

CATALYST

the **MARXGROUP**

Business Strategy | Marketing Communications

June 2004

Strategy vs. Tactics– a Thin Line

By Tom Marx and Tom Herndon

Strategy

According to Webster's New World Dictionary, STRATEGY is "the science of planning and directing large scale...operations, specifically as distinguished from TACTICS. A plan or action based on this (STRATEGY)." The term TACTICS is defined as "the science of arranging and maneuvering...with reference to short-term objectives...any methods used to gain an end."

Plainly, it's planning versus implementing. Or, using the Ready-Aim-Fire example, Strategy equals 'Ready' and Tactics is the 'Aim-Fire' part.

What we mean by strategy is that it's a brainstorming/visioning process. It's taking the time to look at your overarching goals – those goals that align with, support and fortify your company's vision – and not only coming up with the 'Must Have's,' but allowing your team to *vision*: what would have the results be 'Over The Moon.'

From our April Catalyst:

Strategic brainstorming is based on collaboration – collaboration of all key players. Sales, Marketing and Product Managers – everyone takes part. When the whole team has buy-in on the strategy BEFORE it's implemented, there is an exponential increase in effectiveness. Across the board buy-in is fundamental to launching any new initiative. Think of the time and money saved when everyone is truly on the same page from the get-go.

Tactics

The line often blurs between Strategy and Tactics, and they probably always will. A simple distinction to remember is Strategy is planning and Tactics is doing.

The moment you see a brief being delivered to a creative team, or concepts being looked at, you know you've crossed the line to Tactics. Tactics is starting creative concepts, planning the media, developing the mail list, and sending out the press releases. When the teams are getting more-and-more into action, then Tactics are happening.

Example: You are planning a promotion that is designed to reach the end user of your product. But to get

to the end user, you must have the cooperation throughout the channel.

Your field sales force goes to the distributor to enroll them in the promotion. You want the distributor to give you their customer addresses so you can mail them the announcement, supporting marketing materials and the rules of the promotion. There will need to be time built into the program to allow the distributor to gather the names, get the promotion to their marketing people, get the promotion material to their field sales force, and finally to their customer. This process would usually take 60-90 days to complete.

If the Tactic (advertising and marketing the promotion) begins before the Strategy (getting alignment with the distributor), you'll likely cause a lot of unnecessary panic, reduce the effectiveness of the promotion, and perhaps even discourage the distributor from participating in the program.

In today's fast-paced world of marketing, the pressure to launch the Tactics is often overwhelming. You know the signs: impatient management or clients asking "when is this happening" or "how long before we see results of this campaign" or "we need numbers THIS quarter."

How does one resist the pressure for immediate results?

In our experience, the way through this maze is to get alignment up front about how long it will take to complete the Strategy, when the Tactics will launch, and the timeline for seeing results of the effort. Establishing benchmarks and a time line at the beginning will go a long way towards creating a peaceful transition from planning to being in action.

Strategy aims for long-term benefits and it takes discipline to stay the course. Developing a strong strategy FIRST – one that everyone aligns on – before implementing tactics, is definitely Ready-Aim-Fire.

Ready-Fire-Aim? Well, someone could get hurt.