Marketing strategy training activities for entrepreneurs

9 December 2017 4 min reading The views expressed by business contributors are their own. You are reading Entrepreneur India, an international franchise of Entrepreneurs Media. It is very easy to follow in the footsteps of others on the road to success. But, not everyone likes to follow the path that anyone else shows. These people build their own path, gather each stone with hard work and build a path with all their potential and spirit towards success. Being a businessman is never easy. If someone wants to be a successful entrepreneur, you won't have a career guide, one to guide you or show you any map on the path to success, you're the only one who manages everything. You are the reason for your success and for your failure. Here are the few tips you need mindset in order to become a successful entrepreneur-1. Do I love it? Pick it! You can't achieve anything if you work half-heartedly on any project. It doesn't matter if it's a small project or a big print project to your entrepreneur assignment, if you do it half-heartedly and indifferently, then none of your efforts will be fruitful. So choose your passion wisely rather than enthusiastically. Put all your effort and hard work into achieving the color of success you want to achieve. Choosing what you love will not only maintain positivity, but will also help you deal with failure optimistically.2. Fly But with a step on the ground! It seems simple to take big steps in the first few days of your trip and imagine that you will reach your destination. But what emerges is the gruelling journey and you are left without power. So you need to calculate your risks as they are one of the most important factors for any start-up. The balance of loss and profit is very vital, as sometimes small risk can take you to great height, but, great risk can lead to the drop of your boot. Little reward at first is enough to boost the morale of the entrepreneur.3. Always be flexible! It seems easy to continue the plan initially. But, there are many internal and external factors that change the success of your startup. So we have to be flexible to adapt each type in another second way if the first project doesn't work for success. These changes are not necessary to be small, but sometimes you change to make some big changes and can lead to another great success story of a startup. So even if things don't go in your favor as you've planned, go with the flow and achieve success.4. Teamwork wins the game! That's what I'm that initially you should be working exclusively on your startup, but after a period of time, you should have an appropriate time to assign the task to everyone. It can be a group of just three or four people, working in a systematic way. Everyone should match the set of skills and attitude you need to make your startup work because you don't have time to experiment. It will enhance your reputation and as you are the one who leads everyone else, so to also become more committed and will try to set an example for everyone else.5. Describe your goal! As an entrepreneur, we need to be sure of what he sees as an achievement at the end of the day. You control your actions. You should have a suitable goal on your startup achievement. You will be working on all your plans and then only you will know if it results in failure or success. But, you must try better in order to achieve your goal. This is a statement true to all seasons. A startup cannot succeed in a few days. So one has to be patient enough to get everything that comes in the way of their success, no matter whether it's good or bad. Mistakes are considered inevitable and mistakes are the best teacher one can learn from. As an individual you are not an expert at all, so you have to explore and choose the things that are best for entrepreneurs. The marketing literature is filled with research and analysis to help managers devise market-tailored marketing strategies. However, when it comes to implementing these strategies, literature is silent and the self-help books ring hollow. What senior management needed in the 1980s are not new answers to questions about strategy, but increased attention to marketing practice, to signs of good marketing management that steer smart strategies toward successful market results. The goals of this article are to explain and help diagnose and solve marketing application problems, list common problems of translating marketing strategies into management operations, and recommend tactics to increase the effectiveness of marketing practices. The examples and conclusions come from a three-year clinical research program I conducted to start a course on marketing application at Harvard Business School (see the insert for details of this study). The data for this article comes from a course development and research project for marketing implementation. Although I'm still conducting research, I've compiled 35 case studies on marketing practice problems to date. All examples in the article, with one exception, come directly from these cases. They cover a variety of sizes and types of business. The cases fall into the four structural categories I described in the article. Some cases illustrate low-level operational marketing problems, such as how Hertz can retreat from the no mileage, never pricing system, should be made advisable. Others have problems at programme level, relating to the combination of marketing functions to bring a specific product to market or sell a special segment. The