



Winning Strategies in a Complicated World

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Biography

Alastair Hartrup is the Founder and Global CEO of network security experts, Network Critical (<https://www.networkcritical.com>).

Founded in 1997, Network Critical has been providing high-quality Network TAPs and Network Packet Brokers.

CEO and founder Alastair Hartrup has been at the helm since its foundation and under his leadership the company has grown from zero to a global multinational business.

Alastair blogs at <https://www.networkcritical.com/blog>

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Abstract

We live in a period of constant uncertainty fueled by factors such as globalization, worldwide economic challenges, climate change and much more. In fact, many businesses are struggling to stay aligned in what is increasingly being referred to as the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) nature of today's global competitive business environment. In this article, the author looks how businesses can create a winning strategy and, gain and maintain market share in what is undoubtedly a complicated world.

Introduction

Today volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity have been amplified tenfold as we move towards a post-Brexit environment. The UK leaves the EU by mid-2019 and as that moment approaches so the debate is widening in terms of what this will mean for the UK and the wider global economy.

To this point, hardly a day goes by without a headline proclaiming the 'golden opportunity' that Brexit represents, only to be countered by a gloomy prediction of economic decline, with some of our mainstay institutions reputedly drawing up plans to move their operations to other countries in the near-term. The truth is that no-one really knows how Brexit will play out, but what is self-evident is that the continued uncertainty stimulated by the current Brexit debate makes it tough for British companies to plan ahead and to compete. While we have heard some very encouraging reports about the performance of the UK economy, we do have to take seriously the central prediction of forecasters that leaving the EU will have a



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negative effect on the UK's economic growth. Taken in this context, it is likely that UK businesses will face volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity at unprecedented levels.

Here at Network Critical we are a UK company with a global footprint and we are proud of the products that we manufacture which enable network architects and managers to better understand network traffic and protect valuable information and infrastructure. We also know all too well that competition is a fact of life in our world where we have limited resources.

It is good to be king

The multi-billion-dollar mega-companies have some advantages that are difficult for smaller companies to address head on. The marketing and research budgets of these companies are larger than the total revenue of many of their smaller competitors. Their regional sales coverage is denser and the sales support resources likely deeper than smaller organizations can afford. By sheer force alone these companies will dominate their primary markets. They are likely also looking for new markets to attack as well. However, if you are thinking there is no hope for the little guy ... think again.

The market leaders will lead primarily by force. The old IBM tag line, "No one ever got fired for buying IBM" is a great example of how big guys win. They can bring products to market faster, forge high level relationships with the largest accounts and lock up large deals by the sheer scale of their operations. If you are king, you take advantage of your wealth, connections, reach and force. You crush little guys who get in your way by running them out of business or buying the pestering ones that will not go away.

If not a king, a guerrilla be

The description above paints a pretty bleak picture for the peasants. They do not wield the power or have the wealth of the kings. However, they also do not have to support the palace infrastructure and they may have a better understanding of the needs of the commoners.

First, remember that many of the mega-companies started as small companies. They either created something disruptive that no one else had or they built and marketed something better than the kings of the day. They figured out how to survive and to grow.

Generally, a direct, head on competition between a smaller company and a mega-company will end up badly for the smaller company. However, there are many strategic avenues for small companies to carve out a niche in a market and thrive and grow. Strategy number one is: do not try to compete head to head with someone that has a bigger head.

The biggest and strongest mega-companies have markets/segments in their corporate portfolio where they are not as strong as in their other, more dominant, markets. This is where the smart guerrilla picks a target. Understanding the



weaker markets/segments of your competitors is step one in devising a winning competitive strategy.

In parallel with understanding your competitor, it is also important to understand yourself. Look inside to understand where you are faster, cheaper, smaller, simpler, more innovative, more connected, smarter, more focused and/or just better than your competition. Then you put the pieces of the puzzle together and match your strengths with the weaker areas of your competition and that becomes the target for your success strategy. If you have a laser focus on this target and you don't try to blanket all the outer rings of the target you can compete and thrive.

Remember, you don't have to be big to be the best at what you do. Pick your targets and focus in order to be the best there is in your particular niche. A proactive mind-set and a willingness to listen and learn and take small steps to success will help to place your business in a positive position. Adopting systems and processes that help businesses make sense of the VUCA world that the Brexit process is creating, is crucial. This, in turn, helps to generate belief in the direction of travel for your business which generates confidence, which generates success.

Mark my words, this is exactly how small companies get to be big companies!