

Strategy = Plan; Tactics = Action; Logistics = Everything Else!

“Developing A Healthcare Plan & Making Sure Your Healthcare Strategy Gets Implemented”

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We're kicking off the first in a series of three articles this week regarding “Strategy”, “Tactics” and “How You Implement Your Entire Plan”. We start with developing your strategy for success in healthcare.

Strategy is somewhat confusing at times. In layman's terms, it's your “Plan”. It may be your thoughts concerning how a specific product introduction will evolve. Or you might say: “As a sales manager, how can I grow my dealerships' business overall?” Or “How can I grow this new territory I have been given?” Better yet, “As a manufacturer, how can we break into the healthcare market?” These are all good questions, but you must be able to sit back, have an “out of body” experience and view the arena you're attempting to enter.

As an example, some large companies bring their customers and suppliers together with the general managers of various business units and hold strategy sessions aimed at creating new market opportunities. They develop a business ecosystem for managers to explore and analyze. In an ecosystem, companies sometimes compete and then decide to cooperate to come up with innovations, create new products, and serve customers. A high percentage of today's management in contract furniture is so busy minding their current businesses, it's difficult for them to step around from behind the desk and see threats or opportunities. By looking at the entire market, it provides a broad perspective and proves the solutions are sometimes within their own company.

In strategic planning for healthcare, our focus is to assist you in looking at your entire market and determine the viability of getting into healthcare with your current products or other products which may or may not be available to you. Give thought to potentially bringing in minor medical items that round out your sales portfolio for healthcare. We also want you to focus and don't try to be all things to all people.

A very well-known company stated recently, “If we don't have the products for healthcare, how can we enter the market?” Quite frankly, one or two of their sister companies are already in healthcare and when you add their current products to the other two divisions, you begin to have an excellent offering which covers the “carpeted areas” along with the mid market arena. Even though they are different companies, they should consider implementing a healthcare strategy together!

“Roundtables” are one of the most beneficial ways to develop a strategic plan that plays well to your market. Customers, non-customers, distributors and dealers are all assembled for a “give and take” on the marketplace and thus discussion centers around what you can do as a company, how your firm is perceived, and the corrective measures that need to take place to meet the demands of the market. If handled correctly, this strategy session will give you the “keys to your strategic plan”. This usually is implemented by an outside organization for better feedback.

To be successful, you simply listen, determine what you've heard, verify and then expand upon your customers' desires. Begin building and re-positioning your firm with those same customers and others. The results are very beneficial and you will see that your customers, dealers or anyone else involved will perceive you differently from the day the “roundtable” is over.

Customer segments are very important. To whom are we selling? Who is the customer? Do we get contracts with GPO's, IDN's or local hospitals to sell this particular service or product? Is A&D involved in this area? These are very important questions and many times we forget to take all customer segments into consideration before determining how our products will be sold and or promoted.

What products should I sell or promote? Most people say, “I want to enter healthcare and sell as many products as possible.” Why not think about becoming the specialist in a specific area or two? Example: let's consider bariatric surgery and dialysis in hospitals. Both of these generate revenue, have specific needs and are considered to be “money areas”. Study the market and learn all you can about dialysis and bariatrics. You will soon become an asset to the customer, as well as to the manufacturer whose products you are selling. With that . . . revenues will come! You will find that your competitors do not understand the healthcare market, let alone how to sell the products to the end user. So let's say, if you gain the “right” knowledge in dialysis or bariatrics, you become valuable.

Planning a strategy for product entry is equal to “water running down hill”; one product will lead to another. It works that way in other things you have done, healthcare is no different. Before long, you are the healthcare specialist. So your product strategy needs to relate to one another. As an example, if you have two products to sell, you want them to be synergistic to one another. So they both need to work well together or in similar areas. This allows you to maximize selling time. You would not want to promote bariatric seating in hospitals and then sell another product only in nursing homes! Pretty obvious to most of us, but this happens many times.

Another part of your strategy should be healthcare training and healthcare market knowledge which leads to differentiating yourself. In healthcare furnishings “today”, it's easy to differentiate yourself against your competitors as healthcare is a relatively new market for the furnishings industry and many others do not even understand healthcare. There is an opportunity to get a jump on the competition, so do it now! This new found knowledge will allow you to increase your success factors. Whether your customer is a manufacturer, dealer, distributor, rep or end user, they will “sense” your knowledge and be more confident in working with you and giving you their business. Many times, and with better margins, you are providing value to your customer.

Finally, marketing your business and building a brand image of what you can do for companies in the healthcare industry, is crucial for promoting that differentiation. Develop an overall communications program that includes “touch points” of current and potential customers, such as:

- Press releases for larger or unique solutions to higher profile customers; company literature that clearly defines your solutions and methods to a prospect.
- Sponsorships of local and regional healthcare seminars and events to show your capabilities to a broad captive audience are just a few ways to attract and retain business and establish your credibility.
- Simple tactics, such as professional-looking correspondence and sales presentations, can make a difference in how a prospect views your company. This communication must be in “healthcare language”. This lets the customer know you understand “their” environment.
- Always be aware of the image you project and keep communications as concise as possible.

HCFI has partnered with a team of professionals at MindShare Advertising that can create a customized healthcare advertising and marketing plan for your company that specifically targets prospects in the healthcare industry. With a plan in place, you can focus your efforts on the thing that you do best---selling!

In summary, you need to:

- Investigate the healthcare market for opportunities
- Determine product categories to move towards
- Define your customer
- Maximize training and knowledge for market differentiation
- Develop unique marketing, advertising and PR campaigns.

- Download a registration form for the Health Care Furnishings Forum being held during NeoCon in June. ([Click here](#))