management of key accounts is a major concern here. There are instances of marketing systems in which management is problematic or concerned by the information it has (or does not have) available to directly and control the marketing effort. And, there are cases regarding marketing policy guidelines, marketing, formal or informal policies by which management attempts to direct the execution of all marketing. I have collected many such cases on the subject of marketing and leadership. One of the reasons I started a course on the marketing application was that top executives often complained to me that recently cut MBA in general are great generals, but can't organize a three-car funeral when it comes to executing marketing plans in the field. The results of teaching the course for three years show that effective execution in marketing can be taught. The results of the research project show that marketing practice is as worthy of the detailed attention of management and academic study as it is to formulate a strategy. It's always easier to think about smart marketing strategies than it is to make them work under company, competitor, and customer restrictions. Consider a pipe company that invented a new kind of triangular tube 180% more efficient than the existing line, needing only two-thirds as much material. Based on value for users, the new vice president of marketing wanted to price the new tube high. He feared, however, that a lack of support from other top managers, the company's marketing systems, and sales potential would hamper his strategy. All three generations of directors have learned about doing business in this market, what the company is, he complained, seems to be conspiring against me being able to introduce this innovation properly. What to do—the marketing strategy—is clear to this vice president: price by value, encourage cannibalism of existing lines, and make a profit. How the strategy is implemented — marketing implementation — is problematic. This family business usually produced pipes in large quantities and sold it in a non-cultivated market with low profit margins. The company started each year with high profit margins, but due to competitive pressure and the need to keep its factories in production capacity, it ended up reducing costs in the heat of the sales period. Plant managers were paid on the basis of pipes produced per minute. The sales potential was thought of in terms of lowering list prices to stimulate orders and secure commissions. Senior management encouraged this commodity-oriented culture by setting budgets at a high fixed cost and maintaining a measurement system designed to monitor the selling price of each unit of raw material rather than the pipe itself. The vice president was rightly concerned that simply declaring a high price for the new pipe with fiat or even building a marketing program for innovation would be ineffective in combating the entrenched and commodity-focused way of doing business. As this example suggests, problems in marketing practice have two components: structural and human. The structural includes the company's marketing functions, such as pricing and sale, as well as any program based on these functions, any control systems, and policy guidelines. The second element is the people themselves, people, managers tasked with achieving the marketing work done. Strategy or implementation? Marketing strategy and app affect each other. While the strategy obviously affects actions, execution also affects marketing strategies, especially over time. Despite the unclear boundary between strategy and execution, it is not difficult to diagnose marketing implementation problems and distinguish between strategy shortcomings. When a 50-person computer sales power terminal sells only 39 of the company's new line of smart micros during a sales blitz in which sales of more than 500 units were predicted, is the problem with managing sales potential or with strategic move to smart machines? The question is accountable. Fierce competition is eroding margins in sales of its old dumb terminals. In addition, the category of smart terminals is expected to increase by more than 500% during the 1980s. The new product, a portable micro with built-in printer and memory, has many benefits from which the target market prices. But because sales representatives already earn an average of more than $50,000 a year, they have little incentive to struggle with an unknown new product. Management also inexplicably put sales incentive compensation on new machines lower than in older ones. Finally, the old terminals have a sales cycle half as much as the new ones and require no software knowledge or support. Here's a case where poor execution stifles good strategy. The exhibit shows how marketing strategy and implementation affect each other. The computer example falls into the lower left cell of the matrix and illustrates an important rule about strategy and application: poor application can mask good strategy. As the exhibit states, when both strategy and implementation are on target, the company has done everything it can to ensure success. Similarly, when the strategy is inappropriate and implementation is poor, lack of implementation may mask problems with the strategy; not only is failure the likely outcome, but such failures will be particularly intractable due to the difficulty in determining the cause of the problem. Exhibit Marketing Strategy and Diagnosis Application Problem When the strategy is appropriate, but the application is bad or