



Don't Play Politics with Your Planning

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As marketers we need to take the macro-environment into consideration when we're creating any plan. With the election looming, there is a constant barrage of headlines suggesting that the U.S. economy is faltering and that the future could be bleak. Many of the themes emerging from opposing sides are designed to emphasize differences and polarize.

During periods of change and uncertainty, it makes sense that companies work hard to understand the implications of the results for several scenarios. Scenario analysis is a good exercise for strategic planning at any time. Most polls are showing a close election and suggest that we will continue to live under a divided government, accompanied by discord, debates and delay.

It might be heartening to know that since 1947 the president's political party has switched back and forth eight times and the control of Congress has reversed even more frequently. Even with these changes in political power, the economy grew 85 percent of the time. Since 1982 the U.S. economy grew 90 percent of the time. In fact, the economy has expanded at an annual average rate of 6.6 percent, despite periodic recessions.

So while historically we know that political choices establish the framework for the economy, and while there is a lot of uncertainty about potential changes to that framework -- especially in terms of government spending and tax and industry legislation -- our government's system of checks and balances tends to produce incremental shifts rather than dramatic swings. Financial markets and the economy tend to adapt quickly to any changes, resuming a business-as-usual cadence despite policy changes.

The 2012 election will be in the history books in a few months, but the marketing investments needed to make to generate value for your organization will last far longer. That's why you need to avoid getting caught up in the election hype. Don't play politics with your planning. Using the election, waiting on the results to create your marketing plan and taking a "wait-and-see" approach to your investments are not the best course of action. The future of your business is more likely to be determined by your plan of action -- or lack of a plan -- than any election

outcome. As we enter the election and planning season, here are five reminders to help achieve the best results:

1. **Be Strategic:** Choose the best strategy that will generate value for your company and industry.
2. **Pick your Bets:** Bet on a strategy tailored to your current situation designed to achieve your organization's customer and market outcomes.
3. **Follow the Boy Scout Motto – Be prepared:** Don't wait until the end of the year to prepare for calendar year 2013. This will only put your organization behind today's global competition.
4. **Semper Paratus- (Always Ready):** You are more likely to achieve next year's performance targets if you have a plan ready to implement when the new fiscal year begins.
5. **Develop your plan and make quality strategic marketing investments** aimed at moving the needles for the business.

While change and uncertainty may make planning more difficult, they also make it more essential. A good plan takes into the account the extra risk the business may face. In times of uncertainty it is important to step back and identify risks, consider scenarios, and continue to innovate. Rather than using the impending political climate as an excuse for “battening down the hatches” or to taking a “wait and see” position, the best course of action is to maintain a long-term perspective designed to manage potential risks and move your organization forward.

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