

Lesson 7: Know Your Enemy

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The three main points in a Knowledge Triangle Analysis (KTA), the process we use to start a new marketing campaign, are:

- Know yourself
- Know your customers
- Know your enemy

If you've been following along in order, by now you've given a fair degree of consideration to both your company and your customers. This gives you a wealth of information to use in crafting your marketing message, as well as getting it in front of the people you want to reach.

However, no matter how well you plan things, the competition get a vote. You can have the most brilliant strategy on the planet but if you fail to take competitors into consideration, it may well unravel as soon as you roll it out. That's because, like you, the other people in your industry are gunning for the same customers. If you think they're likely to give up without a fight just because you came up with a clever tagline, you're in for some unpleasant surprises.

Define The Competition

Therefore, the first and most important step to take at this stage of the game is compiling a list of your most significant competitors. As you build this list, you need to think beyond the immediate threat. Any company that can steal your customers away is obviously one to include. However, you'll also want to expand your thinking to encompass any competing organization that could adversely influence your target market.

An example of such an influential company would be a large national chain that doesn't yet have a presence in your local market. Can your prospects buy from them? No. However, if they offer products, services or benefits that make you look bad in comparison, it's going to make it harder for you to get the sale just the same.

Now that you have a list of the significant competitors in your field, rank them by market share. This will help you weight the importance of any given aspect of their presence as it relates to your efforts. From here, we'll walk through the same set of questions for each of these pesky neighbors.

What Can You Learn?

When we think in competitive terms, it's natural to adopt an adversarial perspective. However, the first question you should ask about each of your competitors is more benevolent in nature. How do they get their customers?

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It's no coincidence that the intersection down the street from you has several burger joints all within spitting distance of each other. You might find a Burger King staring straight down the barrel of a McDonalds. Why in the world would Burger King want to build a restaurant directly across from such a well established competitor?

In this case, you can be sure that before McDonalds ever broke ground, they did plenty of research to determine whether or not this was going to be a good location for business. In essence, they've saved their competition quite a bit of trouble. Now Burger King knows exactly where the customers are. And the reality of the matter is that there's plenty of business to go around. What can you learn from the success of your most established competitors?

Study Their Strengths

Of course, one of the areas you'll document as you go through your list is the things that your competitors do better than you. Sometimes it's an advantage that you just can't match. If you're a mom and pop general store, chances are good that you don't have the buying power of the Walmart down the street, so you're going to have a tough time competing on price. This tells you that you need to attack from a different angle.

Other times, by examining how they got the upper hand, you can learn how to put the same techniques to work for you. Remember, one of the best ways to succeed is to study success.

Conclusion

None of the questions you can ask about your competitors is a magic potion in and of itself. However, when you put it all on the canvas at once, it paints a very clear picture that is invaluable in helping you design the most effective campaign possible.

While we've covered just a few of the basic questions here, common sense and a bit of effort will give you a long list of questions that you can and should ask about each of those competing entities. By digging deep and truly knowing your enemy, that painting becomes a detailed roadmap to success.