

An essay on marketing strategy and tactics learned from battles past and master warriors

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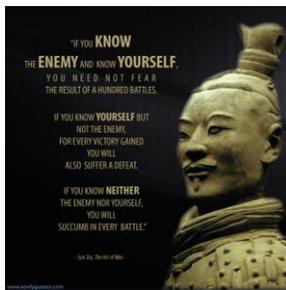
There is much to be learned by a professional marketer from past military battles and wars waged by generals who were masters in understanding human behavior and basic needs of the body and spirit. Sun Tzu is known for the tactical side of military strategy while Von Clausewitz believed that strategy should be based on flexible principles. Mao Zedong was a master at guerrilla warfare. Many marketing professionals specialize in strategy, tactics and guerilla marketing techniques. There is a lot to learn from the masters to hone the skills of marketers who plan and initiate marketing programs that are good for business.

History confirms that innovative technology can win the field for a while, but to maintain the momentum of success, marketers must be experienced strategists and tacticians to gain market share and hold what has been taken.

The Battle of Hastings on October 14, 1066 between the Norman-French army of Duke William II of Normandy and an English army under the Anglo-Saxon King Harold Godwinson was a Norman victory where the plan of battle was heavily influenced by the Norman longbow. The technology introduced to the field thinned the Anglo-Saxon lines when Norman archers loosed volleys of arrows that rained on

Harold's army positioned on the high ground. The Anglo-Saxon infantry pressed together seeking protection of shields while leaving their flanks exposed. Norman cavalry took advantage of the weakened lines and shattered Harold's defenses to take victory from a force that had the best field position. The powerful longbow had created opportunity for victory.

The battle of Hastings demonstrates how a marketer can champion a modified technology to help capture market share. There are numerous products that share a common function, but improved features can increase market share. Much like the Norman longbow, Tide laundry soap is one of many soap products. When Procter & Gamble introduced cold water Tide, it contributed to the reduction of electricity in the home used to heat water. Through marketing campaigns, consumers believed that they could save money by purchasing Tide, designed for use with cold water. Market share was gained at the expense of hot water laundry soaps. Understanding the technology of competitors can open opportunity when existing technology is modified to overcome defenses set up by competitive products.



Sun Tsu believed (among many other teachings) that it is imperative to assess “war” under five fundamentals: the way, the weather, the terrain, leadership and discipline. Some say he described the “way” as examining yourself and your opponent to determine who is most likely to prevail. This action is very much like performing a SWOTT (strength, weakness, opportunity, threat, trends) analysis or PEST (political, economic, social, technological) analysis of a corporation, brand, product or service when starting a business, entering a new market, or introducing a new product or service. Only after conducting a SWOTT and PEST analysis would you mobilize forces or assemble resources and examine the 7 Ps of the marketing mix.

The weather means the seasons. There are good times of year and optimal periods in the business cycle to carry out campaigns. It is inadvisable to enter a competitor's territory at an unfavourable time. Consider the winter campaigns of Napoleon in Russia and the fate of Hitler's 6th army at Stalingrad. From a marketing perspective, it is wise to enter new territory or launch a campaign when the conditions are favourable for success. Disney takes advantage of the seasons in North America to release new movies during festive seasons when people have the time and inclination to entertain themselves and others by gifting and spending time together.

The terrain is to be assessed in terms of distance, difficulty or ease of travel, dimension and safety. When you know the terrain you can enter a territory directly or a circuitous route. Ease of travel determines the use of infantry or mounted troops. When you know the dimensions, then you know how many troops you need—many or few. When you know the level of safety of the terrain, you can decide to do battle or disperse.

For a marketer, it is vital to any level of success to have a clear map of the marketplace. That means the geographic extent of the marketing campaign, competitive territory whether it is a notion under siege or a physical place. Marketers should understand how to build and use mental maps of markets that clients and customers perceive to be able to provide the best service and customer experience (CEM) possible. And, marketers must have some premonition or knowledge of the consequences of entering a new territory with regard to public safety of products and services that may well reflect on the health and safety of the marketer personally! Poor choices can be career-limiting.

Sun Tsu remarked that leadership is a measure of intelligence, trustworthiness, humanness, courage and sternness. Intelligence is to know when to plan and change effectively. Trustworthiness made people aware of punishment or reward. Humanness means love and compassion for people being aware of their toils. Courage means to seize opportunities to make certain of victories without vacillation. Sternness according to Sun Tsu is establishing discipline in the ranks by strict punishment.

