

Strategy steps for future success

Denzil Rankine on why events require a strategy, not just a plan

Most organisers are finding growth increasingly hard to come by. We also know of disaster stories – Comdex, CeBIT, Baselworld and Interbike. These leading, well-established events failed to evolve with the market and respond to changing customer needs. If strategic planning had been part of their DNA, I’m confident the story would have been different.

One problem is that when an organiser has a winning tradeshow on its hands, it’s all too easy to ride the wave. The event grows and new opportunities come knocking. The budget is set along with a plan to deliver it, but little or no formal strategy.

But this is not sustainable. Every show should have a strategy that

reflects the realities not just of today’s market, but that of the future. This is one of the initiatives of AMR’s Exhibitions 2.0.

Setting the strategy for the event

Here is a simple set of steps:

1. Review the outlook of the underlying market

- Events are governed by trends in their served markets
- Use a simple structure to identify and analyse the market – e.g. changes in industry structure, technology, regulation, etc – and understand what the market of the future will be.

2. Assess its impact on customer needs

- Event participants want relevance and value
- Assess how market developments will impact customer needs of

the future.

3. Identify the gap with today’s event

- The event needs accurately to serve the market of today – and crucially of tomorrow
- Figure out dispassionately where you are missing the mark and how to evolve to meet the needs of tomorrow

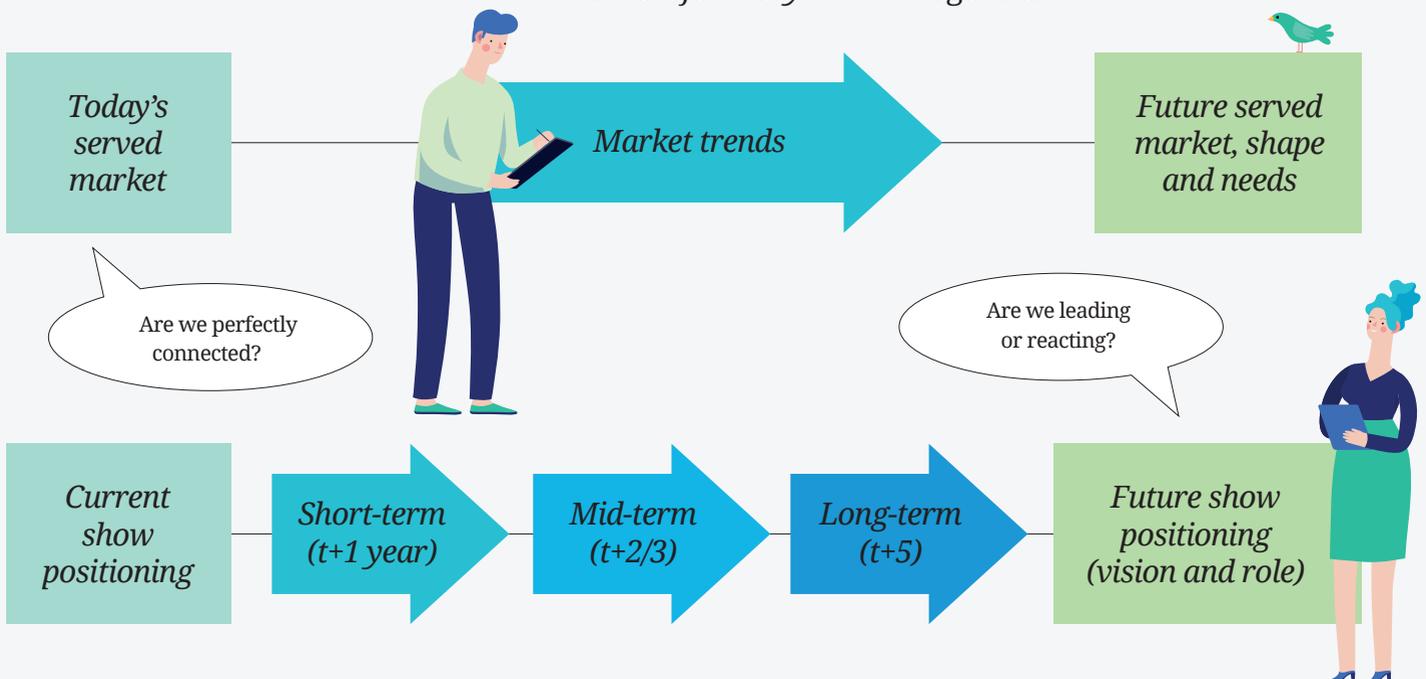
4. Move to the future show shape and positioning

- Set a clear vision for the event and its role – how it serves the future market
- Define a series of practical steps, edition by edition.

Making it happen

Strategy should be a continuous cycle, embedded in the mindset of event and business unit leadership, and understood by the operations teams.

*The strategic planning process
critical for every event – large or small*



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It should inspire and be the constant guide to daily decisions – which segments to develop, who to target and so on.

Strategy requires a commitment from the business. Enablers include:

- Well organised data and feedback systems (CRM, marketing automation, satisfaction metrics, steering committees, etc)

- Full involvement from leadership down to operations and customer-facing teams

- A close link between strategy and budgeting

- Correctly aligned incentives

- Clarity of results with plan, action

and communication.

We see a wide range of approaches to event strategy, and some of the things that it should not be. These include being a one-off, or something that is repeated as an annual chore without much original thought.

A well-implemented strategic planning process leads to both revenue growth and increased customer satisfaction. It helps event organisers to inform decision-making and to focus on what to achieve in the long-term. It gets event organisers closer to their markets, so they can evolve more easily to customer demands and avoid disaster stories. **EW**



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