

8 Obstacles to Growing a Business and How to Overcome Them

BY STEVE KLEIN

How to avoid the roadblocks to growth that have challenged countless companies? It's an issue that's given every CEO more than a few sleepless nights. In my 25 plus years as a CMO and Marketing Coach, I have helped hundreds of clients achieve their sales goals and boost their bottom lines. In that time, I've learned a lot about why successful companies consistently hit their growth targets and why unsuccessful firms don't. In my view, here are the eight biggest obstacles to growing a business, and what companies can do to overcome them.

LACK OF A SIMPLE, ACHIEVABLE GROWTH OBJECTIVE

Too many companies are content to drift along from month to month without clear direction or an overarching goal. Consequently, their employees lack a sense of purpose and don't feel invested in their work. Teams without an objective are teams with no context; they don't have a foundation for success.

A company must clearly articulate its growth goals to its staff, and these goals must be simple and easy to understand, yet still challenging enough to inspire a workforce to strive for more. And company goals must

be S.M.A.R.T. Goals, goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely. Most high-performance CEOs make it their first priority to organize team planning days and retreats, virtual meetings or town halls, where employees and management get together to discuss the business' short and long-term objectives, and what each employee must do to help make them happen.

COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWNS

Too often in companies that are struggling to grow, the CEO knows what his or her objectives are, but everyone else in the company is kept in the dark. All too often I've found that the people doing the work have got no idea what the CEO's goals are because he or she hasn't communicated them.

The solution? Make sure your employees know exactly what you want the company to achieve. Tell them constantly and in new and memorable ways. For example, there's the Brian Scudamore Huddle – a short, intense, daily meeting invented by I-800-GOT-JUNK Founder and CEO Brian Scudamore. At Got Junk, the entire workforce attends Brian's huddle each morning, "huddling up" for just seven minutes to discuss company

news, actual and forecasted sales numbers, and get up to speed on where the business is heading. I love this style of meetings because it reinforces big-picture goals and keeps employees on track in their day-to-day work lives. Huddles are also really effective at building morale and consensus around what a company team is planning to accomplish.

FAILING TO MEASURE AND COMMUNICATE PROGRESS

It's hard to know how much further you need to go to reach your growth goals if you don't know how far you've come. Whether it's using an old-school whiteboard or software that's constantly streaming sales results on a digital dashboard, every company must have a clear way to tell employees where their team stands compared to its goals.

Successful CEOs have a system to communicate their key performance indicators (KPIs) and progress to staff. In my growth marketing webinars, I often use the Weight Watchers system to illustrate the importance of this success habit. WW members track their points daily and weight weekly as a way of measuring their progress towards their weight loss goal.

LACK OF A MEANINGFUL REWARD SYSTEM

A regular paycheck is nice, but Abraham Maslow taught us that employees want recognition for

their hard work and contribution to their team's performance far more than a payroll deposit to their bank account.

I have found that high performance CEOs use creative ways to reward employees for their contributions to the growth of the company. These can range from gift certificates for days at the spa, to tickets for NHL hockey games, to paid vacations at a Caribbean resort or on a cruise ship.

Gifts to employees don't have to be extravagant, but they should be fun, a little bit different and show some thought and caring. Even something as simple as a handwritten thank-you card goes a long way in a world where such gestures of appreciation are increasingly rare. The point is that employees are much more inclined to go the extra mile if their efforts are being recognized in tangible ways. Then they know what the prize is all about – what success is and what the reward is going to be. In the end, success is a team effort. Without that collective effort, a company's objectives can often be empty and irrelevant.

NOT HAVING A CLEAR AND COMPELLING GROWTH PLAN

CEOs should ensure they're working from a written playbook, one that's designed specifically to grow their company. This plan should be clear,

compelling and to the point. It should include a detailed implementation plan, one that describes how (and when) growth will be achieved.

Despite the importance of having such a document, many CEOs never take the time to do the work involved with creating such a blueprint, let alone follow through with a properly managed implementation plan. Businesses without a blueprint for growth are easily knocked off course and rarely get to where they want to go, let alone realize their potential.

If you're not sure about how to put together an effective growth plan, you should find an experienced Marketing Coach or Adviser. It is critical that this Coach or Advisor has expertise in not just marketing, but in growth marketing. They should also have a proven process to prepare a written document and this process should take four to six weeks to complete,

Your growth marketing plan should include forecasts – especially sales, new customers and average revenue – for both existing and new customers. It also should include marketing and advertising budgets. One of the biggest obstacles to growth is that businesses underestimate the funding that will be needed for marketing and advertising.

NOT IMPROVING YOUR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND BUSINESS MODEL

Successful CEOs recognize when they need to make major changes to (or even totally reinvent)

their business model – but more importantly, they have the courage to do so. The North American taxi industry is a great illustration of an industry that lost its way and failed to make much needed changes to its business model. They didn't anticipate and adapt to the arrival of ride-hailing services such as Uber and were totally upended as a result. As I tell CEOs in my workshops: "You've got to continually be working on improving both your business model and your customer buying experience. This experience should be measurably better than your major competitors."

OVERLOOKING THE POWER OF REVIEWS

Whether it's via Google reviews, platforms such as Net Promoter Score or other digital avenues, collecting customer feedback is more important than ever. In a world obsessed with social media, where even just a few bad reviews can ruin a business' reputation, all customer input – good and bad – must be taken seriously and acted upon.

Online reviews are a major force in today's business environment. They are the first way your company will be evaluated by prospective customers, and whether they will be either attracted to your product/service or scared off.

Yet many CEOs are so focused on taking care of day-to-day tasks that they fail to grasp the big-picture importance of customer ratings and their ability to influence new sales.

LACK OF A “CAN-DO” ATTITUDE

Complacency can destroy a company that’s content to rest on its laurels and yesterday’s results. When growing a company, whatever our role or responsibility, we can all learn from sports champions like Tiger Woods who is often quoted saying that he wouldn’t enter a PGA Golf tournament if he didn’t think he could win.

A little grit, determination and a healthy “can-do” attitude can go a long way to help any

organization grow and get to the next level, whether it’s a pro sports team or a software manufacturer. I always challenge my clients by asking them: “Are you hungry for success, or are you steeped in the status quo? Do you want a better tomorrow, or not? To me, everyone on the team, from the CEO right on down, has got to want success. They have to be motivated to change the status quo for a bigger, better future.



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