



# Building Strong Brands: Research Issues in Technology Marketing

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IITA Marketing Roundtable

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Presented by  
Elan Long  
SpringSmart Inc.

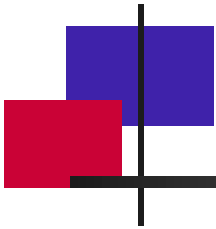




## Strong brands are coherent

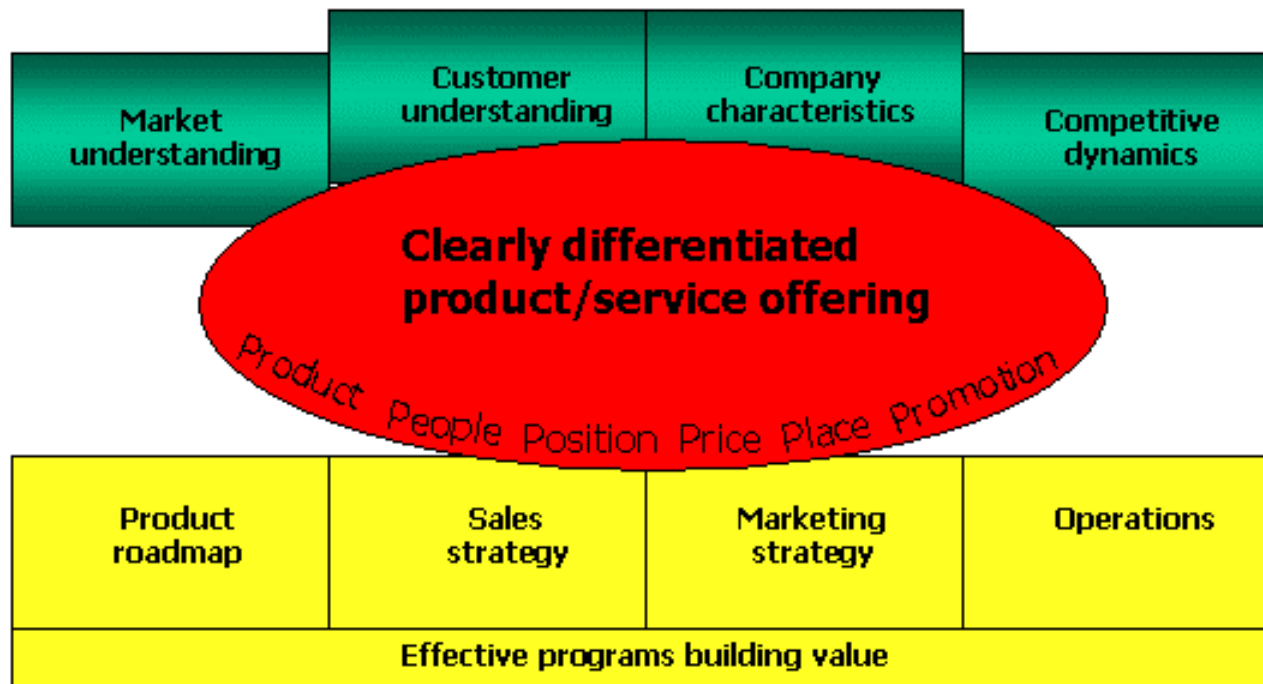
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- Clearly differentiated offering
  - Strategy informed by rich understanding of market, customer, company, competition
- Consistency builds strength
  - From high to low level, it has to all “fit”
  - Product, positioning, place, price, etc.
- Action is “easier” with brand consistency
  - More obvious what the “right” thing is
  - You can move faster and more confidently
- Getting there requires information & understanding
  - Fitting together the pieces for a strong brand



