

SmartPlan360° Program™

MarketCues Thought Leadership
Strategic planning for executives



Developing Strategic Paths to Guide Effective Plans:
And how to avoid the pitfalls



MarketCues
Working Smarter Just Got Easier!™

The press of the day-to-day often prevents businesses from focusing on their long-term strategic planning needs. MarketCues has noted the condition of not “Seeing the forest through the trees,” as one of, if not the obstacle that plagues entrepreneurs in all markets. This is a struggle many b2b marketers encounter in their planning.

To overcome this challenge, executives must be able to identify and prioritize their most promising initiatives. In order to do this effectively, they must be able to be truly objective to ensure they work within achievable parameters and set goals their organization is capable of delivering. To determine these objectives it is essential to use a proven methodology and be able to execute a strategic plan once it is developed. For one, they require the measurement of the potential of market segments, that are essential to ensure a growth curve. And secondly, they require truly smart planning that is scalable and sustainable. With both, companies can raise themselves to the next level of growth they need to build a positive and solid future.



The Economy Challenge: Creating business growth strategies

Few companies have escaped the ever-increasingly difficult business climate to remain profitable and continue growing. Unimaginable just a few short years ago, simply staying in business has become a paramount concern of many CEOs. Even before the economy turned south, there were disconcerting industry signs.

“Be like Curious George, start with a question and look under the yellow hat to find what’s there.”

— James Collins

MarketCues has observed that many companies fail to achieve their strategic initiatives more than half of the time. This is an enormous amount of wasted time, resources and effort. This failure to meet goals has become pervasive among even leading corporations which have stumbled in their product introductions and understanding how best to market their brand in the new digital world.

MarketCues has talked to many companies that can’t make up their minds if they should grow or stay the same size. This internal conflict of their corporate strategy versus their product strategy freezes them in their tracks and makes them vulnerable to competitive pressures and attacks.

Often, growth is a tricky business and simply grabbing ideas that come along is not a healthy way to go about building sustainable growth.

Executives know there is a strong need to analyze their market, competition, pricing scenarios, and a whole host of associated issues. But what context should you use to accomplish this planning?

Sometimes companies have an idea worked out that can be developed into a new product innovation. But, even with a strong idea companies require a rigorous objective strategic process that will assist them in their planning. To achieve these growth goals, MarketCues offers its proprietary product, SmartPlan360™ that provides the guided strategic development that is required.



Why Corporate & Business Strategy is Essential

Whenever the economy slows or grinds to a halt, a large number of businesses go into what could be termed “bunker mode,” thinking they are providing their organization and stakeholders with wise fiduciary management. Of course, no one would argue with strong cost control measures and effective bottom-line management, but the reality is new opportunities are the lifeblood of any business – and effective strategic planning produces those opportunities.

Strategic planning has been a part of marketing since the very first, and most companies operate within a specific set of strategies.

However, problems usually occur when a company continues to do the same thing year-after-year hoping to produce the same or greater results of past successes. This is usually a formula for trouble and why strategic planning has become so essential.

Common problems organizations face in their strategic planning include:

- ❖ Duplicating planning phases and efforts within the organization because there is not a central project owner who is tasked to lead the project;
- ❖ Inability to obtain critical business intelligence outside the company's walls;
- ❖ Underestimating the complexity of a particular initiative or project;
- ❖ Inability to execute business objectives due to a lack of accurate budget forecasts; and
- ❖ Creating too complex charts of action points that are difficult to communicate and implement with the full staff.

Starting from a clear set of business objectives with a focused set of tools is the best approach to execute a successful strategic plan. As always, this type of initiative works best when it is initiated by senior management who will set time aside to focus and monitor the effort. These conditions are central to developing successful strategies.



Key Factors that Hamper Success

Most growth does not occur because the groups that could drive it are bogged down in their daily tasks. Current work usually takes precedence over what appears to be some pie in the sky idea that a manager envisioned.

