

# STAY OUT OF TROUBLE... LOOK FOR PAIN!

Now is the time to be flexible!



think M.

**Many companies are acting as predicted: slashing marketing budgets, digging in and focussing on relationships and goodwill. How are you handling the economic downturn? I hope you're not personally focusing on 'looking core'...many seem to be working hard to not look like excess baggage.**

But if you consider...in your own customer base there is more pain now, more need for your innovation than ever. A dark thought perhaps, but true nonetheless. Even stranger, many of your competitors are stepping down a gear...innovating less and offering you space.

Here are a couple of strategies we've seen successful clients implementing.

#### Now is the time for 'super focus'

In your own sector, I'll bet you can see some companies struggling and others thriving. It may be good fortune but more likely to be a combination of strong financial management and a clear focus on 'what we're good at' and 'why we're better'.

Help your business to take stock; you're already sitting on insights into key customers' buying behaviours and current issues, pains and needs. Be very focused and targeted. Looking at the most opportune groups of customers, (those in more robust, stable markets, those with more resources, or least barriers to purchasing), build a simple plan to target and resolve their 'changed pains'.

In essence, help your business to select niches and invest a small amount in really offering new innovative and carefully targeted offerings to soundly beat your competition in small segments.

#### Build loyalty through flexibility

It's critical not to compete primarily on price and to maintain brand value and positioning; but everyone is seeking value for money. It may be worth taking a look at the range of price entry points for your products and services.

Listen to your customers' concerns and avoid these becoming barriers to purchase. Rather than cut prices, consider alternative strategies for risk sharing and supporting your customers cash flow. Perhaps consider, is it better to sustain longer credit terms, underwrite operating contracts, spread payments and offer a wider mix of pricing points.

Importantly, package and communicate these effectively and at the right point in the sales process.

This may be a critical decision factor which differentiates you from the competition. There is likely to be a kick back when you reach the end of the tunnel too... research suggests customer loyalty is strong and you'll get a substantial lift in your business at the end of the recession if you are prepared to be flexible now.

The conclusion then: be sensitive to your customers needs and find innovative ways to support them through these difficult times. Let your innovation add value and differentiate you from the competition.

*think M. is a successful strategic marketing and research company who specialise in helping businesses large and small practically develop opportunities and grow. There is much support available in the region to assist. If you would like to discuss your needs, call 0191 211 1957 and ask for Katie, or email [katie@think-m.co.uk](mailto:katie@think-m.co.uk).*

## KNOWLEDGE NORTH EAST

We live in a time when science, engineering and technology are high on the political agenda. Here Stewart Watkins, managing director of County Durham Development Company, reflects on seizing the initiative.

The Prime Minister recently declared that science is a national priority and that it should be a key element in our path to recovery from the present recession.

Even more recently Ofqual, the official regulator of qualifications, exams and tests in England, has sparked a debate about standards with a call for questions which stretch and challenge students.

We need scientists – and we need well qualified scientists. More young people studying challenging science and technology in our schools and universities is the best way to produce scientists able to keep the UK competing on a world stage.

We need to value our universities as economic assets – generators of cutting-edge technological advances and innovation at the heart of the region's science, engineering and technology infrastructure.

The North East Technology Park, NETPark, at Sedgefield in County Durham, is another key element in the north-east's strategy to expand its knowledge economy and attract high-value jobs.

And NETPark has a wider role – as an innovation connector that will engage communities, particularly through education, awareness raising and access to employment programmes.

To inspire university students who look at NETPark and see post-doctoral work blossoming into successful spin-out companies and to inspire school students to see science, technology and engineering as a potentially fulfilling and rewarding career choice.