture** – Inspire, train, develop and reward employees individually and as a group. Cultivate a team spirit and the will to win.
- **Stay in the game** – Waiting for a steady economy is not an option. Move while competitor's customers, distribution channels and top employees are most vulnerable.
- **Focus on the top line** - Increase time and resources allocated to sales, marketing and customer issues. Focus on constantly improving process, not just fighting fires.

- **Watch the bottom line** – Be frugal but spend as necessary to achieve performance goals and move key projects along consistently.
- **Tie expenditures to results** – Benchmark key business elements. Establish clear performance objectives. Adjust resource allocations based on performance.
- **Embrace Change** - Achieving a different result invariably requires taking an unfamiliar approach.
- **Flawless execution** – Where most companies stumble. Cultivate a willingness to fix “what ain’t broke”. Push the last 10 percent to optimize every project.

Next Quarter

To reach the future, a company must pass through next quarter...and the next...and the next. Each of those “next quarters” is important but is no end in itself. Visualizing each quarter as a building block to a larger future helps to break the growth-killing cycle of short-term thinking and lengthens the planning horizon.

Next Year

Twelve months from now external forces will have substantially changed the marketplace and in the process paid no attention at all to how they affected any individual business. Some of those changes are fairly predictable and actions taken now will pay off handsomely. Other changes will be unexpected and the time invested today, separating probable outcomes from wildcards can pay rich rewards in avoiding costly mistakes and preparing the enterprise with sound alternatives.

Your Competitive Agenda

A Competitive Agenda provides the perspective and confidence necessary to consistently evolve the renewable competitive advantage essential in moving forward from today’s economic disruption toward stability, growth and increased value. Developing a Competitive Agenda begins with an objective understanding of the enterprises’ current competitive position and the resources it brings to the fight. Input from both inside and outside helps the enterprise understand strengths, weaknesses and the forces that affect the marketplace. Given the increasingly competitive world in which companies now do business, there are few alternatives but to get started today.

Growth Ideas

Growth Ideas purpose is to inform, disturb, offer alternative perspectives, champion cooperation and encourage innovation in revenue growth. Your ideas and perspectives are welcomed and encouraged.

You are receiving this email as a referred guest to Growth Ideas

[Subscribe](#) | to Growth Ideas
[Unsubscribe](#) | from Growth Ideas

PLEASE DO NOT REPLY DIRECTLY TO THIS EMAIL