How You Can Win the ‘David and Goliath’ Battle With Big Brands

Small businesses are using street smarts and creativity to stay in the game against major corporations.

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Amazon, Microsoft, Google. Is it possible to play in the same spaces these big names already occupy and still keep your company in it to win it?

Believe it or not, it is. The internet, big data and the gig economy have lowered the barriers to entry for new businesses, paving the way for small, niche firms that can compete with certain aspects of large brand-name businesses. The world is running on scrappy small businesses that find new ways to compete and succeed. How are small firms able to take on large brand names with seemingly infinite budgets? By being ready to pivot quickly and sticking to the following tenets:

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1. Think small and win big.

When you don’t have the resources to be as expansive in your offerings as the big players, the alternative is to get as good as possible at a specific niche. The narrower your focus, the easier it will be for you to compete in that space. Trying

to advertise for “Shoes” is going to be very expensive, but cornering the market on “Size 6 red sparkle flats for women” will be much easier and much less expensive.

While Netflix is now a well-known giant, the company started as a small upstart taking on the established Blockbuster. Reed Hastings, Netflix’s CEO, recently summed up how keeping a narrow focus on building emotional connections with key markets is helping the company continue to compete against Amazon: “We’ll never be as good as them at what they’re trying to be,” he explained. “Think of it as they’re trying to be Walmart, we’re trying to be Starbucks. So, super focused on one thing that people are very passionate about.”

2. Partner with the major leaguers.

It might seem too good to be true, but plenty of larger companies are not only willing to partner with companies in their fields but are actively pursuing those opportunities. These partnerships help the larger corporations gain new skills, push internal projects to better solutions or grow the next-generation technology for their industry.

Tech companies are especially open to this approach. Microsoft has a partnership program in which it actively trains and assists other businesses with marketing and customer service coaching, purely for the purpose of improving the smaller companies’ customer interactions.

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3. Reinvent the game.

What things in your industry are stuck in the past? Here’s a clue — what things are you not yet doing on mobile devices? Focusing on one or two processes can help you reinvent the

game in your industry.

For example, Tophatter – a mobile discovery shopping app – has found a way to reinvent e-commerce as a fun and fulfilling game. This tiny twist on the e-commerce status quo makes a huge competitive difference, explained COO Andrew Blachman. “We’re no longer competing so much with Amazon and eBay as we are with whatever game or social media you play with on your phone,” Blachman says. “We want to be the thing you do when you’ve got two minutes standing in line at the grocery store or 10 minutes waiting for your kids to finish soccer practice. The idea is to bring back the concept that it’s actually fun to shop.”

4. Take risks to prove your worth.

It can be hard enough to establish your value to your audience, but when a high-profile competitor is constantly threatening to overshadow you, a bold gesture is almost always necessary. Consider putting your money where your mouth is with a bold approach that both establishes your value and increases the likelihood that you’ll turn heads.

I recently spoke with the founders of Strategic Growth Investment Management about how they are challenging the status quo in the finance industry in just this manner. Not only does the SGIM team put greater responsibility in their own hands by removing the middle man of a financial advisor, but it also places return on investment at a premium by only charging fees when a client’s investments beat the market – a highly unusual offer that sets the company apart from big-name competition.

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5. Use intimacy to your advantage.

The beauty of being a small business is that you can really get to know your target market and your customers. This intimate relationship is the key to winning over more customers. Pay close attention to what improves the experience of interacting with your brand for each customer. Use this information to craft a top-notch personalized experience that Amazon or Google never could.

Especially pay attention to what seems inconvenient, difficult or challenging for people.

Chances are, there’s an app, website plug-in or other nifty solution out there that is not that expensive to implement. The more of these frustrations you can eliminate, the better and more convenient your customer’s experience will be. Most of us are being pulled in so many directions in 2018 that convenience is always something that your target market will adore you for.

The little guys of the world are finding ways to win against the odds using the tools around them in new and exciting ways. By getting to really know your audience, keeping your business offerings simple and narrow and getting creative, you can take pivots the behemoths can’t and win the game after all.

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