

## Don't Let Fear Dictate Your 2009 Marketing Strategy

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Frost & Sullivan's Growth Team Membership™ analysts recently completed an extensive survey that captures key issues and business environment factors affecting Marketing executives in North America and Europe. The survey results appear to show marketers are more concerned with justifying their existence as opposed to identifying growth opportunities.

On the surface this approach would be logical with many companies looking to reduce costs and everyone feeling the pressure to justify their existence. However, this approach, while needed in some cases, will not generate new opportunities for organizations. Once marketers get past the fear, they then correctly identify which issues they should be addressing to pull their companies and organizations out of a flat or negative growth cycle and toward a more solid, growth-oriented track. Without going into a great detail, here is a critical assessment of what the survey said — and, more importantly, what it did not say.

### Key Marketing Issues

On the marketing survey these were the five key issues were identified as defining 2009 marketing strategy:

Marketing Issues Surveyed
Measuring market spend effectiveness and efficiency
Justifying the ROI on marketing budgets
Identifying emerging customer needs and preferences
Enhancing the pace of new product and service introductions
Identifying new, adjacent market opportunities

Source: Frost & Sullivan 2009 Growth Team Membership Survey of Marketing Executives

At first glance, fear rules the day for most marketers. Of the top issues facing marketers, the majority cited measuring marketing spends and justifying marketing budgets with ROI as their top two key issues. Only after programs and jobs can be justified do marketing executives go on to identify the key issues which have any hope for driving growth in 2009.

Identifying emerging customer needs and preferences, along with discerning new and adjacent market opportunities, represent critical needs required to create new growth strategies. Additionally, most marketers recognize that the speed with which they are able to roll out these new products and services is critical. This means marketers need to have enhanced communications and shared goals with the R&D function, as well as with market research and competitive intelligence. Sales should always be involved.

### Key Business Environment Factors

Marketers cited the following as the top business factors affecting marketing strategy in 2009:

Business Environment Factors
Global economic downturn
Decreasing customer demand
Intensifying competition
Emerging global markets
Increasing need for product/service innovation

Source: Frost & Sullivan 2009 Growth Team Membership Survey of Marketing Executives

Similar to the key issues, the identified business factors lead with the negative and only after running through all the negatives (global downturn, decreased demand and intensifying competition) do marketers identify the *positive* factors which will drive new growth. So, if we parse these sentiments expressed by marketers into the actions they can control and issues and factors which identify market opportunities, we see a different perspective emerging.

By simply “ignoring” the economy (something you cannot control) marketers can focus on more relevant, controllable issues. Marketers can address the decreased market demand and intensifying competition by listening to their customers and identifying opportunities within adjacent, alternative or emerging global markets, while at the same time using innovation to enhance the position of the company’s products and/or services. In order to accomplish this, marketers need a hotline to the CEO’s office, a place at the table, so to speak, not to talk about ROI, budgets or justify marketing, but rather to identify and discuss new opportunities and ways the company can innovate or reinvigorate existing product and/or services. Securing the CEO’s buy-in is crucial for rolling out both internal changes and external positioning required to seize opportunities in shifting markets and customer needs.

As we continue to experience dramatic changes in the market landscape, marketers need to avoid letting fear and negativity rule their strategies and decision-making. By focusing on positive market opportunities and issues within their grasp, marketers can lead their organizations through these turbulent economic times and come out stronger and more successful in the end.