# Strong brands have strong foundations

...that lead to coherent action & growth





## When do you need research?

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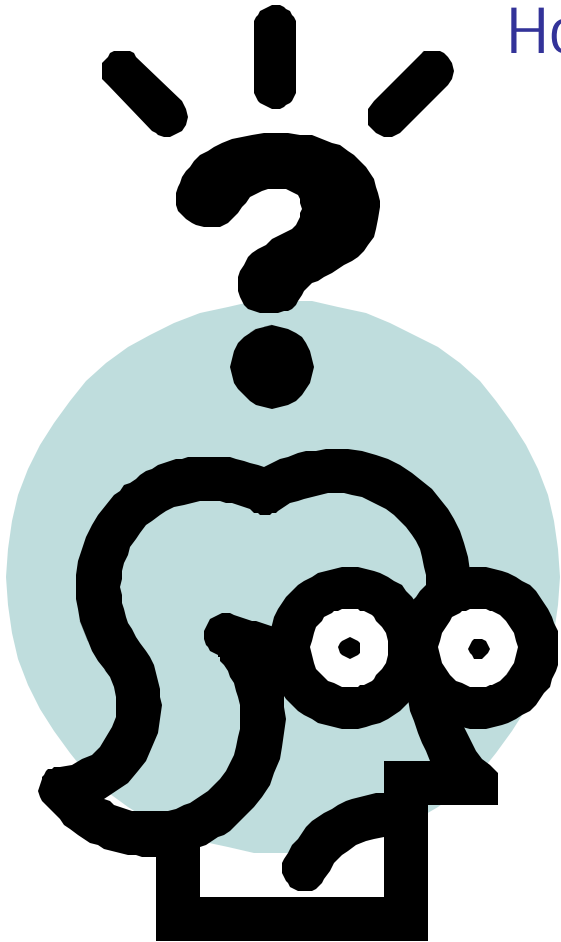


- Market opportunity – is it real?
  - New product
  - Planned product
- Validating strategy – right direction?
  - Current product (roadmap)
  - Development, marketing, sales strategies
- Changing trajectory – ramping up growth?
  - Business
  - Product
  - Program

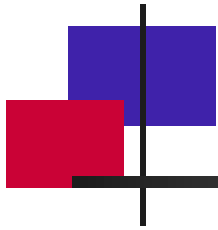


## So what's the problem?

### How does this work in technology marketing?



- New, new products
- Fast-moving technology
- No customers (yet)
- No (or small) budget
- B2B buying processes
- Unfamiliar concepts
- Niche markets
- Research skills vs. product & market understanding
- Planning vs. acting
- Intuitive marketing
- ????



## Information requirements

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# Market understanding

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- Market size
  - Current revenue future growth
  - Number of firms to sell to
- Economic structure
  - Strength of firms barriers to entry etc. (Porter)
- Big trends and issues
- Customer industry dynamics drivers issues
- Technical trends affecting adoption
- Your category & solutions hierarchy
- Government regulation and/or funding impact



## Customer understanding

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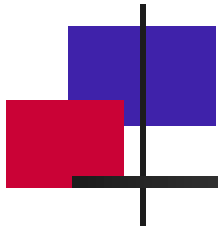
- Customer perspective is the only lens that matters
  - Language
  - Values
  - Perspective
- Company research is a start
  - Business facts give context and perspective
  - Easy starting place
- You MUST talk to customers
  - Guessing is arrogant and dangerous
  - There is no shortcut that really works



# Customer understanding



- Business issues
  - Sources of opportunity sources of pain
  - Current solutions
  - Vision of future
- Critical success factors
  - What really matters – and what doesn't
- Perception of you & your solution
  - Why they considered/bought you (or didn't)
  - Experience vs. expectations
- Perception of alternatives
  - What else was considered – and why...



## Company understanding

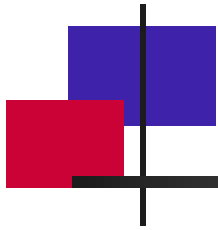
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- Who to ask -- internal:
  - Marketing
  - Sales
  - Development
  - Delivery
  - Finance
  - Operations
- Who to ask – external:
  - Analysts
  - Press
  - Partners
  - ??
- What to consider:
  - Company – what business, why successful, risks
  - Product – what do we have, what do we lack
  - Marketing – strategy, positioning, programs
  - Sales – strategy, process, supports
  - Customers – who are they, why they choose us

# Competitive dynamics



- Alternatives to your solution
  - Categories
  - Sample or complete list by category
- Primary competition – focus
- Competitor analysis – by company
  - Company facts
  - Management, key employees
  - Strategy & direction
  - Product strengths & weaknesses
  - Partnerships
  - Positioning against competitor; their positioning against us



## Finding information





## Secondary research – information is available

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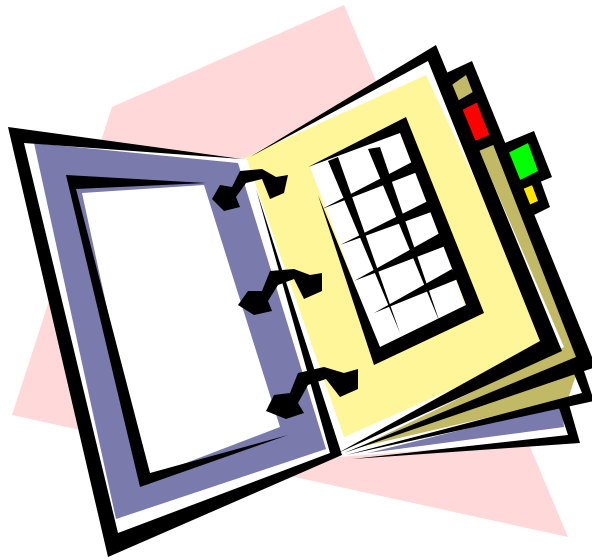


