

CATALYST

the **MARXGROUP**

Business Strategy | Marketing Communications

July 17, 2007

View from the Bay: Climbing Mountains

By Tom Marx

Effective marketing is all about commitment, persistence and being willing to listen to the experts.

Catalyst is a marketing newsletter and my aim, as someone who's been providing marketing expertise for over 25 years, is to provide high value to my readers. Lately I've been suffering from some serious writer's block. My associate Tom Herndon reminded me that my best writing is when I am speaking from my own experience. So here's my story..

Many of you know that back in March 2006 I had a major accident while skiing one of my favorite black diamond slopes. I ended up having serious back surgery and a long, slow recovery. Given my persistence and my nature of pushing the envelope, sometime late last year I decided that I would like to celebrate my recovery by fulfilling a life-long ambition - to hike to the summit of Mt. Whitney!

Mt. Whitney is the highest peak in the continental United States (14,505 feet above sea level). It is located on the Eastern side of the High Sierras in California, adjacent to the town of Lone Pine and West of Sequoia National Park. I have a group of five friends joining me for a 3-night, 22-mile backpack trip August 27-30. We're starting at an 8,000' elevation.

I tried to do this trek with my father in my late teens, got altitude sickness and had to turn back. The desire to complete the adventure has always been with me. First, I needed to get into better shape, with a focus on strengthening my legs and lower back. I also had to improve my cardiovascular endurance, because there isn't much oxygen at 14,500 feet, especially carrying a 40 lb. backpack.

My first steps were to find the right people and to develop a strategy. I found some friends to share the adventure. We planned the trip together, deciding on where we would camp (likely 3 nights in the wilderness), what food we would bring and how we would collaborate on equipment to lighten our load.

Then I consulted the experts. I hired a physical therapist to design a strengthening program and joined an exercise facility that would not only honor my injury, but would support me with a program designed to achieve my goal.

Research was next. I haven't backpacked in years and equipment technology has changed so much. I started reading about the right kind of backpacks, hiking shoes, sleeping bags, stoves, water filters, and

on and on. I went to Mammoth Lakes a few weeks ago to test the new equipment and see how my back and legs would stand up. Carrying a 35 lb. pack for 5 miles, I gained about 1500' to an elevation of 9500'. I gave myself a B- grade. Not bad.

The good news was that my back seemed to do fine and the bad news was that I needed A LOT MORE thigh strength and endurance.

I returned to the PT and we redesigned the program: back to the gym at least 3 days each week, plus a series of exercises to do at home on the off days.

Ok, so what's my story have to do with marketing? A lot.

What are the steps to an effective marketing program?

- Get the right people on the bus
- Develop a strategy
- Design a game plan that will help achieve the strategy
- Do the research first (READY-AIM-FIRE) before launching marketing initiatives
- Hire experts and get quality marketing support
- Practice and test
- Make honest assessments of the test results
- Be willing to redesign on the fly
- Commit to the success of the program, regardless of how difficult it becomes

Stay tuned to *Catalyst*. I'll let you know if I make it!

Meanwhile, I would appreciate your best wishes for a successful trip!