vice versa, the diagnosis becomes difficult. Poor marketing execution can cause management to doubt even sound strategies because they are associated with application deficiencies (the lower left cell of the exhibit). As the computer company's example above suggests, management can hasten market failure if it subsequently changes its strategy. I such a cell problem situation in the matrix because poor execution prevents confirmation of the correctness of the strategy and can cause unnecessary changes. When the strategy is inappropriate and the execution excellent (the upper right cell), the management usually ends up with time to recognize and correct its strategic errors. Good branch heads, for example, amend potentially disastrous guidelines for head offices. Indeed, some companies known for outstanding marketing performance, such as Frito-Lay, expect such modifications from their managers. But at other times, the good execution of the bad strategy acts as the engine on a plane in a nosedive-accelerated crash. Because it is difficult to predict the result of inappropriate strategy combined with good execution, I label this cell rescue or destruction. From this analysis two points stand out to help managers diagnose marketing implementation problems. Firstly, poor execution tends to mask both the suitability and inadequacy of the strategy. Therefore, when not sure of the causes of poor marketing performance, managers should look at marketing practices before making strategic adjustments. A careful examination of how questions, application questions, can often identify an execution culprit responsible for problems that are seemingly strategic. Structural problems of marketing practice In Zen's Book and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, Robert Pirsig suggests a list of traps that can weaken the engineer's determination to do quality work. It tells, for example, how a five-minute screw that keeps an access cover in place can, if stuck, render a $4,000 motorcycle worthless and engineer a frustrated wreck headed for really serious mistakes. Like engineers, managers need a list of traps in marketing practice. In the following modules I get problems and pitfalls of each level, or position, in the structural hierarchy of marketing practice: functions, programs, systems, and policy guidelines. We will then discuss the application skills required by those who do the marketing. Functions: Basic principles marketing functions include selling, promoting trade, and managing distributors. These low-level tasks are the fundamentals, blocking and dealing with the trader's work. However, I have noticed that most companies and their directors face great difficulties with these tasks. Often the difficulty stems from failing to follow the basic principles of marketing in any determined way, such as when a CEO doubted that the company's trade show costs were a good marketing communication device, but continued to allow $1 million each year thinking the company needed to be there. Although the pitfalls that are particular in each operation are worthy of a separate article, there are a few management problems common to everyone. Problems with functions generally outweigh the problems in the marketing program, systems and policy levels. Managers most often have trouble managing sales force, managing distributors, or invoicing transactions. When operations go wrong, it is often because headquarters simply assume that this operation will be performed well by someone else, somewhere else, and thus ignores it until a crisis intervenes. In one company, for example, management decided to offer low list prices with correspondingly low discounts from list prices. In In what it thought was a sound pricing drive for its line of graphics computers, however, management failed to take into account how the pricing got implemented. The pricing system it came up with did not satisfy anyone because the buyers proved their effectiveness because of the size of the discounts received. Thus, application problems at the function level are mainly caused by faulty management assumptions or, as they say in the sports world, by not watching the ball. As might be expected, this disease is more prevalent in large modules, where managers have functional specialists to rely on, than in small ones. A second cause of marketing operation problems is structural contradiction. A promising start-up business with $600,000 in revenue decided after careful discussion about expanding its domestic distribution network by setting up its own high-cost sales offices. The aim was to control its distribution channels. For international distribution, however, management was torn between its need for control and its indity with international markets. The conflict grew after a potential foreign partner said it would guarantee $30 million in sales. The administration was stunned. Its policy dictated that it should own foreign channels, but the implementation was beyond its reach. Cash flow eventually seduced the company into deciding on indirect foreign distribution, with a different partner and settlement in each country. The overall result was a complex patchwork of direct and indirect distribution, which the thin ranks of executives could not handle. The administration's efforts to balance the contradiction between the desired control policies and the distribution structure at the operational level were ineffective and led to conflicts between company executives and foreign distributors. And a third cause of problems is