

THE BIG IDEA CO.™

Len Silverfine

**A BOLD MARKETING RECOMMENDATION
THAT WON®**

BY

LEN SILVERFINE

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Preface

The following is the "Marketing Recommendation" written in 2009 to the new CEO of a major resort developer S.A.I.P. At the time they were interviewing top European agencies to service their needs. . Although I had been consulting with the client on a project basis for 3 years, they felt they needed a large agency to service their needs, so I was low down the line in their consideration.

During this time there were 4 CEOs, the last recently appointed and quite capable, however he and I had not yet had much interaction. I realized that my only hope to stay in the game and possibly prevail was to act boldly, with substance. I decided to write a very long and candid memo. The content synthesized everything I knew about marketing, applied to this client's business. With some translation, I believe my strategic approach applies to many marketing situations, even beyond tourism, hospitality and resort development. Where needed I have added comments for the reader's convenience. The document is otherwise intact but for edits to protect privacy. I hope you find it useful.

OVERVIEW

LINE OF APPROACH

The marketer choosing the right approach to (the client's) needs may be likened to an expert skier at the top of a difficult piste. He quickly surveys the terrain, instinctively sees a line of attack and commits himself, knowing full well that there will be bumps along the way. But, he is confident of being able to adjust without losing his balance, because he has done this many times before, he has developed an instinctive feel for "a good line", and is prepared to react and adjust to whatever may come. Following is the line of descent I would recommend for (the client). I believe it will get you down the difficult course faster, safer, at less cost, and with greater success than any other.

PHILOSOPHY

My basic philosophy is that "marketing" is all about a good idea, and the intelligent application of leverage. In resort development, the "idea" must be meaningful (have value) to the customer and be something (the client) owns or can legitimately lay claim to. The leverage, as Archimedes is credited with pointing out, must be applied at the proper point to gain maximum force advantage. (This is applicable to all products and services.)

CORE MARKET

Bear with me (and my philosophy) for a moment in selecting a line down (the client) piste. And, let us begin at the leverage point, because for practical reasons there is general agreement that this leverage point *falls within* affluent Lisboa area "drive-to" households. This is effectively your core "make or break" market. The first major test, and failure is not an option. (NB: Core market identification will vary, whatever it may be, this core or "vital few" is the make or break market.)

I emphasize "*within*", because as in any grouping not all members are created equal. Such asymmetries present discrete leverage opportunities. The people that really matter within this grouping are the "early-adopters", "connectors" and "influencers". These are the people that move markets to a product. (The client)

should not expect to find these people through any general market study. They will have to be diligently identified and culled from the larger group through inquiry and experience. Then seduced with intelligent argument and delivery of superior experience. This is a lot of work; however, the rewards for success are disproportionate (that's leverage for you). The "good news" is that once this train is set in motion, others will follow more easily. By "others" I mean not just members of affluent Lisboa drive-to households. The lessons learned of "intelligent argument" and "delivery of superior experience" will pay dividends for you when you move on to broader internal and external markets down the road.

Oh, and let me give you the flip side. If (the client) does not win over these select targets among the core market, the odds of winning over those that they influence become much more forbidding, the process even more expensive and the time involved even greater, not to mention the effect on appealing to broader more distant markets.

"BIG IDEA"

Let's move on to the other marketing essential, "a good idea" (naturally I prefer "the big idea"). However one chooses to refer to it, it must be *meaningful and proprietary* (or you must give it meaning in the eyes of the market and own it).

The market is bombarded by sales pitches from all manner of products, and many vacation and leisure providers. At best, a few seconds are granted to listen to an appeal. No second chance is granted unless in those few seconds a distinctive and meaningful impression is made. (The client) should not hope to be successful by merely imitating or copying others and offering marginally better experience. And, you should not hope to be successful by presenting a range of experiences appealing to the broad market, without distinguishing (the client) in some clear manner.

Further, and I believe this is absolutely critical to (the client)'s success, the concept must *ring true*, i.e. it must be *evidenced* and continually reinforced at every message, every customer touch-point from the very beginning of contact.

(NB: Touch-points may differ between products/types of businesses, but the principle applies to all. As an example, in a high-end resort a chance contact with a gardener or a maid that creates a negative impression may result in a "bad story". Bad stories are fatal to customer trust. They create doubt, and are very difficult to turn-around. We all encounter frustrations with, for example, utility companies when we need to contact them, leading to bad stories about unhelpful audio-text menu's, long hold times, drop calls, "not my department...", etc. You no doubt can identify similar examples in your particular business. They are your "bad stories" that must be avoided.)

