

PROCESS

TO ELIMINATE COMPLEXITY, ASK:

Are there attributes we could eliminate thus reducing our cost and potentially the price to the customer?

Are customers complaining about the complexity of our products or services?

Can we readily identify features that many of our target segments don't care about?

from another. Finally, the whole process of creating value for the customer is dynamic: Yesterday's major differentiators become tomorrow's taken-for-granted.

Not fair. Not nice. But, that's how it goes in open competitive markets.

POSITIVE FEATURES

A basic positive feature is one that the target segment expects to receive. We call these features "non-negotiables" (see "How to Simplify the Value Proposition," chart, page 10). One thing you need to be realistic about with non-negotiables: Although you may spend enormous amounts of time and energy worrying about them, most customer take them for granted.

Not having this basic characteristic means that this segment will simply not buy from you. Having this feature does not mean that people buy any more, pay any more or value what you do any more. The frustrating thing about non-negotiables is that they tend to be where marketers spend the bulk of their time, investment and infrastructure, but sadly, most of that effort is taken completely for granted by target segments.

In the middle category of the top row of the Value Proposition chart are "differentiators." These are attributes that distinguish your offering from your competitors' in a positive way and give you a favorable position. Similarly, your competitors' differentiators are what attract their customer segments to their offering and not to yours.) Having differentiating features can form the basis for competitively differentiated pricing and positioning.

Even more powerful is a class of attributes we call "exciters." Exciters are so overwhelmingly attractive to a particular customer segment that they not only distinguish you from competitors, but also so delight the customer that they can constitute the basis for buying and using your offering. Exciter features create the seeds of considerable competitive advantage.

NEGATIVE ATTRIBUTES

All products have negative attributes, so it's important to be explicit about them. First come "tolerables." These are attributes that customers put up with to get the positives you offer. As with

non-negotiables, customers assume that tolerables come with the product and that buying from a competitor will not eliminate them.

When you think about it, most industries have many tolerables. Airlines require you to suffer security searches. Credit-card companies charge interest on revolving debt. American movie theaters not only have sticky floors, but they also smell like popcorn.

When customers believe that a negative attribute of your offering could be avoided by buying a competitive offering, it becomes a "dissatisfier." Dissatisfier features differentiate you from competitors, but in the wrong direction. Thus, cars that are perceived to require excessive service, fees perceived to be too high, technical departments thought of as unresponsive and the like can all drive your customers away.

Even more deadly to your competitive position is a class of attributes that are energizing, but negative. We call these "enragers," although they may inspire many negative emotions, ranging from anger to fear to disgust. Obviously, these features are never the result of conscious decision; rather, they emerge as the result of misjudgement, or even outright misfortune.

NEUTRAL ATTRIBUTES

Target customer segments are indifferent to neutral attributes, so in general they will not be sources of MarketBusting ideas. However, products can have features that are neutral from the perspective of one customer set, but that are basic or differentiating for a different customer set.

Because neutral attributes add cost without enhancing value, one major MarketBusting opportunity is to ruthlessly eliminate the culprits and use this to drive down cost and, in turn, price. Be careful though; for some customers, things you might think are neutral are actually non-negotiable. For instance, replacing a live person with a voice-mail system may be perfectly fine under some circumstances, and deeply upsetting to customers in others.

SIMPLIFY, SIMPLIFY, SIMPLIFY

Attribute mapping of the most important consumption-chain links makes it even more likely that you can systematically identify opportunities for

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