The trouble with this is it runs contrary to how growth is achieved. When it comes time to act on a new idea, there is a built-in disregard for it, even by management or one of the team members, because it is too far off the every day track. The 'job' becomes the essential thing, and the solution to future growth and sustainability gets choked out as a result.

Nowhere is this more prevalent than in companies that have long-standing products and services that, in year's past, have sustained them.

To get out of this mindset takes a leader who is driven to find the next big thing and not let daily tasks prevent it from rising to the surface.

Management's Role in Innovation

If senior management is interested in creating new growth, it has to demonstrate it by leading the charge. The new strategic directions that can come out of this simple step are enormous – they will not occur if management assumes a passive role in this critical process.

There are a number of factors that need to be in play at all times for planned strategic growth to take place, and strategic planning that does not employ these principles greatly diminish its capacity to create high-leverage solutions. Here are a few guidelines:

- ❖ Dedicate financial resources to strategic planning within a reasonable set of parameters that tie investment to returns.

- ❖ Have a group of people focused on the strategic plan. This means a designated strategy team from various parts of the company such as IT, financial, customer service, sales, marketing, product development and related;
- ❖ Permit them to work on long-term ideas as long as they deliver long-term value back to the primary organization;
- ❖ Focus on long-term growth ideas that are capable of delivering years of sustainable and profitable growth to the company. Discard small ideas that are a passing fad;
- ❖ Create a trackable process that operates outside the realm of the normal day-to-day activities; and
- ❖ Ensure the CEO's direct involvement to achieve quick access and movement throughout the company.

Begin the process with some quick wins to create momentum within 6 - 12 months. From these successes, longer-term projects can be pursued with a general sense of confidence throughout the organization.



An Overview of the MarketCues SmartPlan360™

The strategic planning process requires both effective communication and clear thinking. First we gather and analyze information from inside your organization. Then we look outside the company to confirm and expand on our analysis, which enables us to develop a clear set of strategies that will meet the specific challenges you establish and achieve the results you want.

The SmartPlan360™ phases include defining the mission, establishing goals to drive business results, and creating strategic steps that lead to the expected outcomes you select.

This approach is designed to achieve a particular goal with an immediate benefit, knowing the realities your organization faces. The SmartPlan360™ identifies six main foundations where business growth can occur or stall:



- ❖ Organization – including management performance, strengths, weaknesses, corporate alignment from the CEO to the entry-level employee;
 - ❖ Products/Services – including current product offerings, new product offerings, product acceptance, full services in support of customers;
 - ❖ Sales/Marketing – including supply chain management system and distribution, sales management process, brand identity, messaging, online marketing and retention program;
 - ❖ Market/Model – including market size, growth potential, key trends and dynamics;
 - ❖ Competition – including competitive ranking, key players identified and value proposition defined;
 - ❖ Customers – including longevity, loyalty and lifetime value (LTV).
- When determining potential strategic initiatives these six foundations are evaluated in comparison to the resources and leverage points that are available. This process is a two-way collaboration between MarketCues and the client.



A Business Results Program

In order to steer an organization in the most effective direction, its leadership team needs to be convinced that it is navigating its organization in the most optimum direction. To understand where an organization is heading it needs to begin by identifying its top challenges and desired outcomes.

Top Challenges	Strategies/Solutions	Expected Outcomes
Need to drive top-line sales:	Create selling strategy to produce a set of ongoing client relationships with strong recurring monthly income.	Fill up the Sales Funnel
Chasing too many different types and levels of client work	Create a high-level strategy that is based upon a three-tier approach: Tier 1: Large corporations, large entrepreneurial firms, etc. Tier 2: Divisions of large corporations Tier 3: Small to medium size companies	Organized system of approaching three types of clients to speed up selling process
No winning business development plan	Review and analyze all client projects done to date, projects in the current sales funnel, and match them to the current set of Company's services in-house. From this data determine the optimum selling strategy and reinforce it with the necessary support and marketing services required.	Win two clients valued at \$250K with CEO and fill up the sales funnel with small to mid-size projects
Too long Sales to Close Cycle	Create a template-driven sales marketing system that includes pre-written templates using vetted Company's copy/language from current proposals and customize one for each of the three tiers above.	Ask better questions and create an effective sales funnel on the Company's Website
Lack of an ongoing brand marketing plan	Redefine the brand definition based upon the services, company abilities and match this new definition to harmonize with the three tiers of desired clients.	Launch new brand campaign
Confusing brand messaging and new identity program	Create a new brand identity, brand tone, and brand messaging including both repeating text and visuals to be used throughout the new brand marketing.	Launch new brand identity and messaging program