The best theme I have heard expressed to-date revolves around the thought: "...*the soul of the Alentejo*". I say "theme", because I do not yet see the flesh that fills out and gives life to a big idea, and there is a great deal of flesh that this will require (along with some fat that should be removed). Nevertheless, this theme feels to me like it offers promise. Remember, I'm looking for a point-of-differentiation that (the

client) can own. You cannot own "water" (the ocean trumps being on an inland lake). You cannot own "golf" (unless you can capture something like a world-class tournament). But, you could own the Alentejo, or at least *the essence of the Alentejo*. And, that could be made into a very good thing to own. After all, *the Alentejo arguably is the only untouched region in southwestern Europe*. It has a rich history, lovely rolling countryside, unique traditions, fine cuisine, wine, crafts, etc. All of which have broad appeal. With the right vision, leadership and drive, these basic ingredients could be fashioned into a genuinely unique, refreshing and desirable experience.

By the way, everything that I have just suggested is not new. On my very first trip to Portugal, I was met at the airport, and we drove to Evora, stopping along the way for lunch, where what was special about the project was described to me, albeit in long-form. In the following days I was shown the evidence. However, over the next 3 ½ years I have watched (the client) struggle with that vision, never quite losing it, but never quite "nailing it home" as we say in the U.S.; and, certainly not validating its market impact. This is not an uncommon failing among developers. At Intrawest (former client and employer, a large international developer), the Founder and CEO, solved this problem by appointing a company "Visionary", whose job it was to make sure every development had a fundamental vision and that vision was maintained throughout the tedium and distraction of the development process.

I know that you are anxious to move quickly into the details of execution. But I urge you to "nail (the client's) vision home" first. Then, move quickly to get everything in train behind it.

(A common mistake in many companies is to yield to the fear of being pre-empted by competition, creating a *rush to market*. I have often likened this to constructing the upper floors of a house before establishing a firm foundation. The consequences inevitably are significant waste of time, money and management focus, which cannot be recaptured, and can lead to catastrophic failure.)

WHAT FOLLOWS

For years I have tried to analyze the marketing process, and simplify an approach that would work in all circumstances. I think I now have it. Let me summarize, in personalized terms...

In order to have a good plan, I have to have a good strategy...and before I have a good strategy, I have to have good intelligence...in order to have good intelligence, I have to talk with the right people...in order to talk with these people, I have to identify who they are and find a way to interest them in talking with me...in order to interest them, I have to provide something of value...and given all the trouble I've put myself through to find them and get them to talk with me, I don't want to lose them, so I had better find a way to keep them engaged, that way I can continue to learn from them, e.g. continually validate my strategy...and besides, keeping them engaged is cheaper and easier than finding replacements...and, you know, over time, if I really do my job I might actually convince them to become my customers...even more valuable I might convert them into missionaries that tell their friends and associates about my product...then I

could repeat the process all over again with an even bigger group for even larger results.

OK, now how I see this applying to (the client)...

1. You need to identify your "insiders", the first people you are able to access that are representative of your core market.
2. You need to start engaging them in dialog about your concept and offering. This should be done with a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques asking fixed questions, and having open discussions (i.e. surveys and focus groups), however you need to see this as *the first step in an on-going marketing process, not stand-alone research.*
3. You need to establish and build a knowledge base that is designed to support your program archiving and making available empowering intelligence *seeing the experience through the eyes of your customers.*
4. You need to continually incorporate this knowledge to improve your concept and offerings, in turn validating and refining.
5. You need to keep expanding from this inner core, being sure that you focus on the people that are the most important to your success, *the vital few*, encouraging their participation and rewarding performance, *earning their loyalty*, and continuing to offer people opportunities to involve their friends.
6. You need to never lose sight of your Vision or compromise its integrity.
7. You need to make sure that everyone in (the client) is a contributing member to the fulfillment of the Vision, and that they all support and tell the Story enthusiastically.
8. You need to involve (the client)'s other "publics", the local community, the business community, the government, investors, etc., and secure their enthusiastic acceptance of the Vision, and encourage their contribution to and telling of the Story. Understand these other "publics" will either be project enthusiasts or un-enthusiastic about the project, i.e. either spreaders of "good stories", or contributors to "bad stories". Bad stories have a disproportionate negative effect, and can be fatal.
9. You need to constantly seek to provide superior experience delivery to the point of generating *"lots of good stories being told at cocktail parties"*, BUZZ, the most powerful force in marketing.
10. And, you need the intellectual capital to drive this program along with the software to manage it.

