

7 Key Steps to a Growth Strategy That Works Immediately

The key with any growth strategy is to be deliberate. Figure out the rate-limiting step in your growth, and pour as much fuel on the fire as possible. But for this to be beneficial, you need to take the following steps:

1. Establish a value proposition.

For your business to sustain long-term growth, you must understand what sets it apart from the competition. Identify why customers come to *you* for a product or service. What makes you relevant, differentiated and credible? Use your answer to explain to other consumers why they should do business with you.

For example, some companies compete on “authority” -- Whole Foods Market is the *definitive* place to buy healthy, organic foods. Others, such as Walmart, compete on price. Figure out what special benefit only *you* can provide, and forget everything else. If you stray from this proposition, you’ll only run the risk of devaluing your business.

2. Identify your ideal customer.

You got into business to solve a problem for a certain audience. Who is that audience? Is that audience your ideal customer? If not, who are you serving? Nail down your ideal customer, and revert back to this audience as you adjust business to stimulate growth.

3. Define your key indicators.

Changes must be measurable. If you're unable to measure a change, you have no way of knowing whether it's effective. Identify which key indicators affect the growth of your business, then dedicate time and money to those areas. Also, A/B test properly -- making changes over time and comparing historical and current results isn't valid.

4. Verify your revenue streams.

What are your current revenue streams? What revenue streams could you add to make your business more profitable? Once you identify the potential for new revenue streams, ask yourself if they're sustainable in the long run. Some great ideas or cool products don't necessarily have revenue streams attached. Be careful to isolate and understand the difference.

5. Look to your competition.

No matter your industry, your competition is likely excelling at something that your company is struggling with. Look toward similar businesses that are growing in new, unique ways to inform your growth strategy. Don't be afraid to ask for advice. Ask yourself why your competitors have made alternate choices. Are they wrong? Or are your businesses positioned differently? The assumption that you're smarter is rarely correct.

6. Focus on your strengths.

Sometimes, focusing on your strengths -- rather than trying to improve your weaknesses -- can help you establish growth strategies. Reorient the playing field to suit your strengths, and build upon them to grow your business.

7. Invest in talent.

Your employees have direct contact with your customers, so you need to hire people who are motivated and inspired by your company's value proposition. Be cheap with office furniture, marketing budgets and holiday parties. Hire few employees, but pay them a ton. The best ones will usually stick around if you need to cut back their compensation during a slow period.

Developing a growth strategy isn't a one-size-fits-all process. In fact, due to changing market conditions, making strategic decisions based on someone else's successes would be foolish. That's not to say that you can't learn from another company, but blindly implementing a cookie-cutter plan won't create sustainable growth.

You need to adapt your plan to smooth out your business's inefficiencies, refine its strengths and better suit your customers -- who could be completely different than those from a vague, one-size-fits-all strategy.

Your company's data should lend itself to all your strategic decisions. Specifically, you can use the data from your key indicators and revenue streams to create a personalized growth plan. That way, you'll better understand your business and your customers' nuances, which will naturally lead to growth.

A one-size-fits-all strategy implies vague indicators. But a specific plan is a successful plan. When you tailor your growth strategy to *your* business and customers, you'll keep your customers happy and fulfill their wants and needs, which will keep them coming back.