Once these parameters have been established, a mission grid allows the strategic planning effort to stay on track within the organization's over-arching goals. Usually the mission is known throughout the company but new initiatives require time for development and implementation. Strategic planning allows for both the development and communication of high-growth strategies.

SmartPlan360™ Helps You Work Smarter, Not Harder

Online assessments and one-to-one executive interviews are used during a SmartPlan360™ engagement to collect a repository of data that allows MarketCues to analyze results and identify high-growth strategies.

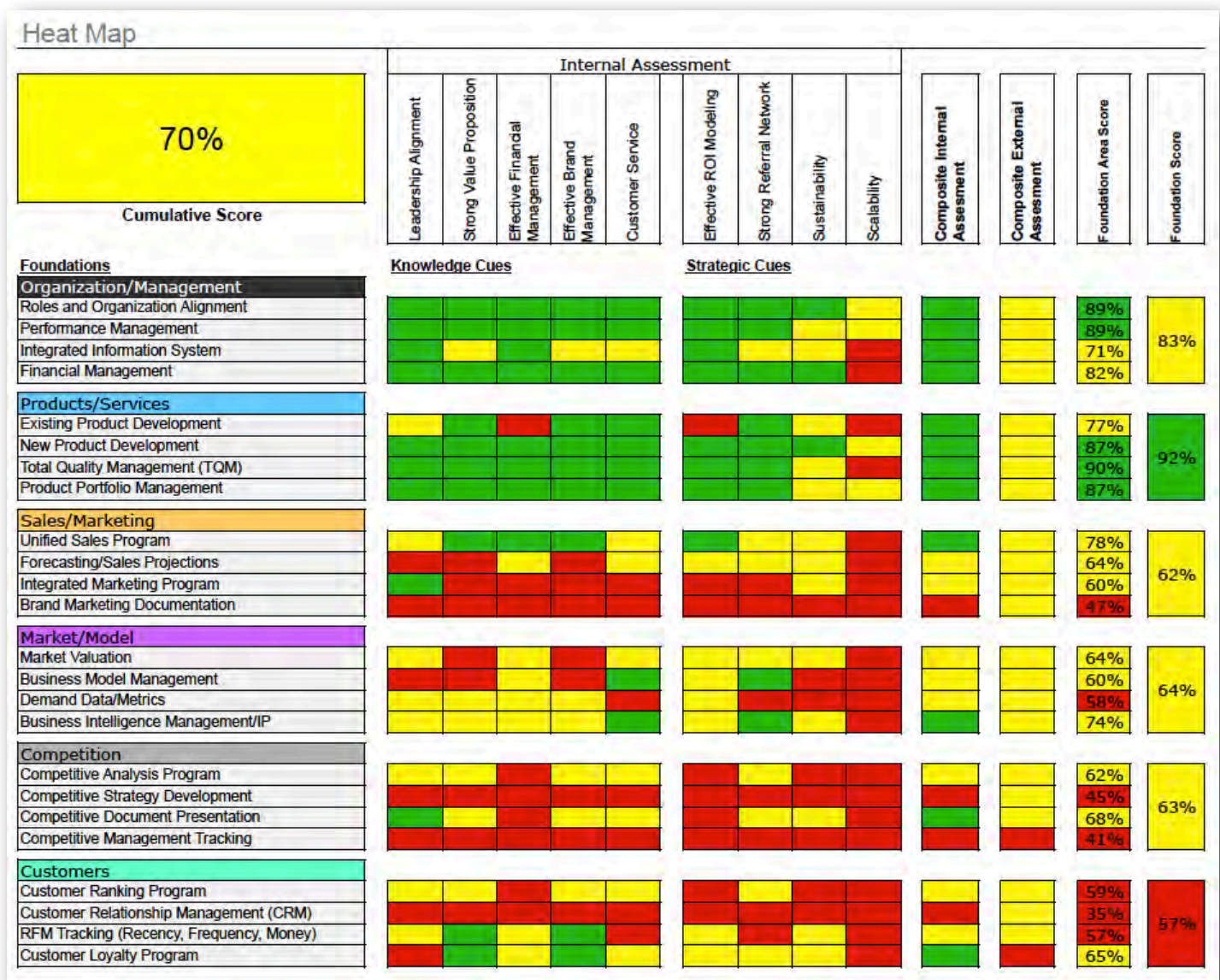
MarketCues uses a 10-point criteria to guide the discovery and analysis stages based upon three decades of b2b work experience. This analysis is based upon the following objective benchmarking criteria:

1. Leadership and customer alignment
2. Strong value proposition defined with unique differentiators
3. Effective financial management
4. Brand asset valuation
5. Customer service standards maintained with continuous improvement methods
6. Scalability of the current business model
7. Sustainability for the enterprise to continue a healthy growth curve
8. Managed ROI modeling
9. Strong referral network



Below is a sample SmartPlan360™ Heat Map that identifies the six key foundations of the organization with the internal and external environments that are analyzed. The criteria of evaluation are grouped into two primary areas of Knowledge Cues (what an organization knows) and Strategic Cues (what an organization does) that are used to produce a gap analysis for the overall organization. The Heat Map displays areas by indicating their degree of need. Red is for critical, Yellow is for recommended, and Green indicates healthy with no further projects required.

Change the business results you are receiving by changing your strategic initiatives!





The Smart System

In addition to compiling critical business intelligence that is displayed in the Heat Map, a business case is also prepared that details the essential strategic initiatives including ROI models and the timelines required to execute the program.

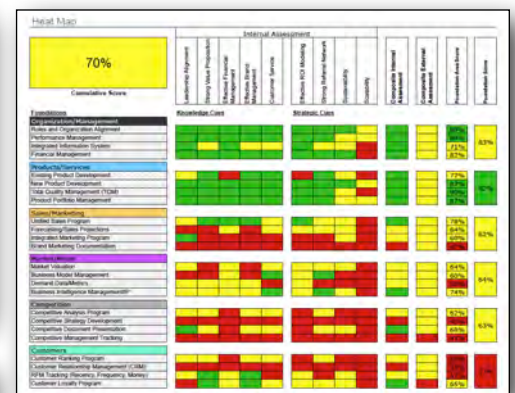
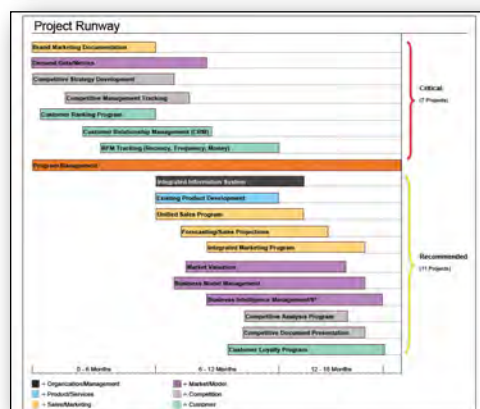
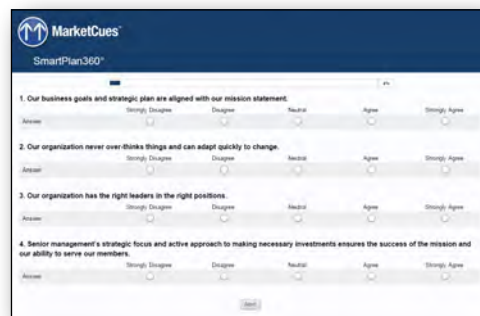
The Heat Map brings visual clarity to the overall strategic plan in a displayed gap analysis that measures objectively where the organization is today and where it needs to go tomorrow to achieve its goals.