This is the view from 10,000 meters. Now, let's go down an order of magnitude further to define (the client's) marketing picture.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

In answering these critical questions the operative phrase is: *"seeing the experience through the eyes of your customers."*

EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS

Doing so is not a "stand-alone" one-time event, or even a series of events. Seeing the experience through the eyes of your customers requires an evolutionary dialog with individual customers and prospects over a period of time of their choosing (not at all particularly convenient for the marketer); and being able to archive and access this *intelligence* in ways that can "inform" and "enable" strategic decisions as required.

INTERRELATIONSHIP

Further, while for convenience we have identified these "critical questions" individually, in reality they are intertwined. Consumer interest in the "Offering" is largely determined by how they see the fairness of the "Pricing", which is materially effected by the power of the "Big Idea", which is enhanced by "Branding" and given meaning through "Messaging". Modify any one component and it will affect the others.

SOUND PROCESS

Practical considerations place limits on testing. Time pressure and budget limitations being the biggest factors. Given these realities, it is important to maintain a disciplined approach. Compromising for expediency on a crucial factor (e.g. the "big idea") and coming up short could doom the entire project, while compromising on a particular product offering within the project and misjudging would be painful but not fatal.

My first work experience was with Procter & Gamble, a fortuitous occurrence because they wrote the book on sound marketing process. One of their core principles was to require that the decision-making process be carefully laid out on paper, beginning with "What are we trying to accomplish?" "How should we go about it?" all supported in turn with argument, and reduced to the fewest words required to make the case. Over the years this discipline has repeatedly proved its value to me (though I confess to forgoing my habit for brevity in my memos to you, because I want to be sure that my thoughts are not lost in translation).

"BIG IDEA"

Also known as "Unique Selling Proposition" ("U.S.P."), or the "Position", the "Niche", etc., in essence refers to the product's meaningful point-of-differentiation in the marketplace, i.e. what it can "own" because either it has a product advantage, or it is the first to make the claim and support the claim with fact.

At the moment, (the client) feels "*the soul of the Alentejo*" may offer promise as the *big idea*. There are undoubtedly other ideas / expressions that also offer promise. These need to be whittled down to a few propositions (2 - 3 at the most). Each needs to be expressed in its simplest and most direct form, with attendant support, then put into concept presentations for "testing". The concept would then be subjected to qualitative testing (focus groups) and quantitative measurement (standard questionnaires or surveys). This testing would be done among as many

representative targets as can be identified, and over as much time as necessity will allow.

A combination of testing techniques is recommended because it is the safest way to remove risk, which is all that can reasonably be expected from "testing" at this stage. Quantitative testing generally indicates preference among respondents, while qualitative testing is valued for uncovering unanticipated negatives, as well as revealing interesting new insights and approaches. Nothing short of actual market experience is definitive, however.

(NB: It is not necessary to construct a time-consuming and expensive testing program to accomplish these intelligence objectives. Not everyone is Procter & Gamble. We did in fact develop a simple, affordable approach based upon the principles I articulated here as part of an empowering intell platform, after I joined the company. The concept is a common sense solution perfectly applicable to any product or service. I would be the last person to advise forgoing intuition in the marketing process, however prudence demands that validation at every critical point in the process.)

Once (the client) fixes upon the "big idea", it needs to develop it with as much flesh and substance as is possible, paying particular attention to how the potential customer will see the experience, and how (the client) can improve its proprietary claim / competitive advantage. Again, this development must be evidenced in fact and reinforced over and over. Which means that the "big idea" once agreed upon may indicate significant re-designing and re-ordering of development plans. For example, using "*Parque Alqueva is the soul of the Alentejo*", the fleshing out of this concept would have implications for everything from the layout of residential development, to architectural and interior design, to the choice of amenities and experiences and how they are emphasized, to how the surrounding community is integrated into the experience. It would also impact on the fleshing out of the Branding Strategy. It would be hard to justify moving away from "*the soul of the Alentejo*" to a generic resort ideal like "*Lago Paradiso*" (or whatever generic name) and remain true to the "*the Alentejo*" positioning. *And*, it would influence (the client's) approach to strategic partners and allies. Another example, Evora University, assuming they speak authoritatively for the Alentejano cultural heritage, or an institution / organization that does, would become "a must have" in (the client's) equation.

