No Guarantees

by Renato Soares Fleischner

What guarantee does your organization have today that it will remain in business tomorrow? Even solid companies may not survive changes in a new, competitive global economy.

In 1983, a third of the largest 500 companies listed by *Fortune* magazine in 1970 had already disappeared. In a McKinsey study with 208 successful companies over 18 years, just three companies remained succesful over time. And though these studies focus on big organizations, their findings are critical to small publishers who don't want to disappear.

Unprecedented scientific progress and expansion in global communications have broken previously insurmountable barriers. Decisions are made for survival in a society based on new paradigms. Publishers that do not adapt will not be players in the global market.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

How much time do you and your team dedicate each day to positioning your organization for the future? What trends today will change your organization tomorrow? The work of respected marketing thinkers indicates priorities publishers must take into account.

Prahalat and Hamel suggest establishing long-term objectives. Ask yourself, "Will my customers today be the same ten years from now?" Cost-reduction strategies won't result in a sustainable leadership position if the company does not focus on constant evaluation of its business, on re-inventing its market, and on seeking innovative strategies.

Focus on strategies that assure leadership today and in the future. Prahalat and Hamel stimulate leaders to foresee "the future" by noticing trends in technology, demographics, government regulation and lifestyles. Publishers of collections who didn't notice CD-ROMs lost positioning. The development costs to produce and to market digital works are infinitely lower than the costs of issuing a printed collection. Professionals can take advantage of these trends to re-write the rules of a market and to create a new competitive space.

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND RETENTION

For religious literature, an important trend is that people today are less likely to follow denominations. Many denominational publishers in Brazil believed customers were obligated to buy their products. The lack of loyalty to established religious identities has caused them great headaches, since they did not consider quality as an important tools to keep customers.

Many publishing organizations are product oriented rather than customer oriented. Publishers arrogantly think they know what readers want, and are surprised when a long-time best-seller begins losing ground to other products more directly targeted to the reader.

Consumers are becoming aware of their influence on the market and no longer accept second-rate treatment. Publishers who fail to notice customers pay the bills and deserve respect won't survive in the future.

VALUE

Kotler and Porter, two recognized marketing scholars, focus on the concept of value. "Organizations that supply a product or render a service," says Kotler, "must ensure their customers are obtaining what they value." Value is the key to understanding the failures and the successes of an organization.

What image or value do you want to offer your readers? The image selected determines one's positioning. Volvo, the Swedish automobile manufacturer, develops the concept that its cars represent safety. However, safety features come with a price. Volvo aims its advertising at a market segment able to pay that price.

"Value determines one's whole production process," says Porter. When one seeks to publish quality books, one cannot assume quality is a function of printing. Quality must be evident in the choices of the author, translator, in the paper, in layout, in production. The whole process demands strict attention.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY

Years ago, business strategists predicted spirituality would be an important trend at century's end. The religious publications industry moves billions of dollars all over the world. How should Christian organizations position themselves in this new global order?

We are part of God's strategy to reach lives, and should use all the resources at our disposal to communicate the good news. Competition in publishing is not simply a duel for market share, but also a battle to communicate Jesus' name with much more efficiency and effectiveness. It is our privilege to communicate the good news of the gospel to the lost.❖

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