A Few Words About Why Strategic Planning Is Beneficial

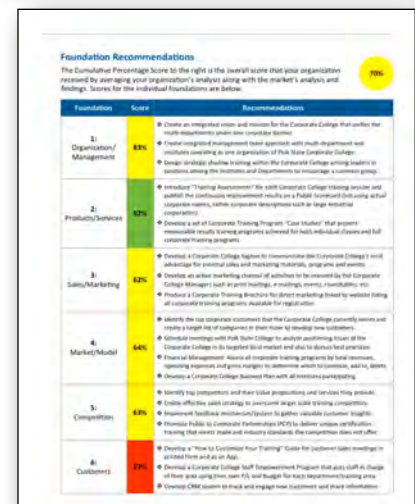
One of the most critical challenges of not having a strategic plan is that members of the organization will continuously propose new directions the organization could follow. Although making suggestions is always a positive behavior, without a strategic and objective context to evaluate them, they can cause the organization to drift in many different directions. Over time this process can cause the organization to lose its way in its marketplace.

For instance, product misalignment often occurs because the primary product attributes are not being tracked or mapped properly to the organization's key customer needs.

As sales and marketing teams ramp up they can tend to overcome this deficiency by operating independently of the product group until there is a crisis. By then it is usually too late to undo the problems and the need to go back to the drawing board results. A SmartPlan360™ avoids these inevitable problems by creating strategic pathways that guide the organization to sustainability levels.



SmartPlan360™ Program™: Online Surveys, Executive Interviews, Software-generated Heat Map, Project Runway and Strategic Recommendations drive your business objectives





Project Runway

One of the critical aspects of any new project is to execute on the strategies that have been identified.

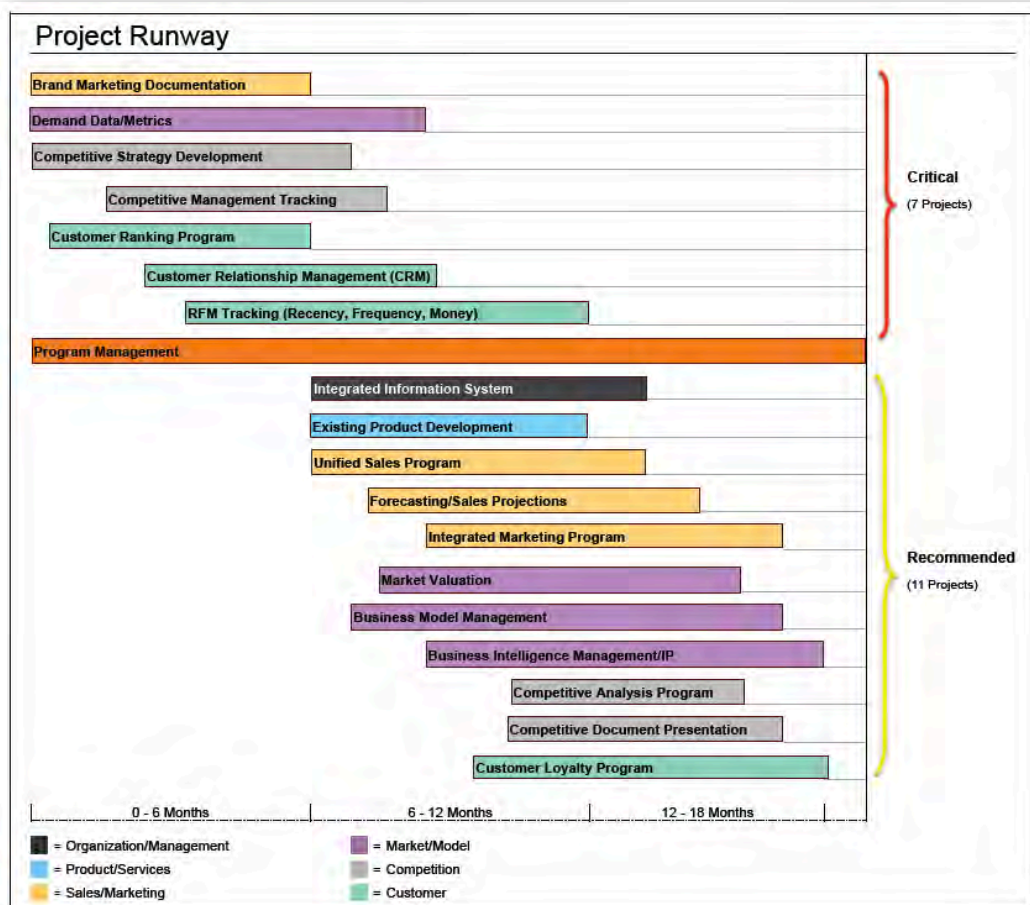
The Project Runway outlines the projects that need to be produced in the priority for each. The final Project Runway also outlines the critical project parameters including:

- ❖ Timelines and budgets associated with each project;
- ❖ ROI metrics that have been calculated for each project;

- ❖ Growth impacts calculated on the top-line and the bottom-line;
- ❖ Specific traffic management tracked on an ongoing basis for each project; and
- ❖ Project owners and support staff identified.

There are two types of projects that are identified in the Heat Map – Critical and Recommended – that the SmartPlan360™ software places into the Project Runway based upon a priority-ranked basis to achieve the overall growth goals.

MarketCues is expert at identifying strategies that will drive growth for its clients. Not all projects are done for pure income objectives, however. There are instances where upgrades to image are essential to continue in the marketplace with a competitive position and identity. In all cases, MarketCues will inform its clients of the value that will be derived by pursuing each project.





MarketCues SmartPlan360™ Approach

The MarketCues SmartPlan360™ delivers the business results that you have identified at the beginning of the engagement. Over the years we have found that there are three types of companies that greatly benefit from the SmartPlan360™ program:

1. Growing companies that are encountering problems of declining profits;
2. Companies that need an interim strategic focus on a specific program to effect a specific innovation and change;
3. Smaller businesses that need strategic planning assistance but don't need a full-time Chief Strategy Officer

Our Experience

Beyond hiring, nurturing and rewarding the best and the brightest employees, the best way to grow a company is through a thorough strategic plan that is integrated throughout the organization. This document outlines the MarketCues approach to creating innovative growth using our SmartPlan360™ for producing winning business strategies.

Based on this strategic thinking, the process provides a platform for building new initiatives and markets that create new business income.

The project initiatives you assign to MarketCues are guided by us with rigorous attention to meet your key business goals based upon our decades of market experience. Our approach to solving problems is based on a deep understanding of how to effect change throughout an organization using best practices learned over many years.

There are a number of key questions that we will ask to find ways to overcome specific challenges your organization faces:

- ❖ What are your key assets?
- ❖ What are your known liabilities?
- ❖ Who is your strongest competition?
- ❖ What positioning have you used successfully?
- ❖ What positioning has not worked successfully?
- ❖ What market(s) have you avoided and/or entered and why?
- ❖ What brand value do you have in your key markets?
- ❖ What strategies best serves your existing business lines?
- ❖ What strategies have obstructed or side-tracked your growth?
- ❖ What is the most effective way you can position your new product/service in the key markets you have identified?
- ❖ What will be the financial impacts on the top-line and bottom-line within the first year, second year, and fifth year?

This process assures that your investment in this program drives the business results you are looking for.



Every successful client relationship starts with a good conversation. Let's start ours today!

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Assessing,
Analyzing,
Strategizing,
Implementing,
Delivering,
Results.

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