

## High Tech Marketing/Business Model Boot Camp (Part 6): Stepping up to the Microphone

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Can you imagine what it would be like to charge 20-200% more than your competitor and own market category dominance? This final part of the Boot Camp series focuses on ways your organization can increase its economic power.

Success isn't an equation that looks like this:

Great Product + Advertising + Price Point + Distribution = Success

If only it were that easy. Instead, it's about building on the foundation of a solid business strategy combined with a good go-to-market plan, then adding the ability to connect people and ideas.

To have an enduring company, one that is worth more than the sum total of its parts, you need to create a community of passionate users who so want what you have that they no longer shop around. Their trust, preference for your brand, and belief in your product lines is so strong that they desire to buy only from you.

The key is this. People, consumers, respond with their heart and their head. Given how much Silicon Valley messaging focuses on speeds and feeds, it's relatively easy to understand why technology marketing is less than effective.

It's an essential human truth that all human beings aspire to be a part of something, to belong to something that is larger than themselves. It's with that part of their being that people respond to elegant design, communities, or aspirational goals. It's not that they are duped, but that they are emotionally connected to the company's vision and therefore committed to the company.

Let's step back a minute and talk about some of the aspirations people have and how companies have used them:

- Accomplishment: "Empower your People" by Microsoft
- Smart: "Smart Cars for Thinking People" Honda Hybrid
- Beauty: "Life by Gorgeous" Jaguar
- Community: "TEDsters" at the Technology Entertainment, Design Conference
- Creation: "Revolutionizes the way people create ideas" Adobe
- Enlightenment: "What you need to know" Wall Street Journal
- Harmony: "The home we've built" Williams Sonoma
- Oneness: "Inspiring conservation of the sea" Monterey Bay Aquarium
- Redemption: "The power of turning your hopes into reality" Canyon Ranch
- Trust: "Advanced technologies into value" IBM

- Truth: "Organic (and tasty) ingredients. Profits after taxes go to progressive causes." Newman's Own
- Validation: "Superbly rewarding leisure time" Four Seasons
- Wonder (Las Vegas—Bellagio Hotel)

Do you provide your customers with special, unique reasons to look at your products? Remember that nine out of ten products never survive, and very few are remembered. To imagine what is possible, ask yourself this: Do you provide the elements that build desire, leading to passionate consumers? It's an intangible, emotional context and I call it vision.

When a company has vision, many pieces are used to communicate and share that vision. When the pieces are combined, they form a series of ideas that create sustainable differentiation in a world of commoditization. You'll know you have a visionary and aspirational element to your business when you have done the following:

### **1. Communicate Context**

We all come from somewhere, and have a context that drives our decisions and choices. It could be that you were a poor black child whose grandmother used to encourage Bible readings at church (Oprah), or it could have been that you wore a white sheet to proclaim your independence from oppression (Gandhi), or maybe you were a geek who liked to innovate using software and hardware in the back of the parent's garage with other geeky friends (Wozniak). Those are context stories that form the very fiber and history of a company.

Sharing the context gives customers a reason to trust you and tells them what business you're in and the story of how your business came to be. You can read a phrase that states "two college kids in a dorm room who imagined unbiased free information on the net" and know we're talking about Google.

### **2. The Mission Beyond the Product**

You must have a compelling mission that is beyond just a product. A mission creates stickiness and ties people to a bigger cause worth supporting. If I want a financial accounting package for consumers, I would know to call Intuit, but if I want the best solution for a growing business, I would call IBM. Intuit has positioned itself as a tool company for a niche area. IBM has elevated its mission to be in the value-creation business. Part of Starbuck's mission is to offer a "third place, a comfortable alternative place, a spot between home and office." That's more than coffee, or mugs, or machines, or music. It's enduring and expansive.

Remember—when you are selling a product, you can be compared, but if you are selling within the framework of a larger mission, you rarely can be. If Starbuck's were selling only coffee, then maybe we could argue that paying \$2.95 each day makes no sense for a latte. But if we can linger, and meet colleagues and share our latest ideas for business growth, then the \$2.95 is a very small price to pay for a relaxing environment for connecting with people.

### **3. The Integrated Experience**

Ever open an HP printer? It's designed so that you can literally be printing within the first few minutes of first opening the box. That's the reason for including ink, making all the parts easy to open, including the envelopes, and having a 1-2-3 guide sit face up when you start. HP has thought about your entire interaction with the company from the box texture to the customer experience. Such interactions either add relevance to or extract value from the offer.

