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Business Bumper Cars

I recently took my kids to an amusement park that had the old style bumper cars. You remember the kind. The sparks on the roof, the smell of arcing electricity, the chaos on the floor, grandmas kamikazing 7 year olds as if they were getting even for some old score they had to settle. Remember? Ahhh. Good times. Well, while I was standing in line with my two boys, the girls were off with mom to go on some other less violent ride, it dawned on me that what I was watching on the bumper floor was a lot like today's business climate. Screams and all!

There were people driving everywhere. Some impotent to move because their didn't know how to steer their car. Others driving around with a mad look in their eyes trying to figure out how to steer the car, and others just smashing into each other, log jammed in the center of the arena. Finally, there were a couple of smart drivers under control cruising the outer ring of confusion, picking the right moment to pummel some unsuspecting driver. I cant help to mention the pain in the but driver who for some unknown reason has identified you or your child as their target and spends the whole ride trying to nail you....repeatedly. Which of course, requires immediate counter measures and a turn the hunted into hunter strategy. But I digress. But not really.

You see, this chaos is very much like the current business climate. Businesses in all industry sectors are in chaos. Driving around, smashing into things and being stuck in the middle log jam because they don't know what to do. We are in an global business environment that is unprecedented and certainly not one they teach about in an MBA program. When you combine the massive government intervention into the private sector, business verticals shrinking or at best wildly fluctuating, costing and budgeting models changing on a dime, you end up with the equivalent of business bumper cars. Sure there are those business that drive the periphery to stay out of the mix and try to make things happen, but those are the exception to the rule. Most business are in the log jam. So what to do?

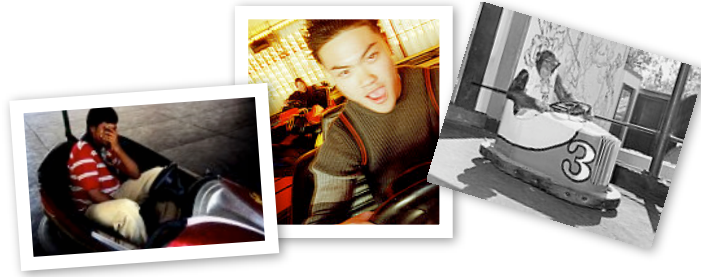
First, there is no magic bullet. These are crazy and tough times. In addition, most businesses small and large are too cumbersome to just simply turn on a dime. Even so called lean business. But there are things that can be done to help break the bumper car log jam and put your business in a stronger and more nimble place. Like most successful strategies, they are deceptively simple, obvious and dynamic to ebb and flow with the uncontrollable dynamics of global business. So what are these strategies? Well, I have listed 10 basics herein:

1: My first rule of chaos is there is always opportunity to be found in chaos. You just have to know where to look. What does this mean? Look at better ways to differentiate and get out of the commodity play. Build value instead of trying to compete just on price. Hone your message, product and service strategy, etc. Laser focus on your competencies. These simple things will help you stay out of the noise.

2: Use this period to innovate. Really innovate. People are looking for something new. It could be as simple as a reposition of your brand. A clearer message. New products and modified solutions. More cost effective smart sourcing, etc. Innovation is a multi-dimensional activity. Remember, what made you great in the past will not necessarily make you great in the future so you MUST innovate. If you need help with this, give me a call.

3: Establish leadership both in your organization and in the market. I mean real leadership. Lead from the front. Execute. Even if you fail or falter, you're still moving and can adjust course accordingly. If your standing still, its too easy to get picked off. Also remember, if you getting kicked in the butt all the time..... by your competitors complaining, or your employee's complaining because of change, that means your out front where you need to be. Leading.

4: Look at the market place from your customers perspective. I know, Duh right. You would be surprised how many companies forget this simply perspective. Adjust your solutions, value, products, services, etc. to meet the needs of your customers. Anticipate and prepare for where the future is going to be. Not what is happening now. If you focus on only the hear and now, you will only be following, not leading. If you know how to look and use data effectively you can predict where the market is going. What your customers will need. Even in this crazy market. In fact, absolutely in this market.



5: Communicate. Communicate both internally and externally. Internally you want to make sure your team is on the same page and executing to the same objectives. Externally, you want your customers and partners to know who, what, when, why, how and where. It's too easy to start making radical changes in marketing, sales, branding, and other external facing communication when you're in a pinch, desperate and grasping at solutions. But remember, you will only confuse the marketplace if you are shooting from the hip and trying to be all things to all people. FOCUS and EXECUTE

6: Look at ways to leverage technology more effectively. Technology can do a lot for a company, but if you don't know how to leverage the data, mine the info, and build effective and meaningful strategies from technology enabled solutions – TES, you risk getting swallowed up in the data and become impotent to adjust course, execute and lead. Again, if you need help here, give me a call.