(The point being made here refers to the integration of authoritative strategic partners to add credibility to the client's positioning in the marketplace with all its "publics".)

OFFERING

This is more likely a combination of specific offerings designed to create trial and encourage repeat purchase, and commence the principal businesses of the resort.

#1 on the offer list is to appeal to (the client's) most likely first visitors – those among affluent Lisboa drive-to households who are curious enough to *try* the new resort experience. "*Come to Parque Alqueva...we're making it very attractive for*

you to give us a try..." In crafting trial offers it is important that (the client) understand that it must err on the side of caution, i.e. it must make the offer very attractive, because the offer must attract as many people as possible to the resort so that in turn their experience (presumably one that will exceed their expectations) can be leveraged to bring in others, shortening the amount time required to establish the resort with a viable base of customers. This will require having a "basket full of trial offers" appealing to sub-categories in the target group and varying seasonally. Ideally, these offers should be "pre-tested", evaluated for effectiveness, and wherever possible customized to targets. For the most part, standard questionnaires and surveys should yield the validation and guidance needed. Additional intelligence on what trial offers appeal most will accrue as a natural consequence of focus group discussions. Trial offers should not be thought of as "stand-alone". They need to be combined with follow-up offers that expand visitors' experiences and encourage repeat purchase.

In addition to trial offers, (the client) needs to get the ball rolling in terms of its principle revenue source, resort real estate sales (which include private residence club memberships). Bear in mind that the purchase of resort real estate is a "considered purchase" that usually occurs after years of repeat visitation. NB: At Intrawest Resorts, a study of all R/E "whole-ownership" buyers (10 years ago) indicated that they had been visiting the resort for an average of 7 years prior to their purchase. My feeling is that this number is somewhat less today, perhaps more like 5 years on average, and of course would be even less for "shared-ownership", but nevertheless a sales cycle of many months at best.

(As in many client situations, there was a "build it, and they will come" mentality that underestimated the marketing challenge.)

For practical reasons, (the client's) first R/E offer is likely to be club membership, rather than land sales or whole-ownership residences. An exclusive PRC offer has the advantage of establishing a premium product image at the outset (*at a fraction of the cost*), which will help in overall R/E sales. Image making is one-directional, downward; taking an established image to a higher level is very rare and problematic. However, in Europe PRC's in particular and club memberships in general are not as a familiar and valued tradition as in North America. For this reason the sale can be expected to be more complicated, requiring more preparation and explanation. The burden of simplifying this message and testing it will fall on focus groups, a medium more suitable for this type of exploration. Further, third party validation will be key to acceptance. By this I mean customers will look to authoritative sources (non-profit organizations, respected media and writers, members of their peer group that are considered experts, etc.). Taking this into consideration (the client) would need to determine what elements are essential for this support, and how best to validate them. (Surveying should take care of this requirement.)

(Any and every selling proposition benefits from respected 3rd party accreditation. See Malcolm Gladwell's "THE TIPPING POINT" for detailed explanation of these groups and their influence.)

PRICING

The Price of any proposition is integral to its evaluation. "Would you be interested in *Clube Alqueva* an exclusive Private Residence Club that provides its members with ... experiences, privileges and benefits...?" begs the question at *What Price?*

Respondents will generally undervalue the offer (for the simple reason that they are being asked to imagine something generally expressed in the superlative, for which they will have some skepticism), so getting the answer to "Pricing" means approximating the range of acceptability for a given offer. This is one reason why a combination of focus group testing, which allows for embellishment of the offer, and surveying, which limits embellishment but can be more specific in response, would be a good idea. And, of course, a well-made argument based on thorough analysis of competitive product, which to date is exclusively "whole-ownership".

Price is very much a market determinant. An offer of guaranteed minimum of 4 weeks per year of usage, spread over the course of the year (plus "space available" time) at one price versus twice the weeks for double the price, will sort the market into reactive groups that we can only guess at this point. The results of such testing will require revision, recalibration and re-testing to arrive at a comfort level.

