



## **What Does Marketing Look Like in an Execution Environment?**

Marketing is critical to organizations. Branding and name recognition are essential to connect with prospective customers and establish a level of trust that results in a sale. Interacting with the marketplace to uncover prospective customers and to understand their needs better than your competitors is essential to developing new offerings. Social media provides a new way to interact with a wide array of prospective customer to understand their needs and to influence their buying decisions. Competitors in any given sector provide similar offerings and quality. Our experience, skills, and products are no longer a differentiator. Understanding and solving customer needs is the way companies of all kinds have to differentiate themselves today. We often think of marketing as either a data gathering activity, or as a series of thrusts that are being conducted, which make marketing activities isolated islands. Marketing in an execution environment is informed and guided by the strategic planning and operating processes.

Marketing as Part of the Strategic Planning Process: The strategic planning process in an execution environment starts with a vision of what customers need and what will solve that need. This vision in large part has to come from interacting with prospective customers and understanding their needs. The marketing function fills this role in an execution environment, and there would be defined plans, activities, and performance metrics relative to achieving this level of understanding of the customer needs, preferences, and buying habits.

Apple's vision for example is to provide a user experience, rather than simply a product as their competitors see their strategy. Providing a user experience requires a far deeper understanding of consumer needs and preferences than does simplifying a product. For example, Apple realized that supplying music for personal and mobile use required more than just a portable music player. Apple's leaders instilled the execution environment in the way they setup and manage the various processes by which they operate. The processes themselves, not leadership edicts, mandate the actions that the staff need to take to get to a superior outcome.

Marketing as Part of the Operations and Budgeting Process: The Operations and Budgeting Process in an execution environment is an outcome of the strategic planning process. The strategic plan in an execution environment was based on a vision informed by the insight uncovered by marketing, and the operations and



budgeting process implement the strategic plan's objectives and accomplish its goals. There is continuous questioning and testing by the marketing function of the assumptions and resources allocations of the strategic plan as it is executed under the operations and budgeting process. Was this vision correct? Are the market estimates in the plan correct? Are prospective customers responding and behaving in the way the plan anticipated? The strategic plan in an execution environment also spelled out specific marketing objectives and thrusts, the resources needed to meet those objectives, and the metrics by which execution in meeting those objectives would be judged. During the operating and budgeting process, marketing not only has to conduct the thrusts and activities defined in the strategic plan, but also ask what limitations (knowledge, people, budget) exist that cannot be overcome at present and will have to be lived with? What people skills will be needed? Who has them? What resources will be needed? Are they available, or already deployed? What is unknown and will have to be established? Are the metrics we are using to assess our progress and to judge the performance of the various people involved reliable and meaningful? The marketing plan in this contest is brutally objective and continuously challenging its validity and making needed corrections.

ITC Experts was a startup professional services firm that provided scientific and engineering investigations to insurers and litigators. The challenge for our marketing was to increase name recognition and build trust. We did this by focusing on face-to-face interactions. Some of our findings were unexpected and valuable in guiding our vision to differentiate ITC Experts from our competitors by knowing the needs of preferences of our client sector better and offering innovative services. We uncovered an unmet need to cut costs that our competitors were not addressing and in response developed an innovative way to short-circuit the discovery process that we call SpotlightTPM, which is what is needed to cut cost.

### **Spotlight Business Consulting**

*Spotlight Business Consulting (SpotlightBC) was formed with a mission to provide businesses with consulting that is informed by a focus on execution. What distinguishes businesses with superior performance is the way they execute and overcome ambiguity and insufficient information and insight. Rather than simply apply our extensive experience, we are unique in offering you a contemporary, information-driven consulting process, every aspect of which is informed by a focus on execution.*