when headquarters fails to choose a marketing function for special concentration and capability and instead gets satisfaction in doing an adequate job with everyone-what I call global mediocrity. Employees thus disseminate resources and administrative talent democratically but ineffectively. Typically, pricing, advertising, promotion and distribution functions are satisfactory, but no function is excellent. The best companies have a ability to handle one or two marketing functions and are responsible for the rest. No traders are good at everything, but the most capable focus on performing an excellent job in some marketing functions. Frito-Lay is an example of a company that has refined two operational skills — sales and distribution — to such heights that they serve as the company's marketing base. The Department Gillette's care makes an advertising science. Both of these companies have resources, often unevenly, to maintain competitive excellence in showcase operations. Programs: The right combination A marketing program is a combination of marketing and non-marketing functions, marketing, promotion and production of sales, for a specific product or market. Marketing programs are a key benchmark for analysis of marketing practices. of these, it is possible to look under the functions that include the programs or on the systems and policies that direct the implementation of the programs. At the program level, management seeks to combine marketing and non-marketing functions in an effort to sell a specific product line or penetrate a target segment. Managing all aspects of the Silkience hair conditioner line is an example of a marketing program. this is the management of a company's basic accounts and their specific needs. If the functions are blocking and dealing with execution, marketing programs are the playbook that shows how customers will flirt and the competition is confused. A computer vendor, for example, wanted to install a national account program to better serve its small but growing number of basic accounts. The salesman recruited a highly respected national apology manager from another company, gave him a secretary, and issued a presidential order to put a basic apology program together. How exactly would that happen? Perhaps the manager should try to set up a headquarters-based, dedicated national sales force account, despite the risks involved in competing with the vice president of sales, his supervisor. Or was it better to work in a dotted-line capacity through the company's sales managers, trying not to sales or coordinate services beyond mere interoperable persuasion, and performing different risks with the customer base? The art of mixing functions into programs is a poorly understood at best, often left to on-the-job learning by trial and error. A common problem of the program stems from what I call empty marketing promises, which results from the establishment of programs that are either contradicted by the identity of the company or are beyond its operational capabilities. The computer graphics company hinted that it previously made a generalized piece of computer equipment that served all parts of the industry, but most buyers were small users of a site. Indeed, with the exception of its national account manager, each implementing act and policy directive oriented the company to small customers. Unlike many businesses that receive 80% of revenue from the largest 20% of customers, this company received only 30% of its revenue from its large accounts. In short, the company's national account program was contrary to what the company was founded to do in The program was an empty promise internally and in the market. In another case, the country's largest private label lamp producer decided it had to give its bulbs a brand and place them on grocery shelves to pre-understand others from an attack on its profitable main business. The company, which specializes in industrial lighting products, had no experience in consumer marketing or advertising and only a little in important retail sectors such as Promote. Nevertheless, he created Project Shopping Cart. After spent several million dollars on designing a new display and packaging for bulbs and even more to support sporting events and hire a host of brokers to place bulbs, management garnered a .3% share of the market in two years. Marketing functions at this industrially and generally oriented company were not able to provide retail blocking and dealing with that headquarters simply assumed that they would be there to implement its well-designed program. A second program-level execution error is what I call bunny marketing. It arises not from a functional inability to execute the programme's plans, but from a lack of direction in the implementation policies of the high command. A heavy construction company was constantly frustrated because it came out late with new products in an industry in which spare parts stocks and operator loyalty give the first-in-supplier a significant advantage. One of its products, a machine for special mining conditions, came out almost two years after entering the competition. Headquarters had kept thin engineering development staff busy with a torrent of engineering projects, some to re-process machines already in the field, one to come up with an automatic prototype machine under government grant, and another to design the new machine. In short, the abundance of programs had no focus because it came from a bad sense of what the company was and what it did. The presence of