

Going back to basics

By [Carmen Murray](#)

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To be "warriors" of change, marketers need to solve tomorrow's problems today. The challenge is this: Marketers are losing their way, and this is no fault of their own.



Image credit: Ryoji Iwata on Unsplash.

They are constantly using tactics rather than strategy and chasing the new bright shiny objects. To add to the layers, marketers are completely overwhelmed by the choice of technology, suppliers, agencies and the constant societal and behavioural changes that they become paralysed in their pursuit to make the right decisions that will have a positive impact on the business and its customers.



#FutureFit Yourself: Is your customer journey a map to failure?

Carmen Murray 21 May 2019



For marketers to avoid the "knock on wood" syndrome – the hope that the next campaign or technology stack will bring in good fortune for the business – they need to go back to the basics of marketing strategy.

“ *“Maybe you are searching among the branches, for what only appears in the roots”- Rumi.* ”

According to Johnna Rizza, trees don't heal as humans heal. If they are damaged from the outside, they will form a callous over the wound, but continue to rot inside.

Therefore, being marketing fit is key to success. The branches might look green and healthy from the outside, but without proper strategy and planning in place, the future growth will be compromised if you are not fixated with the marketing roots.



#FutureFit Yourself: Do you trust companies with your biometric data?

Carmen Murray 4 Apr 2019



I wanted to get an academic opinion from one of South Africa's leading marketing specialists – Dr Beate Stiehler-Mulder, senior lecturer at the UJ department of marketing management and speaker at this year's #UJMarketingFit Experience – to give some context on this topic.

Here is what she had to share with me:

Strategy 101: It's all about applying some “old ideas” in a new world order

In a world filled with new technology emerging every day, consumer markets and needs are becoming more fragmented and cunning competitors lurking around corners ready to improve on our ideas, it has become truly challenging to develop and let alone implement marketing strategies.

What should we do? How can we tackle this challenging new world dynamic to successfully plan and implement strategies? And, most importantly, how do we stop ourselves from panic every time the environment changes and sticking to a proper well thought out strategic plan?

Sometimes it's a good idea to look at seminal old ideas in a new world to understand where we are going wrong. Let us, therefore, revert to the seminal works by Michael Porter and see how these “old concepts” are still relevant and can be applied in our fast-paced world.

Don't forget what strategy is about

We sometimes forget what strategy really is and we focus on tactics (e.g. a new application must be developed, we need to innovate with a new product fast, let's get something that uses AI) - this often happens because of being reactive, rather than proactive and succumbing to external environmental pressures.

“ Tactics are easy to copy, but numerous integrated activities and strengths are not. ”

Activities, trade-offs and fit – get back to the core of strategy and stick to the goal

In Porter's seminal work on strategy, he explains that the concept of strategy comes down to three aspects: activities, trade-offs and fit. The bottom line of his argument is that **multiple activities** (either activities performed differently or performing different activities to our competitors) that complement one other and that fit together like a well-oiled machine becomes more difficult to copy.

One activity is easy to copy, but not multiple integrated activities that your organisation or business unit performs well and that reinforce and complement one another.

A simple example of these activities – your goal is **to achieve the best prices and customer experience**. Your

organisation, therefore, has: A well-oiled logistics system; the capital to buy in bulk; a strong functioning marketing team that ensure your products move; a culture of supporting ongoing consumer research insights, which allows you to design great value for money offers; and you have excellent sales staff on the floor.

Importantly, all these activities fit and complement one another. This is a simple example, but it demonstrates how each activity complements the other to achieve value for money sales and great customer experience (clearly supporting and reinforcing the goal).



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Carmen Murray 21 Mar 2019



The activities should always reinforce one-another and fit well. Sometimes it is more important to revisit the fit and identify the weak links than to try and innovate and force new ideas into a system that is not strong enough yet.

Similarly, to the organisation example, you can analyse and look at the reinforcing activities in a specific business unit too and evaluate its role in creating a good fit in the larger system. The point is, don't lose track when the environment changes fast, focus on strengthening and growing your current activities and make sure any new endeavours will complement the current and that the activities have **fit**.

In terms of trade-offs, we need to appreciate having clarity in terms of what our business is about and/or **not** about. We often find ourselves jumping on the "me-too" wagon, because of external environment pressures (especially with technology), without considering the implications of activity **fit** with our organisation.

These "me-too" initiatives often end up fizzling out or becoming an expensive headache. Does this sound like something that has happened to you? Read on.

Innovate within

Always think **activities** and **fit** before embarking on an initiative and don't be afraid to make trade-offs (to say no). In addition, ask yourself "can I differentiate by performing the same activities differently or could I possibly revise and perform completely new activities in this system in a fashion where all the activities still reinforce and complement my end goal and, in this way, beat my competitors?"

I am not implying that one should not be proactive and embark on new initiatives, but rather that one should innovate with care and caution.

Think **activities** and **fit** first. Then only how you can rather innovate against the background of your own unique *activities* and strengths as an organisation and achieve an excellent **fit** that reinforces your business's current activities and strengths, making it more difficult to copy.



#FutureFit Yourself: Why diversity inclusion requires a restoration strategy

Carmen Murray 14 Mar 2019



Focus and innovate where you know you are already doing well and take things further, don't merely succumb to every new factor in the environment.

In those areas where the business is "not there yet", do your research and identify whether this could be a unit of more

value or importance in future, invest in improving and strengthening its current activities gradually, get the engine strong and then innovate and take things further.

In summary

A fast-paced world often means panic and fast reactions, often steering us off course, it causes stress, frustrations and oftentimes money not well spent or even wasted. Reverting to some of the seminal concepts and theories can still prove beneficial in our current world.

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What makes you "talkaboutable"? Earlier this week we met Udo (@udo.fotofabrik.ch) at a Marketing Event (@Basicbananas) and got inspired by his question... Is it your positive energy? Or maybe (like in his case) crazy curls? ;-)
Especially if you run a startup like we do, you need to know your uniqueness and know what the two or three things shall be which you would like people to remember after meeting you! What would you like them to tell their friends or colleagues about you? Udo who most of you know from @zurich.influencers shared some great tips on LinkedIn about how to identify your uniqueness and how to learn about what makes you attractive for customers. However, this is not only relevant for a startup but also for everyone of you being an individual person: Be talkaboutable in the sense of: Be the person you would be interested in talking to! Find out what makes you unique, be proud of that and share it with the world! Have a wonderful weekend! . . . #myprofashional #talkaboutable #basicmarketing #startupmarketing #beuniquebeyou #standupforyourself #beintetesting #startupbusiness #startupgrind #lifehack #marketinginsights #entrepreneurmarketingtips #marketingideas #startupschweiz #swissentrepreneurs

A post shared by [myProfashional](#) (@myprofashional) on Mar 8, 2019 at 11:16pm PST

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tactics are not strategies and can easily be copied, whilst numerous well-oiled activities are more difficult to copy. Ensure a good **fit** between **activities** and rather deepen and innovate within your current strengths to bring about something strong and truly unique.

Learn to make **trade-offs** and have clarity on **what your business is or is not about** before embarking on new initiatives.

ABOUT CARMEN MURRAY

Carmen Murray is one of the most influential modern marketers in South Africa. Her strong background in content, digital, mobile, innovation, and data analytics allows her to identify emerging trends and conceptualise disruptive communication strategies deployed with precision. The customer and their needs are always at the heart of her approach.

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