

Developing Your Sense of Timing In Business

by

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Everyone knows that timing is important in life. Can you think of a single human activity where timing isn't an essential component? Timing is fundamental! Timing is everything! PERIOD!

Webster's defines timing as "Selection or the ability to select for maximum effect of the precise moment for beginning or doing something." And everyone knows that moving at the precise moment is critical in business.

In most business schools and business publications, the importance of timing is stressed but unfortunately, no one delves very deeply into the subject because no one has been able to explain or teach how to develop your sense of timing. Until now!

So, how do you develop your sense of timing in business? How do you increase your ability to move at the exact time required by your business for success?

Success in business comes from satisfying customers' changing, personal needs and wants profitably. And the way to do that is to engage in an iterative and intuitive process fueled by learning from paying customers.

What is this intuitive and iterative process?

Most simply, the process is attempting to develop a business model that satisfies your customers' needs and wants, testing the business model in the marketplace, learning from that test and then refining the business model to more accurately fulfill your customers' needs and wants. And then you must go through this process again and again and again.

It is important to understand that when you implement your business model, you are actually testing the assumptions upon which the model is based. And you do that by creating a business model that allows you to generate the information you need to make better and better assumptions—who your customers are, what they need and want and how well your business model is satisfying those needs and wants. In other words, when you "open for business," you gather as much information as you can from your real customers. Then, using that information you compare it against your assumptions. Wherever your assumptions are not valid, you revise your assumptions and modify your business model. Then, you repeat this process again and again and again.

Think about it, if you had "perfect" information, you wouldn't have to make assumptions since you'd know your customers precisely and, therefore, you would know exactly how to satisfy them. However, since no one has perfect information, when you start a business you have to make assumptions and assumptions are not facts. Your business has not started. You do not have any feedback from paying customers. And if you're an existing company, no matter how long you've been in business, you still have to interpret that information and the information is always changing because customers and their needs and wants always change.

As with any process, you will want to identify specific predictive metrics that you can track and use to allow you to assess whether your business model that is based on your assumptions is achieving the results you desire. To use a simple example, you might decide to use the frequency of the cash register ringing as the metric to track how well your customer acquisition process is working. Obviously, if the register doesn't ring frequently enough, you're not attracting customers and thus some of the assumptions you made about how to attract customers aren't valid and need to be changed.

The key question is--how much time does it take for you to realize that your assumptions are right or wrong? That is, how many rings do you have to hear before you decide to change your assumptions, or stated a better way, how long do you have to wait between rings before the silence tells you that you have to change your business model?

The length of time it takes you to decide that an assumption is valid or in need of change determines how much information you take in and therefore is a measure of your sense of timing. But knowing that exact moment, that exact point in time in which to take action, is based upon a combination of intuition and experience: skills you can't go to school for. And that's because you need to feel it. That's right, the way you know when it's time to do something is when you feel it in your gut--literally. How many times have you done something and later been asked why you did it and you responded by saying, "It felt right!" And you meant it. In your gut you had a feeling and you acted on it. And that's because a feeling is your intuitive sense of something and timing is simply when you put your intuitive sense into action. However, while you are developing these skills, at the very least, you can make sure you have the right information and most exact metrics available to you in real time so you can make the best decision possible given your current level of intuition and experience, that is, your current sense of timing.

Fortunately, today, there is a new breed of entrepreneurial company that is developing systems which are web-enabled, browser-based platforms that are capable of effortlessly automating your company's business processes and intelligently tracking your key data points and metrics providing the right information, to the right people, at the right time. Many of these systems can send data to wireless devices, such as cell phones, PDAs and pagers so that you can in a sense "hear" your cash register ring. This new breed of software is easily adapted so that it can match your organization's desired operating environment and provide you with the capability to alter your business processes "on the fly," based on understanding gained through the real-time information they generate.

As a matter of fact, during a luncheon conversation we had with an entrepreneur, we thought we heard his cell phone beeping. When we told him to feel free to answer his call, he surprised us by saying it wasn't a call. He had set his cell phone to buzz EVERY TIME a customer ordered from his Web site. We couldn't believe it. Here he was 3,000 miles from his business and he was listening to his cash register ring. He knew how important timing was and was doing everything he could to stay in constant touch with the metrics of his business. You don't have to walk around with a cell phone buzzing every time your business makes a sale but you do have to pay very close attention to what your business is telling you through the information it produces.

There's an old saying that's relevant here, "You need to love your business." Why? Because the more you love your business, the more you'll stay in constant touch with it and the more you'll be able to feel its pulse. The metrics of your business are its pulse. Like a mother feeling the pulse of her child, her sense of whether the child is sick is very accurate based on her love for and her constant attention to her child. Her love and attention make up what we can call her child raising experience and the combination of her love, attention and experience are what develops her intuition. It's the same in business. Your love, attention and experience will develop your "gut feeling" about your business. If you don't love your business; if you don't pay constant attention to it; if you don't have experience with every aspect of it, your gut feeling is never going to grow.

The good news is everyone has some level of gut feeling and by going through the iterative process of building your business and feeling the pulse of the critical metrics for YOUR business, you can develop your intuitive sense of timing and build a successful business.

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