- Analyst reports and conversations
- Business and trade press
- Company information
  - Annual reports
  - Sales materials
  - Published research
- Association & industry information
- Economic census
- Portal sites



## Digging for gold in published materials

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- Use multiple sources – but be sure to reconcile them
- Ask the publisher for clarification when “facts” don’t make sense
- Economic census data is valuable -- especially the number of firms in the potential market
- Companies often buy rights to publish analyst opinions
- Use your analyst services, if you subscribe



## Survey research – flexible but technical

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- For the right project – known group you can reach
  - Customer satisfaction
  - Customer demographics
  - Product feature planning
- Match methodology to respondents & goal
  - Phone, mail, web, in person, etc.
  - Size, speed, accuracy
  - Sampling – think!
- Ask valid questions
  - Match question and response data type
- Analyze results
  - Consider response bias, subgroup differences
  - Interpret and make recommendations



## Keep the survey easy and interesting

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- Make it easy to respond
- Write fewer questions
- Keep questions short & clear – 25 words max.
- Only ask for information you know you'll use now
- Test-drive your questions frequently
- Use “proven” questions
- Use simple language; define words that might be misunderstood
- Don't use double negatives or other “brain twisters”
- Only one topic per question!

# Qualitative research

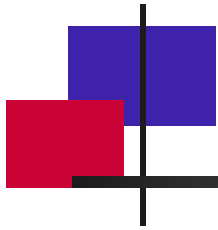


- Customer interviews
  - Positioning & messaging
  - Sales strategy
  - Delivery strategy
  - Product roadmap
- Usability tests
  - Product features, priorities
  - Application differences
  - Clarity, support
- Focus groups
  - New products
  - Direction or validation

## Honest customer conversations are gold



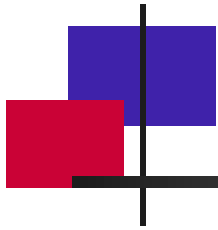
- If it's a small population, talk to them all
  - Confirm or identify subgroups
- Use a call guide, but keep it conversational
  - Cover same ground with everyone for comparison
  - Get THEIR words for pain, advantages, goals, etc.
  - Checklist for confirming importance of traits
- The "outsider advantage" can be significant
  - Customer explains background more freely (you should know it already!)
  - Confidentiality is an option
  - Interviewer can "hear" more objectively
  - You get the halo effect of asking their views



## Audit your understanding: what do you know?

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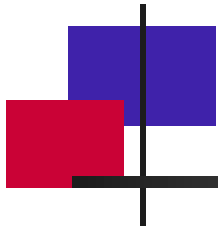
- Market context
- Customer perspective
- Company characteristics
- Competitive dynamics



## Designing your project

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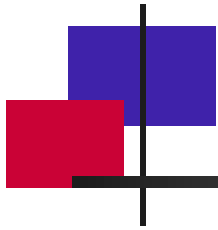
- What would you most like to know?
- Why? How would you use the information?
- How can you find out?
- How long will it take?
- What resources are required?



## Getting started ideas

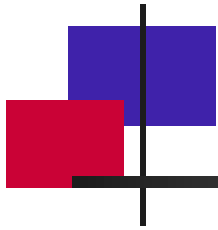
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- Market overview
- Competitive situation
- Product comparison
- Company advantages
- Customer characteristics
- Customer perspectives
- Sales process understanding



## The most important thing: get moving!

- You have to get started to learn:
  - What you know
  - What you don't know, but need to
- Start with a series of short projects
  - What you learn will inform the next steps
  - Spend weeks, not months, to put basics in place
- Develop a strategy and action plan
  - Then execute → evaluate → adjust in a series of steps
  - Use more formal research methods to validate



## For more information...

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This material was presented at the IITA Marketing Roundtable meeting on January 11, 2006. This version of the slides does not include samples of research or strategies developed using the approach described which were included at the live session. Please contact Elan Long at SpringSmart for further information.

SpringSmart Inc.

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