

by Jay Conrad Levinson

he first thing to know is that guerrillas plan backwards, beginning with the attainment of their loftiest goals in the future, then working back to the present. If you can allow yourself to visualize success, the path to it will be easier to find. Most companies see the beginning of the path in front of them, but don't see where it leads in the distance. Their short-sightedness gets them in trouble when change or unforeseen circumstances occur. It even impairs their ability to function when confronted with success.

The hardest job in the planning of marketing is seeing the target. You must remove the shackles of insecurity and fear in order to travel to your final destination. So you've got to think as though you've been attaining your goals all along as you plan for your distant future. You must see your company at its finest in 20 years in order for it to operate at its peak in ten years. By knowing what must be accomplished for such optimum performance, you can see where you must be in five years. That helps you concentrate upon what must be done by the end of one year. And that points the way to what you've got to do tomorrow, to do today, to do now.

When the golf ball is in the middle of the fairway and the green 200 yards away, the great golfers don't aim for the green. They aim for the cup.

You must know exactly where the cup is. Knowing where the green is won't cut it for you. Knowing that the fairway is in front of you won't do it either. Most small businesses are run by owners who stand at the tee, club in hand, but aren't really certain in which direction they should aim. They can hit the ball, possibly even hit it long. But that won't get the ball into the cup where it belongs.

Guerrilla businesses operate by marketing plans that factor in success and growth, change and flexibility. These plans shine a bright light far ahead, illuminating a target that exists only in the mind of the owner. That owner must put that same target into the minds of those who work with him -- his employees and co-workers, marketing partners and suppliers.

The way he does it is with a plan that clearly shows the path upon which he is traveling and the destination to which it leads. It helps in all decision-making -- from advertising to personnel. It has room for expansion, diversification and success. Although it enables the business to operate in the here and now, it keeps a sharp focus on the there and then.

Although the soul of planning exists within the mind of the planner, the heart resides in the research he or she does. Knowledge gained from research will provide stability and reality to a plan. It will guide the hopes and ambitions of the planner while pointing to goals and tactics. The research must temper both boldness and timidity at the same time with the radiant glow of information.

The guerrilla possesses the insight to begin planning with research. The more concrete the research, the more sensible the plan. Plans gain strength as guerrillas gain wisdom in these areas:

- Product or service: Guerrillas learn what makes it different, better, desirable. They find ways to improve it and add value to it.
- Benefits: Research into the benefits offered by the product should be reflected in the marketing plan, especially benefits not offered by others.
- Market: Plans exist not in a vacuum but in relationship to an entire marketplace. Guerrillas become experts in their market before planning.
- Industry: Guerrillas want to see their industry as a whole to help them spot vulnerabilities and opportunities, to learn from successes and failures.
- Competition: Sane marketing plans are created according to dreams adjusted to competitive activity. Guerrillas are rarely taken by surprise.
- Customers: Rich sources of guerrilla data are customers of guerrillas and customers of competitors of guerrillas.
- Prospects: Savvy marketing plans specify who these people are because research identified and located them prior to the plan being created.
- Media: Guerrillas learn the best ways to reach their target prospects and incorporate what they've learned about the media in their marketing plan.
- Internet: It's so simple to scour cyberspace for marketing intelligence that all guerrillas consider cybersearching mandatory before planning.
- Technology: Because speed and efficiency can spur effective marketing, guerrillas look into how technology can propel them to their goals.

The end result of research should be an arrow pointing in the right direction and a bow with the power to get the arrow to the target. The marketing plan is the quiver in which the bow and arrow are kept.