



Moving from organic to strategic growth demands critical intel

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In my last article, I focused on the limitations of organic growth and counseled a strategic approach based on inorganic tactics. In this follow-up, I'll look at a real-life example illustrating the problems of trying to go it alone.

Our company has had the pleasure of helping many organizations grow and succeed. That growth and success should be the real role of a marketing partner. Yes, marketing involves highly visible elements like splashy websites and clever advertising, but its primary focus demands a deeper understanding of where your company is, where you want it to be, and the most effective ways to get there.

In most cases, helping companies achieve meaningful growth relies upon assisting those organizations manage change. Successfully moving from an organic-only model to one built upon deliberate growth strategies demands changing the way company leaders view themselves and their marketplaces. Looking at existing data through a new set of eyes often produces exciting new ideas. That doesn't mean company leaders can't be innovative. Instead, it reflects the challenge most company leaders experience when it comes to truly objective assessments of what they're doing. Human nature keeps us focused on the familiar and tries to protect us from new ideas, because they might be a little scary.

I never ceased to be amazed at how some company leaders make critical business decisions based upon their "gut" or their own assumptions. That means they're gambling the future of their organizations on their own thoughts and opinions, rather than on data and other facts about their own company, their customers, and their industry as a whole. I'm sure you can think of several once-prominent companies that were so resistant to change that they were eventually bypassed by competitors – including competitors they never saw coming.

Some time back, a large professional organization contacted us for help with a new operation they thought had been underperforming. They had their eyes on a distant city where the company had handled some projects, so they established a branch operation based upon their expectation there would be an easy route to big revenues.

As we quizzed them about the metro area, it became obvious they didn't know it all that well. When we asked about local competition, they were convinced what they offered was unique in that marketplace, so they weren't worried about it. We inquired as to whether they had performed a market share analysis before making the move, and as you've probably surmised, they didn't see a need to do that. They were certain the potential was obvious. Now they were trying to understand why the new operation was generating just a fraction of the expected revenue.

We performed some basic research using widely available data, and quickly determined they had five major competitors in their new market. As for their perceived uniqueness, we found three of those five firms appeared to be almost identical to theirs ... and one was clearly the proverbial 800-pound gorilla that locals turned to first. The competitors also had the benefit of longevity in a market where companies preferred to do business with names they recognized.

After we presented a variety of marketing strategies to help them carve out a bigger share of this competitive market, they thanked us for our efforts and decided to keep things status quo. They were still convinced their gut feelings about the market would prove accurate and wanted to attempt crafting a simple solution themselves. Deciding to stay right where you are without making any changes is still a viable choice and that is leadership's prerogative.

As company leaders mull over critical decisions about the future of their operations, they readily reach out to their legal counsel, accountants, and others who provide useful expertise. While they may be familiar with the law and know how to prepare an income statement, those leaders recognize *they don't have as much expertise as those professionals, so they ask for and follow* the advice they receive.

Smart leaders regard areas such as marketing in similar ways. They're not afraid to admit they don't have all the answers or the same level of knowledge. That's why they draw their marketing partners into these conversations for an objective look at what's required and issues they may not have considered. Our clients expect us to challenge their assumptions and hold them accountable for their role in pursuing objectives.

Like other leaders who seek growth, they do come to the table with their own ideas and assumptions. Sometimes they're right on target, but often, there are aspects they haven't considered. The difference between those clients and the organization mentioned earlier is they're not afraid to admit what they don't know. We appreciate their trust and confidence ... and are proud to play a role in their success.

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PERSPECTIVES



Nonprofit competition impacts new and existing nonprofits

After decades of working with and for nonprofits, there's one major takeaway regarding nonprofit competition. It's not to be taken lightly. As I shared in a recent article, there are nearly 1.85 million existing nonprofits in the United States today. More concerning is there are 50% more charitable nonprofits today than there were just 12 years ago. As I frequently mention to potential clients, the competition keeps growing, so it should be a major consideration....



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