many smart marketing programs—an excellent game manual—is often associated with implementation problems. That's because when a strong sense of marketing identity and direction are absent, programs tend to go away in all directions. Such bunny marketing results in spreading effort and random results. Systems: Bureaucratic Barriers Marketing Systems include formal organization, monitoring, budget, and other overlays that promote or inhibit good marketing practice. Systems can be as simple as voice telecommunications or as complex as profit accounting. From systems to lower organizational levels, the most problematic is reporting and controlling sales potential. Of the pervasive systems, those involved in allocating marketing resources and those who help manage track results are bugbears in all but a few companies. Especially in smaller enterprises, allocation systems cause many problems; in larger ones, the control systems do more damage. Other types of systems, as well as staff and the formal organisational structure may also be problematic, but managers can usually overcome these obstacles by exercising their execution skills. Three problems that usually occur at the system level are errors of ritual, politicization, and unavailability. Errors of ritual arise when the company's systems drive it down the usual routes, even when good judgment dictates a different course. To a particular producer, the marketing control system was based on a measure to delay the establishments. When When it was low, sales strength beat the bushes for jobs no matter how marginal, the appraisers (who control pricing at construction companies) shaved the margins, and everyone from the CEO down got nervous. When the delays were high, the reactions were the opposite. As a result, low margin activities taken in bad times hampered the company when it sought high margin activities in better times. When the president accepted proposals for a new sales control system to address the problem, he introduced new forms and reports, but refused to either modify the management of to-dos or approach profitability from work as a means of more efficient partitioning and selling. The problem of politicisation has never been more evident than when observing the reporting and control systems of sales forces and, in particular, call reports. Sales managers are often weaned off their call reports to match their biases. Even more dangerously, call reports can completely lose their information function and instead become a device to punish sales representatives who submit inappropriately. However, the politicisation of systems is in no way limited to sales controls. In one case, the management of the department at an equipment rental company chose to report to headquarters that the new pricing regime would increase unit revenue by 11% and margins by 13%. It failed to note, unfortunately, that the rental equipment would be obsolete a year earlier than the headquarters had planned! The ultimate, and most pervasive, problem of systems is unavailability. That is, some systems designed to make the lives of line officers easier simply don't. In all but a few companies I have studied, for example, financial accounting and sales accounting systems can be seen as rather than perverse in failing to meet marketing requests. One would expect that in today's data-oriented companies managers could make forecasts based on a detailed analysis of the results. Few executives, however, have any idea of profitability per segment, to name one. Rarely are they still good numbers for profitability from the product, and only once have I seen a system that allowed profitability to be calculated from the individual account. Instead, administrators are either treated to incomprehensible, foot-thick prints of non-cracking data or otherwise say in response to their requests that accounting won't give it to us that way. The inevitable result is a kind of bell-jar in which it is impossible to make good decisions. Policies: Oral and unspoken At the broader structural level of marketing practice are policy guidelines. While policies cover the range of administrative activity, I focus here on two particularly important marketing implementation policies: identity policies — those related to what the company is — and direction policies — those relating to what it does. By policies I do not just mean oral or written statements; indeed, some of the policies that are more central to good marketing practice are untold. Identity problems are the most common policy difficulties and, paradoxically, occur more often in mature ones than in new business units. Marketing theme and marketing culture are two terms I use to capture the powerful but often untold sense of common purpose that the best implementers have and others don't. Theme and culture convey the identity policies of the company. The marketing issue is a vague but important term that refers to the administration's common understanding of the purpose of marketing. At one company, some executives realized that they are in charge of a commodity supplier with the only hope for the future to be the R&D projects of the blue sky. Others believed that the company's main feature was the diversification of its core lines. The directors operated consistently according to their different perceptions, and the result was a confusing and ineffective marketing effort–a sales force that thought its headquarters gave contradictory signals, a divisive trade, and disgruntled customers. By contrast, the management of another