



Dragons, Quests and Marketing Plans

Over the course of the last few months, I've had the opportunity to review a number of marketing plans. In many instances, the plans fell into one of two categories. One group involved brief documents containing short lists of tactics for the coming year along with a budget and calendar. The second group consisted of an extensive set of PowerPoint presentations chocked full of charts and tables about market statistics and product roadmaps, etc.

In the first group, while the tactics were well defined, they are not anchored to any specific strategies or objectives. Someone reading the plan for the first time would have trouble understanding why the organization is embarking on these efforts and what outcomes are intended. The second group contains an enormous amount of information about the market, company, customers, competitors and a set of strategies and tactics. However, in this group, it is difficult to connect all the dots between the information, the plan and the outcomes. While it may seem that the two categories have little in common, the one common link is their inability to tell their company story. A good marketing plan is in essence the "Cliff Notes" version of the company story explaining current status, how it got there, and what if anything needs to be addressed and if so, by whom, how, with what and when. A good marketing plan has all the elements of a well-told story.

A good story grabs our attention, captures our imagination, draws us to the characters--both the heroes and villains--and to the situation at hand. A marketing plan should do the same. While a marketing plan doesn't need to be a novel, it does need to provide a context, define the situation, clarify the objectives and measures of success, and establish the strategies and tactics for achieving outcomes. A marketing plan must provide a setting and context, just as a story does, such as "Once upon time in the far away mountainous land of Travinikar, one of its six kingdoms, the once prosperous kingdom of Jedele, lay in near ruin and its great castle, Orona, was under siege." From this one sentence we have context.

Once we have established the context, we can very quickly provide the information about the organization's successes and challenges, its market, position, competition and customer information. Using our story and an example, we learn that Jedele, once the most prosperous and powerful kingdom in all of Travinikar, was the only manufacturer of Premion used in the making of precious metals. Premion, at its highest purity, requires dragon fire and is in extreme short supply. Two other rivals kingdoms, Stober with its Puratonic and Corbin with its Specpure, are quickly overtaking Jedele's position as the best provider for the high purity substance. The situation is swiftly unfolding.

We don't know why Jedele lays in near ruin or why the castle is under siege. And the story continues the essential details will be provided. For example, in this instance, we discover that Jedele and Orona were under siege by the Imperial Eastern Dragon, Yanagi, and his clan of dragons. We learn more about the dragon clan and its members, Burga, Dildy, Geydos, Kashdan and Vega, who are angry with the people of Jedele for stealing a



sacred flask of dragon fire in order to manufacture more Premion. We now understand a key challenge, obstacle that must be overcome. The challenges your company faces need to be just as clear in your plan.

Opportunities also need to be presented. For example in our story, for Jedele to regain its glory it will take more than just defeating the dragons, it will require Jedele to secure the Philosopher's Stone, which is hidden in Mount Horeb in the land of Ormus. The situation is clear and so are the objectives: defeat the dragons and secure the hidden stone. It seems that most good stories contain at least one and sometimes both elements - something that must be overcome and/or something that must be acquired - the elusive quest and the slaying of the dragon. A well-crafted marketing plan lays out the same information whether there are any dragons to defeat or quests to complete.

Once we understand the primary plot, a marketing plan explains what the organization will undertake including the strategies, tactics and resources needed to achieve the objectives. The remainder of the story addresses how Rincon will save Jedele. For example, his strategy will be to ask the five most powerful mages in the kingdom, Aguais, Malkemus, Huricks, Steverding and Toupal, to help defeat the dragons. The story will provide some details about the mages, their skills and flaws, and outline the tactics they will use to defeat the dragons. The story will explain whether the mages will attempt the task alone by creating a special potion, negotiate with the dragons, form a strategic alliance, or seek help from somewhere else or a combination of all of these strategies will be revealed. And while this part of the story unfolds, we'll discover that Rincon also requests each noble house in Jedele to send their best knight to seek the stone and secure it before the knights from the other kingdoms do. We'll read in anticipation how the Knights of Jedele - Lacour, Gordon, Sandars, Wroe and Eason - set out to secure the stone before the rival kingdoms of Stober, Corbin and two other kingdoms, Devwa and Malave, secure it. The story provides insight into the strengths and weaknesses of each kingdom, as well as the strategies that Rincon's knights will use to reach the stone before the rivals. We know time is running out for Jedele and Orona. We feel a sense of urgency.

Your marketing plan must do the same: outline the challenges and the quest; define what it will take to succeed and win; identify which competitors to overcome and which dragons must be slain; and identify the strategies and tactics to deploy by whom, when, and at what cost. Keep the tables and charts of your market, along with customer and competitive information, as they are illustrations for your story. Just understand they are not the story.

Your challenge is to examine how well your marketing plan tells the story of your kingdom and castle, the challenges and opportunities being faced, and the strategies and tactics needed to succeed. Do the mages defeat the dragons or does the castle burn to the ground? Do the knights secure the stone in time or does another kingdom find it first? Do the mages and knights succeed or are casualties experienced in the battle? Is Jedele once again the most prosperous kingdom in all the land? Well, that's a story for another time.