Professional marketers are leaders and may report to corporate officers for guidance and strategy/budget approvals in a corporate environment. They should know what constitutes leadership, and if they have none of their own in an organization, they must seek champions that can take on the leadership role in implementing a marketing campaign. All successful marketing campaigns have strong leadership with a will to be successful by mobilizing staff and other resources to achieve desired outcomes.



Carl von Clausewitz was a Prussian general and influential military theorist. He is most famous for his military treatise *Vom Kriege* (On War). A company must look for weak points in the positions of its competitors and then launch marketing attacks against those weak points. General von Clausewitz preached that wars are won in almost every case by superior forces. Translating that to marketing strategy, Al Ries says that bigger companies normally can defeat smaller companies and it's difficult to dethrone a king. The defensive form of war, Gen. von Clausewitz writes, is in itself stronger than the offense.

There are three basic principles of defensive marketing warfare, according to *Marketing Warfare*, by Al Ries and Jack Trout.

“Defensive Principle No. 1: Only the market leader should consider playing defense. The problem with this, says Mr. Ries, is that he has never met a company that didn't consider itself a leader. Most companies fool themselves with creative definitions of leadership. Companies don't create leaders, he writes, customers do. It's who the customer perceives as the leader that defines a true category leader.

Defensive Principle No. 2: The best strategy is the courage to attack yourself. In other words, you can strengthen your own position of leadership by introducing new products or services that make your existing ones obsolete.

Defensive Principle No. 3: Strong competitive moves should always be blocked. Most companies have only one chance to win, Mr. Ries writes, but leaders have two. If a leader misses an opportunity to attack itself, the company can often recover by copying the competitive move. But the leader must move rapidly before the attack gets established.”



Mao Zedong (Chairman Mao), was a Chinese communist revolutionary and founding father of the People's Republic of China, which he ruled from 1949 until his death in 1976.

A master at guerrilla warfare, Mao Zedong saw objectives other than the heart of the enemy army's offensive power. These objectives were the enemy's supply lines, rear bases, and isolated enemy detachments, outposts or garrisons. If Mao could strike at these objectives, while avoiding the enemy's main strength, he could force the enemy to defend them. This would give the initiative to Mao's weaker force and compel the stronger enemy to concentrate most of his strength in guarding his rear and his lines of communication and supply.

Recognizing that the enemy's rear is his most vulnerable target, Mao abandoned any attempt to defend a front or main line of resistance. This obliged him to give up orthodox warfare in which one army directly confronts another and attempts to destroy it. In Mao's system, orthodox war could only come at the final stage just prior to victory, after the enemy had been weakened and demoralized. To prepare for this culminating stage, he adopted indirect warfare, essentially guerrilla in its operation, that avoided a straightforward challenge to the enemy's main strength.

Professional marketers who represent small to medium-sized enterprises are often engaged in one form or another of guerilla marketing to compete in a crowded market space. Often they have few funds to launch and sustain a long-term marketing campaign.



Modern business owners are looking for an immediate ROI and look to their marketers to produce results regardless of changing market conditions, sales competencies and the strength of competitors.

This is where the best of the best professional marketers stand out. There is much that a marketer can do with a well-funded marketing program, but when you are faced with few resources, guerrilla marketing may be the only option for the enterprise.

Combining web analytics, CEM, sales, and other data will provide a good indication of prospects and where they like to spend time online. Social media sites provide metrics that are also valuable for market research, as are the digital and paper files in municipal offices about demographics and community growth. All of this market research data and information is available at little cost—an advantage for businesses with little or no money for market research.

Internal marketing to build the competencies of staff and colleagues in delivering marketing messages enhances the quality and strength of a small sales force.

Using YouTube, blog sites and podcasts to message prospects and existing clients can result in building customer bases and leads quickly and efficiently.

By targeting the markets and customers of competitors and entering market space in an unexpected way it is possible to build market share by offering products and services that have features that strongly differentiate from those of competitors.

There is much risk involved in guerilla marketing techniques—especially if the product or service being offered is of lower quality and of little need or value to consumers.

In that case, the professional marketer has an ethical responsibility to the public to provide accurate information about the product or service and to offer a professional opinion to the enterprise of its likelihood of success.

Entering a market space with a low-priced inferior product, while mistaking the tactic for guerilla marketing only hurts the businesses that are already established along with the enterprise behind the “low-price” campaign.

There are volumes published on the way businesses can learn from tactics used in battles past and master warriors—ancient and modern in all nations to market goods and services. This knowledge can add to the skills and resources of the twenty-first century professional marketer. With a foot in the past, a sense of future trends, and an acute awareness of the present moment for decision making and taking, professional marketers have an advantage over those who dabble in marketing.

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