company and the entire sales potential of 10,000 people could recite (with conviction): We are the leading supplier of snacks in this country. Our products are great. But we only have two seconds to get to the supermarket shopper, so we live or die in the service. The common understanding and continuous strengthening of management (through compensation, training, and the like) of this topic, however simple it may sound, has promoted extremely effective sales performance and consistent customer reactions. It is tempting to dismiss the concept of promoting a common understanding of the company's marketing issue as a vague and trivial idea. A test of your company executives' perceptions of this issue may cause some concern. To run this test, write a single sentence that describes your company's marketing essence. Then tell your main people to do it, too. The results are usually both didatic and shocking. Marketing culture is a broader concept than theme. While subjects can often be verbal, culture is the underlying and usually unspeakable social fabric of management. They are discreet but dynamic channels behavior of administrators in comfortable grooves. Culture can be clearly observed by such things as dining room conversations and slogan management puts on the walls. For example, when I asked managers at a company why they were planning a $700 million plant addition to support a new product line that market research suggested would require only half of that capacity, the vice president of marketing replied, We don't see much sense around here in chinning ourselves in. Direction policies refer to both marketing strategy and leadership. While marketing strategy is out of the realm of this article, leadership deserves attention as a key aspect of the application. It has become fashionable for companies to blame the shortcomings in practice on culture. It is undeniably true, however, that some top marketing managers are top leaders and others are not. The first inspire us their willingness to go out on the field; they are smart at designing simple and effective monitoring methods, and their understanding of customers is strong. Others are much less effective as leaders, immersed in complex conception or unwilling to let their leather chairs on the market are inspired only as models of what their juniors hope not to become. The quality of marketing leadership has an extensive effect on the quality of marketing practice. Indeed, from the business units I noticed that it had low caliber leaders, did not have high quality marketing practices overall. Whether a powerful theme and culture is caused by the gift of the individual at the top or orchestrated through the memoranda is irrelevant. The crucial question is whether these intangible elements of identity, or who we are, and direction, or what we are about, exist as powerful though non-identifiable forces that impose themselves on an observer in the same way they permeate the company. Gap Bridging: Execution Skills Up to this point I have analyzed the motorcycle without much attention to the mechanic. Indeed, the primary reason good marketing practice occurs is that managers often use their personal skills to replace, support, and sometimes quietly overturn inadequate practice structures. I call this substitution of personal skills for the weak structure a reversal towards quality. The poor functioning of official marketing systems is often repaired when managers who use them engage in informal organisational skills. Similarly, informal monitoring systems are often created to obtain data that the control system cannot, and budget reallocates are often designed to undermine standard policy constraints. Managers bring four execution skills to marketing work: interaction, distribution, monitoring and organization. Interaction Marketing work by its nature is one of influencing others inside and outside the company. Inside, there is a regular parade of peers over which the trader has no authority to impose preferences; Instead you have to hit the horse trades. Outside, the dealer deals with a plethora of assistants, including ad agencies, consultants, fabric manufacturers, and the like, each with an agenda and an axe to grind. I noticed that managers who show empathy, that is, the ability to understand how others feel, and to have good negotiating skills are the best enforcer. The allocator must be left with the time, assignments, and other resources of all between the marketing tasks to be done. In a position directors have no false sense of equality or but it is tough and fair in putting people and dollars where they will be most effective. The less capable usually have too many dollars and people in mature programs and too few to more dangerous and amorphous programs. Monitoring is using monitoring skills that an administrator can do most to rebuild degraded corporate information and control systems. Good match implementers they fight with their markets and businesses until they can simply and forcefully express the back-of-the-envelope ratios necessary for the operation of the business, regardless of the typical shortcomings of the control system. Poor intestenders either sink blissfully into industry clichés or get immersed in terrible and often quantitative complexity that no one understands. The chief executive of a company with 38 factories and 300,000 customers, for example, ran everything he thought was vital according to notes on two three-by-five-inch index cards. By contrast, a company's sales manager about one