BRANDING

There are several strategies for choosing a brand. In (the client's) case we begin with a location that is not established, being developed by a company new to resort development, with no following of customers. The obvious way to cure these shortcomings is to bring in a strong established partner, a "flag" if you will. The flag could be a co-developer of the entire resort, or an initial portion of the development, or an operator of the hotel (and PRC). In any of these cases, the flag would serve the purpose of providing credibility to the offerings.

(The client's) first concern should be to ensure choices contain no strong "negatives"; secondly, to see which possess strong "positives" in support of the "big idea". Beyond, the decision becomes very much one of personal preference. As I have mentioned before, who would have voted for (harsh sounding successful brand) at its beginning? The lesson being that an awkward sounding brand is not necessarily an obstacle to success, and in some ways can be (made to) an advantage.

(The reference here to a "harsh sounding brand name" was meant to deflect objections to the resort brand name that I strongly favored, but had been rejected because of its perceived difficulty with English-speakers. I drew the parallel to the highly successful brand name similarly accented owned by the majority investor in the project. The ironic point was accepted with humor.)

MESSAGING

"Messaging" is a particular passion of mine. Nowhere in marketing is it more important than in resort development. When you get down to it, we are purveyors of a "dream". We package up an assortment of experiences, create a beautiful story around them and then tell the story to prospective buyers in such a way that they see themselves and their family idyllically within the story. The better we make the

story, and the better we tell it, the easier prospects will be convinced, the more they will buy and *the higher the price they will be willing to pay*. So, to my mind marketing in its best form is not unlike a grand symphony, in which everyone at the company involved in *touching the customer* is a part of the composition and the orchestra. Each plays a part in “*story making*” as well as in the “*storytelling*”. The marketer is the conductor orchestrating the impact of it all and turning it into a magical symphonic experience.

In (the client’s) case, the message needs to be particularly on-target and compelling for it to surmount the inherent challenges of the project. (The client) needs to be especially attentive to “messaging” and its nuanced reaction among targets in the testing process to hope to achieve goals, and (the client) must recognize that this can only be accomplished over time with persistent support of actual experience delivered, *and with the help of early converts assisting in subsequent customer conversions*.

(NB: This advice is most applicable to premium products and services, but I believe applicable in all other cases, except of course for commodities.)

STEPS TO GETTING THE ANSWERS

IDENTIFY “INSIDERS” / “INNER CORE”

This first group, which we will call the “Inner Core” or “Inner Circle”, is by necessity the group that is easiest to access, because (the client) *has a connection*. Thus, they are likely to respond in good fashion and more readily contribute information. Also, where there is a connection the *quality of engagement* can be expected to be higher than traditional research methodology where there is little or no connection.

For (the client) the “Inner Core” is where (the client) has *connections* to the Lisboa households, believed the most likely to contain (or represent) “early-adopters”, “connectors” and “influencers”. (The client’s) first step is to begin compiling a contact list, which is intended to continually grow over time. The (client staff) sponsor suggesting a contact should first determine that the contact is open to the idea of helping, occasionally answering a few questions, perhaps attend an advisor meeting with others, generally be part of (the client’s) “Insider Program”. The implication being that “insiders” will get recognition and privileges for their contribution as the process develops to fruition. Receptive contacts will be told they will be contacted shortly, and then turned over to (the client’s) marketing to initiate contact.

(NB: In this case, the highest value core market corresponded to families, friends and business networks of the projects investors. Together this group was the key to not only initial trial but to reaching out and opening other target markets. Without their blessing and cooperation marketing would be faced with an almost insurmountable challenge. The reasoning behind this strategy applies in some degree to all products, and to premium products most definitely.)

ENGAGE / DIALOG

Each “insider” should be welcomed into the program with some information or action that represents value – e.g. an invite to an event or reception, interesting

news, an opportunity to learn, etc., along with a few short questions ("Are you interested in finding out more about ____?" "Are you a golfer? Equestrian?" "Do you currently own a vacation home?" etc.) The idea is to establish a sort of value exchange, where (the client) gives information or privilege of value in exchange for information about the "prospect", which in turn enables (the client) to provide more customized information of increased value, and so on reinforcing the relationship. Bear in mind that communication must never become a burden, but rather something that the participant looks forward to receiving.

