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a newsletter on practical strategic thinking and action
issue #23: strategy lessons from a fourteen-year-old

editor's message

Not too long ago, we were discussing one of the corporate seminars we give on Strategic Thinking with our fourteen year old son. "Oh," he concluded, "like RTS." "Like what?" we asked. "Real time strategy," he explained impatiently, "you know, it's a kind of computer game."

Real Time Strategy—now that sounded cool. We looked into it and decided to share some of what we learned. This month's Strategic Thinking takes a look at the background of this kind of game, and Strategic Action will suggest some ways you can apply these ideas to your work. Our Industry Spotlight shares some thoughts on better presentation skills, and the Reading List examines *Market Busters: 40 Strategic Moves That Drive Exceptional Business Growth*.

strategic thinking

Real Time Strategy

For the first fifteen years of their development, computer games were designed with a turn-based strategy, like those of traditional, physical board games—your opponent had to wait for you while you took the time to think and plan your next move. In real time games, you and your opponent are moving simultaneously. You have to think on your feet.

The basic plot of most RTS games involves three major points:

- Gather resources
- Build and position them
- Attack

I can't think of a better analogy for the way we all need to approach strategy today. Markets and competitors move too quickly for us to sit and contemplate grand and complex moves. We need to focus on having the right resources, positioning them in the right places, and approaching markets at an aggressive pace.

What I like best about this genre of game is that it distances strategy from the common bias that it is somehow slow-moving and only done on the big picture level. I often hear people dismiss activities as tactical rather than strategic. This is a dangerous distinction in real time. The best tactics are those that support your strategic goals. Using this definition, all tactics should be strategic. We live in real time. Let's keep our strategies moving at the same pace.

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Beside talking to our in-house expert, we also consulted a few on-line resources for our research including Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.com), a history of real-time strategy games (www.gamespot.com/gamespot/features/all/real_time/), and a list of the Top 10 RTS games today (compactiongames.about.com/cs/realtimestrategy/tp/topRTS.htm).

-Mary Adams (adams@trekconsulting.com)

strategic action

How to Become a Real Time Strategist

After playing a few rounds ourselves, here are the lessons we learned about winning in a real time strategic game that are relevant to our own businesses:

- Understand the rules and constraints—as in a game, each of us operates in an environment with laws, regulations, and ethics.
- Understand your capabilities—self-knowledge is the critical starting point for strategy.
- Identify your opportunities—this extends your learning to your environment, your competition, and your potential resources.
- Exploit your opportunities—this is the piece that most people think of when they are talking about strategy, but if you start here, you actually are not being very strategic.
- Learn from your mistakes—even good strategies need adjustment; in this context, mistakes (as long as not fatal) will make you stronger.
- Keep moving—this is the bottom line, real time doesn't stop.

In this context, strategy is a constant learning exercise. As you move along, take the time to consider how new learning affects what you thought you knew about your capabilities, constraints and opportunities. A real time strategist is constantly learning.

- Michael Oleksak (oleksak@trekconsulting.com)



industry snapshot

Visual Presentation Techniques

We attended a recent presentation at the Society for Professional Consultants (www.spcconsultants.org/aboutspc.htm) given by Brian Mullins, the President of Visually Speaking (www.vspeaking.com).

Brian made a powerful case for taking a tack that is different from what most people do when preparing a PowerPoint presentation. He recommended the following steps:

1. Plan to tell a persuasive story.
2. Create a storyboard to use visuals that support your story, not repeat it.
3. Use high quality images that engage your audience emotionally.
4. Create a PDF file of the notes pages as a leave behind.

Many of you probably have heard this before, but still may be filling pages with bullet points. The difference is that Brian has clued us in to the existence of low-cost, royalty-free stock photography on the web. One of the sites he recommended was iStock (www.istockphoto.com). They have 669,000 images, with prices starting at just \$1. There are plenty of other sites out there like this as well. So make the leap to better presentations...what are you waiting for?

reading list

Market Busters:

40 Strategic Moves That Drive Exceptional Business Growth

By Rita Gunther McGrath and Ian C. MacMillan

This is a very handy new book that gives you some great ways of thinking about growth strategies. The real value isn't the list of 40 strategies (which are actually buried throughout the book). The great contribution of this book is the framework that they lay out to help companies look for new strategic options. There are five "lenses" that they recommend looking through and give a tool for each. Each tool is pretty simple to use and covers the important aspects of growth:

<u>Lens</u>	<u>Tool</u>
Customers	Consumption chain analysis
Products/offerings	Attribute mapping
Key metrics	Unit of business analysis
Industry shifts	Industry framework
Emerging opportunities	Tectonic triggers framework

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The opportunities for busting a market can be drawn out of these five analyses. Although much of this is familiar ground, the clarity and focus of using these five frameworks has the potential to inspire breakthrough thinking.

For more information about this book, visit the authors' website (www.marketbusting.com/).

announcements

Management consultants can now offer intellectual capital assessments to their clients using the IC Rating™ tool. For more information, see our press release (www.trekconsulting.com/Publications/Newsletter/Issue23/ICAssessmentforManagementConsultants.pdf).

Don't miss the Institute of Management Consultants New England (IMCNE) Consultants Conference - "Ignite Your Business Potential!" on April 7 at the Holiday Garden Inn in Waltham, MA 8:30-3:00. For more information visit their web site (imcne.org/events/2006/apr0706.html).

In next month's issue, we ask the question, "How can you drive by looking in the rear view mirror?"

about trek consulting

Trek Consulting LLC helps companies to face the challenges of growth, building value and dealing with change. Since 1999, we have been a valued partner to business owners and leaders on their arduous journey to business success. We know that we cannot make this journey for our clients, but we can make it easier and more successful. We focus on getting you the best information available, facilitating sound planning and decision-making, making sure you have the right skills and resources to face your challenge, and coaching you through the roadblocks that invariably arise along the way.

Our clients report improved market focus, greater revenues, better margins and increased profits. To learn more about Trek Consulting and how we can help you improve your company's results, visit us on the web at www.trekconsulting.com or call us at 781-729-1008.