centimeter of this size produced hand-truckfuls of monthly computer prints in his tracking zeal, then let them age like cheese. Organizing good tools has an almost uncanny ability to re-create an informal organization, or network, to match every problem they face. They know someone in every part of the organization (and outside too) who, because of mutual respect, attraction, or some other tie, can and will help with any problem. That is, these managers are rebuilding the organization to suit the marketing work that needs to be done. They adapt their informal organisation to facilitate good execution. Often, their organization and the official have little in common. Good practice in marketing Marketing management is problematic in all but some companies, and the ability to manage is often limited to a few functions or programs within the framework of marketing discipline. However, some of the businesses in my sample showed really excellent marketing application, and it is from them that some simple but important features that differentiate good marketing practice arise: In the best companies, there is a strong sense of identity and direction in marketing policies. There is no confusion and little disagreement among managers about who they are. Moreover, leaders are strong and capable. There is, in fact, clarity of the subject and the vision. The best implementers are constantly targeted at customers, including trade or distributors, in a number of unusual ways. Customer concern is an ingrained part of the culture and is always prominent in the matter of better tools. Interestingly, distributors are also considered customers, and management's main objective is to maintain a partnership with both distributors and end-users. I call this behavior a profit partnership with a broad definition. I did not find that good implementers are less profit-oriented than the poor; quite the opposite. However, administrators are better off performing to take special care to see that end users also in terms of real value for the money they spend. Commercial profits in more traditional ways, with dollar margins, but also benefits from having good implementers consider the basic accounts. Companies that are less competent in implementation never form a partnership with these two key marketing constituencies or, worse, lose the focus that Hda. In the best organisations, management is able and willing to replace its own skills for shortcomings in the formal structure. At United Parcel Service, the story is told with some pride of the regional manager who took it for himself to untand a misguided shipment of Christmas gifts by renting an entire train and diverting two UPS-owned 727s from their flight plans.1 When top management learned of his actions, he praised and rewarded him. Culture supported replacing the director of capacity for the structure, but the regional director was also ready to fight to defend his judgment. Finally, in companies that handle execution better, senior management has a distinctly different view of both the marketing structure and managers than bosses at other companies. In the best companies, without exception, the importance of executives dominates the importance of the execution structure. That is, marketing (and other) managers are key accounts of senior management and are treated with a latitude that is not found in other companies. Top executives at companies that are good at marketing encourage their fans to challenge them and challenge them because it's not always possible for those at the top to be right. Those who are poor at following constantly frustrate the tendency for policies and structure to become a religion, which causes management to lose its flexibility in times of change.2 This process can be characterized as a common theme of good leaders, poor followers. Top managers at the best companies also see the marketing structure differently. They tend to promote a philosophy of over-sharing with program pickiness in marketing investments. It is not always easy to get new projects approved by these directors, but the projects approved are staffed, funded, and otherwise fully supported to maximize their chances of success. The full approval of fewer, healthier marketing programs seems to give these officers the critical mass they need to make programs work in good times and bad and reduce the risk to the company. This approach worked well for a business-jet distributor I studied, which overcame the recession of the early 1980s in much better shape than its more programmatically productive peers. Again, in the best companies, management focuses on one or a few marketing functions that promotes and cultivates a competitive distinction through expertise. When the strong theme and culture, program pickiness, and function-level concentration are combined, the conclusion that emerges is that businesses in marketing execution encourage robustness at the top (policies) and bottom (functions), rather than shine in the middle (programs). When all is said and done, quality in marketing practice is no guarantee of good market results. There's just too much luck, competitive jockeying, and a totally perverted client involved in hoping for this kind of proactive accuracy. I guess. marketing practice means using skillful skills to deal with inevitable execution crises that cloud strategies for customer and media management. Individually, such threats are not much to fear. All in all, they're strategy killers. Killers.

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