Apply that to your own product or service. What is it like? Do you offer an "easy to use" product packaged in an unbelievably difficult to open box? Then you've actually not created the reality of the offer. It's not real, it's disengaged, and it's false. Ultimately, no customers will want to stay with you if they see those disconnected points, because it lacks harmony.

That's not to say you need to be high-end. When you enable an enriched, connected experience, you're saying to the user what matters to you. And that could be low-cost, it could be fast, or it could be complete.

Whatever words or attributes you want consumers to experience, you have to think through and plan each part so that the experience is complete.

#### **4. Enable Your World**

The power of our words can create connection or disparity. A client we're working with wants to define a visionary goal for what it can do, and move from selling "boxes" to enabling a platform.

The key to writing such a vision is this: You need to show the positive things you'll enable, not the negatives you'll protect against. When the world is described in negative terms, then what you are doing is inspiring fear. It's like being in the business of selling a chain mail suit for a diver who photographs sharks. While interesting, it's a commodity. What you want to do is add a mystique and interest beyond being strong, but also the cleverness of knowing what needs protection and why the solution is way more than a fancy suit. What you want to do is make the user feel like Aquaman.

Don't be defensive, be forward-looking in every way you can. Language defines our point of view. When we say "something will fail," then we've participated in that negativity; but if trust can be enabled, then we are painting a picture of courage and enablement.

Each company or major brand has a set of words it uses to describe its vision. If it's The Donald, it's "You're fired"; and if it's Oprah, it's "Live your best life." And in technology terms, it's "think different."

Based on the language we select, we show the new THINGS people will do, and not the specific problem that are fixed today.

#### **5. Have a Spokesperson, or Many**

One of my favorite movies is American President. It's the pre-West-Wing work of Aaron Sorkin. If I've had an especially hard week, you can find me at 3:00 in the morning watching it. In it, an

advocate and aide to the President comments on the lack of leadership being demonstrated by the current administration:

They don't have a choice! Bob Rumson is the only one doing the talking! People want leadership, Mr. President, and in the absence of genuine leadership, they'll listen to anyone who steps up to the microphone. They want leadership. They're so thirsty for it they'll crawl through the desert toward a mirage, and when they discover there's no water, they'll drink the sand.

While certainly a great line of dialogue, it applies to the high-tech industry also. Customers need you and want you to articulate why they need to follow you.

When you want to move from pitching products to having a vision, you need to recognize you are moving from pitching stuff to pitching ideas. You are pitching a notion of the world we ought to have, one that makes you want to dance down the street (iPod), get inspired (TEDsters), talk with loved ones (MCI) or create amazing experiences (Master Card).

And that's the power of great ideas. It's not just having one person, but having a set of people who get the idea and can move from making a pitch to sharing ideas about how our world should be. With courage, honesty, and clarity, you can create emotional resonance—and that's why customers choose products and services.

## **6. Community**

And, finally, the one thing that you'll want to do is to create customer connection. I started this six-part series with the idea of creating customer love. And so, as a final note, I want to circle back to the ways we build community with our users.

Do a Google search on Lego, and you'll likely find a million results. Why? Because Lego knows its users want to discuss Lego products. The company enables and encourages its users to talk with one another. That sparks individual users, then stokes a natural fire leading to users who want to connect and share their passion.

Make what you do great, then make it viral. People want to share. A unique thing about the Web 2.0 world is that we can easily connect with people, and get ideas relayed and spread throughout communities. Bloggers can like (or not like) what you are doing and spread the word to others. And it's the saturation of ideas that causes customer passion and engagement.

Back in '99, I finished B-school at Santa Clara University. A small group and I wrote a "capstone" paper on digital convergence. We imagined how cell phones and the online media would converge. Today, our vision is being realized. Video, data, instant messaging, blogging, and connection are all facts of life. Our vision is now a global undertaking worth billions.

Recognize that people don't blog about products, they blog about what moves them and creative ideas. Become a part of that, and you've raised your level of play. And created a real community.

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When you extend what you have beyond your product, you'll experience improved business strength; customer connection; improved economic power; strength in partnerships, tone and definition; improved flexibility to prevent share loss; and new ways to ensure continual gains.

I'll see you out on the playing field. Enjoy!

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