

Wiebke Brüssel
bruessel@das-strategiebuero.de

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Strategy Needs More than One Umbrella

One of today's megatrends is "Individualisation". We can choose ingredients for jam or chocolate online and can have it made just for us. We can have sneakers or furniture made to our own design. We can watch movies "on demand" whenever we want. In short: We don't want to be put under the same umbrella anymore. We want sellers to fulfil our individual wishes. And more and more often they do.

If you work in a small company just like me, it is easy for you to offer an individual service to your clients. Since we are not that big we work for a small number of customers at the same time. In our projects we get to know our customers well and to adapt our service exactly to their individual needs.

Other companies work for a huge number of clients every day. Their service hardly includes individual elements. One example is Bremen's big company for public transport by tram and bus, the Bremer Strassenbahn AG, in short BSAG.

If you use public transport you will have to adapt your mobility needs to fixed timetables. If the bus is late or crowded it affects everybody just the same. In the evening you sometimes have to wait for a long time until the next tram or bus arrives. If it rains the bus stops do not offer enough roofed space for the waiting crowds. Ticket prices are quite high in Bremen.

Therefore, it is no wonder that many people prefer to use their own car. I do it as well. My personal mobility needs are:

- To be on time for business meetings without having to spend much time just waiting at bus stops,
- to be able to transport a lot of material needed for my work, and
- to reach places far away from bus or tram stops in clean and dry condition, especially in rainy weather that is so typical for our area.

Presently, the BSAG does not serve my needs. At least the management realized that today's customers do not like to be offered a fit-for-all service: The megatrends "Individualization" and



“Mobility” will lead to solutions that do not look like the present offer of most Public Transport companies.

Meanwhile BSAG managers plan to improve the company’s service offers by creating a smartphone app, using the megatrend “Technology”. Customers will then be able to order a taxi, find the next bus or tram stop or call a shared taxi. The latter is planned to be offered by creating a cooperation between BSAG and a partner. Thus, they want to offer a service for small groups of customers who need to go to the same destinations – just like me.

So far, so good. Unfortunately, the BSAG has not talked with a potential big provider of mobility in our city. It is called Taxiruf Bremen and offers a well-known taxi service. According to our local news program “buten un binnen” Taxiruf Bremen is also working on a similar app.

So this is what you can learn about strategy from this example:

- It is a good idea to have a look at megatrends and other trends, and to find out if your product fits the challenges of the zeitgeist. If not, it is high time to change your strategy.
- Think the way your customers do, to find out about their needs and motivation – or just ask them. The needs of BSAG customers might rather be “to arrive relaxed and on time at work” or “to find a cost-effective way to reach a destination”.
- It is a good idea to cooperate with business partners. This also is a trend which we small companies use successfully. Good for big companies as well that also discover the advantages. It is not a good idea to ignore a nearby strategic partner. Even if there have been problems between the two potential partners in the past it is worth starting to find out about the chance of cooperation.

Spring might be a good season to find out if you still put all your clients under one umbrella, and to look out for a better strategy. I hope that it will bring a lot of success to your business.

Editorial Notes

About the Author

Wiebke Brüssel is a graduate in business administration and managing partner of Strategiebüro (The Strategy Office) in Germany.

We moderate planning processes - including preparation and documentation. From a single question to strategic corporate planning. Our clients are companies and organizations in the private, social, and public sectors, companies at the beginning of their development, and founders.

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