At what point does the participant no longer qualify as an "insider"? NEVER! Just as in elite frequent flyer programs, where there are gradations of privilege, but always a sense of belonging to a privileged group.

ESTABLISH KNOWLEDGE BASE

All of this effort is for naught unless there is a core structure that enables (the client) to learn and *see the experience through the eyes of customers*. Knowing its customers is the most critical intelligence a company can have. The better it understands what its customers like, what they do not like, and what they would like, the less likely the company will be to fail or to make an expensive error, and the greater will be the opportunity for success. (The client's) knowledge base is fundamental infrastructure, one of the best investments that can be made.

Most CRM's and database products do not do a good enough job from a broad marketing perspective. Accessing data in convenient, usable form is not optimized. Programs tend to be designed to meet the specific needs of one department of the company (e.g. Sales), but are not very useful to others. They lack integration, precisely because most companies do not take a global, integrated view of marketing *in which all elements of the company that touch the customer play an important role in making and telling a magical musical story!*

The way for (the client) to approach its database needs is from the perspective of its approach to marketing. The dBase program should be designed to conform to (the client's) marketing plan, empowering management with the intelligence it must have to make timely decisions and adapt to changing circumstances.

CONTINUALLY EVALUATE, INCORPORATE, ADAPT, REFINE & IMPROVE

Over the course of our careers we have all sat in meetings where critical decisions were required, and conclusive data upon which to decide was absent. Usually in these cases the strongest voice in the room decides. The difference between well-run companies (like P&G) and the general mass is that at a well-run company the decision would be made on available knowledge and judgment, because it had to be made at the time, AND the necessary study would be insisted upon so that 6 months down the road, the same people will not be in the same room faced with the same question without better intelligence.

EXPAND INNER CIRCLE

(The client's) approach to its intelligence needs should not be a research-driven approach, but a marketing-driven approach. By this I mean (the client) is fundamentally seeking to win over customers. To do so it must engage in a dialog with the most likely prospects, tell them what its vision is. In the course of this dialog (the client) will *learn*, enabling (the client) to evaluate, incorporate, adapt, refine & improve. This in turn will make (the client) more and more of interest to prospects, and *to others among their networks of friends, who they will be increasingly likely to involve*. A marketing-driven approach to intelligence focuses directly on leveraging relationships to win over even more relationships. I refer to this practice as *Core-Centric Marketing*[®].

MAINTAIN VISION

(The client's) vision for its resort must be very clearly defined and constantly reinforced. Ideally, there should be no "disconnects" between the vision and reality, as disconnects can cloud the vision and put in question its authenticity. This too should be an important part of (the client's) intelligence program. It must be able to see "disconnects" (from the point-of-view of its customers) and address them quickly. (No "bad stories!")

MARKETING CULTURE

I am of the view that doing what is expected in marketing is never good enough! Marketing is always evolving and improving (like an armaments race). The resort development world has become more challenging since (the client) entered it some years ago. If (the client) is to hope to achieve its objectives it must look at itself in the mirror and ask: "Do we have a winning strategy? Are we establishing the culture necessary to over-come our challenges and win against unfavorable odds? What more should we be doing?"

Over the past 3 years I have observed (the client) occupied with issues regarding permitting, finance, and management; all critical and necessary to resolve. In the end, though regardless of the company's business, there is only one group that gets to *vote...the consumer*. And the area of every company that is charged with getting this vote is marketing. As such marketing transcends and includes all others. This is why it is important to establish a company culture where everyone understands that they are "*in marketing*", whether they are architects, designers, lawyers, etc., and takes pride in their contribution toward getting the consumer's vote.

(Ditto every company and every employee outside of resort development.)

INVOLVE (the client's) OTHER "PUBLICS"

In addition to its "Employees" and its "Customers", (the client) has other publics that are absolutely necessary to fulfill a successful marketing strategy, and these publics must be won over as well – "The Public / Community", "Business Community", "Local & National Government", "Investors", "Suppliers".

Winning them over is important because each plays a critical role in delivering superior experience to the customer. And winning each group requires the same steps that are required for any conversion: identification of the most important influencers in the group, engaging them in dialog, learning from them, applying those lessons to win over the group, then leveraging early converts to support the conversion of the next circle, and so on.

SUPERIOR EXPERIENCE DELIVERY

Marketing is the business of selling products by *satisfying and exceeding the customer's desire for special experience*. This means...

1. Unsatisfactory experiences have to be eliminated, and turned into positive experiences.
2. Experiences that just meet expectations may not cause any harm, but neither do they do any good, so they should be *considered a lost opportunity to exceed expectations*.
3. Exceeding expectations should be where the measuring bar is set, and *wildly exceeding expectations* should be the ideal, as this causes "*good stories to be told at cocktail parties*".

Effecting Superior Experience Delivery requires a "Touch Point Management" program incorporating a staff incentive program. Without such tools management doesn't find out about problems until damage has been done, and it has little ability to recognize, encourage and reward best practices. TPM programs are available through many providers. However, most are treated as Operations programs, and are not integrated into the overall marketing of the company. See <http://lensilverfine.com/projects/intrawest/>

PROCESS & TOOLS

As you can see from the previous pages, marketing has a lot of things to take into account, integrate and manage to fulfill its function. Most companies, to the degree that they may understand this, find it easier to just order up a study, a survey, or focus group or two and follow what others appear to do in their marketing. After all if so-and-so does it this way, and they are successful, why shouldn't I expect to be by following what they do?

Well, copying something that appears to have worked does not ensure success, and it generally doesn't produce exceptional results. Market conditions evolve and become more problematic. Locations differ, Timing differs, Markets differ, etc. Then too, and you've heard me say this before: The developer who made \$20.0 million 2 - 3 years ago was ecstatic. What he may not have realized is that had he practiced more intelligent marketing he would have made \$40.0 million. He didn't make \$20.0; *he lost \$20.0 million!* However, in his ignorance he had no way of knowing that, so it didn't matter.

The market that (the client) will face is likely not to be as forgiving. Conditions are expected to be much more difficult. Smart developers are not resting on past

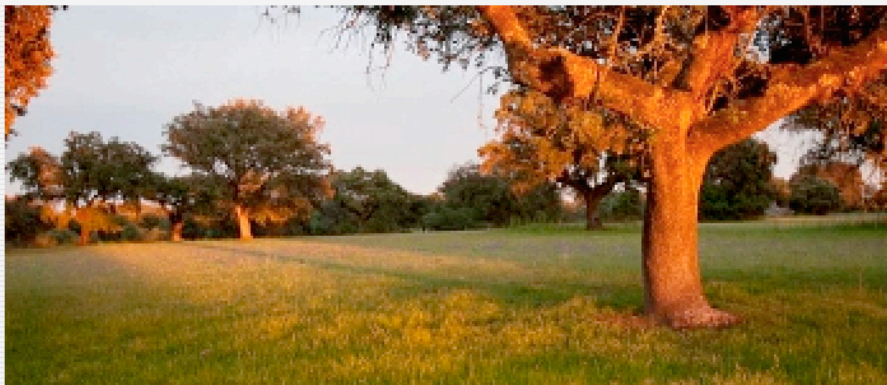
successes. They are re-tooling, and nowhere more so than in marketing. For (the client) not to be innovating in its marketing may mean the difference between some profits versus a big loss. Given marketing's complexity and nuance, to be intelligent and effective in its marketing (the client) must establish a clear marketing driven process and incorporate the best tools it can to manage the process.

Postscript:

I heard nothing back from the client for six months. They went through the process of auditioning various agencies; then retained a noted branding agency at considerable expense to develop a branding recommendation. As you can imagine this took time. I was anxious of course, but optimistic. The company had internal disagreements that had needed to be sorted out. I didn't think that confusion would be remedied before agency briefings were given out. In my experience that is a recipe for mixed, weak messages. Thankfully, my intuition was correct. Six months later I was invited to join the company, as part of the CEO's senior team, with my branding recommendation approved by the Board. The world financial crisis, and in particular its effect on the Euro killed the project, but it remains in my mind one of the most exciting and rewarding experiences of my career. I felt completely in sync with the CEO and exec in charge of Development. We shared a common vision, each contributing and stimulating the other. It is not often like that in the world of business, and when it is creativity flourishes.

The resort positioning along with a re-branding, which I strongly favored, was adopted. Parque Alqueva returned to its historic royal roots – *RONCÃO D'EL REI* (The king's favorite hunting lodge, roughly translated to "The King's Biggest Snore", an apt name for an idyllic resort). And, the Alentejo became the source of inspiration...

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