7: Don't get pigeon holed into one business strategy. Too many times executives will read a book, attend a seminar, talk to a colleague, etc. and think that what works for others will work for you. Most of the time it doesn't. While there are fundamental benefits in most business, marketing, and corporate strategies, business is not static. Most of my clients forget this. They think my business has been successful for X years and I never changed a thing. We execute our strategy and it works. I always hate telling them that it doesn't. Especially when I use the data to prove it. If the global business world is changing why would your business be any different? There is a saying used in the Marine Corp that I am fond of quoting to my clients. "Adapt and Overcome". Your business should be adaptable. Flexible. Dynamic. This way when the markets change or competitors pull up alongside you in the race, you can adapt and overcome the challenge. If you're not adaptable your business will snap and start to fail.

8: Just like the rubber on the edges of the bumper car that are used to "bump" someone, you need to have your own rubber bumpers to bump off challenges. You do this by building dynamic, flexible and aggressive forward looking strategies. These are derived by solid marketing data and communication, lean and cost effective product/service development, strong R&D and innovation, bold and confident leadership executing your strategy. Yes, you will get bumped. But being able to absorb the hit and move on is the key.



9: Take a global approach. Just because your core markets maybe domestic, perhaps your growth strategy, cost reduction strategy, etc. may be across the ocean. Depending on the size of your business, this approach may be of value. To many companies when faced with challenges become myopic. Broaden your field of play and you have a better chance of scoring a goal, identifying beneficial team mates and winning the game.

10: Bumper Car Hell. We are all trying to stay out of the log jam and drive smooth so we can pick our target without getting hammered in the back by the maniacal screaming 10 year old. You will take a hit. No question. Many times it's because we can't drive the car and smash into the wall. Other times it's because we're in the game and playing for keeps. Remember that grandma! But, regardless of the arena, you need to move forward with agility, vision, strategy and execution. To succeed in today's global business and bumper cars, doing these things will keep you moving in the right direction.

So in the end, we rode the bumper cars. My youngest son with me in one car, my oldest son in the other car. We did ok. Took some hits, gave some hits, evaded the crazy people and enjoyed ourselves. Screaming and all. Mostly by me! As the ride ended and I exited the car with the scent of arcing bumpers in my nose, I couldn't help wonder how many businesses today are screaming and trying to avoid taking a hit and driving in circles because they couldn't get out of the mass of bumper cars stuck in the middle because they didn't know what to do. Is that you? If so, we need to talk.

About the Author: David A. Frederick, II

Frederick is the Executive Director and CEO of the Institute For Advanced Innovation Research. He is a seasoned senior business executive, technologist, and visionary with over 25 years experience in the global technology, strategic management, consulting, integrated marketing, innovation, and media and interactive business industries. He is a recognized leader on strategic management, innovation, the convergence of interactive media, and has been a key speaker on numerous industry round tables. He is also a recognized author on such topics as innovation, strategy, IP monetization, management, marketing, business process and content development. He pioneered the first digital musical keyboard instrument based solely on a Windows Operating System, as well as pioneered the HPX- Hierarchal Platform Xchange and the follow on MPX- Media Platform Xchange, a SOA based software architecture used in managing and sharing voluminous amounts of associated meta data, digital content and rich media. His experience in VC, M&A and PE has included raising venture funding of over \$30M and M&A activity of over \$36M.

In addition to his executive background, Frederick served as Adjunct Professor of Strategic Management, Executive MBA Program for Norwich University, is a member of and contributor to the Management Round Table, The Institute of Management Consultants, IEEE, Harvard Law School - Program on Negotiation, MIT Enterprise Forum, APS - American Physical Society - American Physics, United States Naval Institute, IGDA (International Game Developers Association) Intellectual Property Rights Committee as well as a member of the Council of Communications Advisers, Media and Entertainment.

Frederick earned a BS in International Business and an MBA from Weston Reserve University and conducted graduate work at MIT Sloan School of Management and Harvard Law School. He is currently working towards his PhD in Behavioral and Policy Sciences with a specialty in Innovation from Atlantic International University. He also holds executive certificates from Harvard Law School and MIT Sloan School of Management (Massachusetts Institute of Technology).

Mr. Frederick is an EMMY nominated and multi-award winning composer, sound designer and producer having won the Chick Corea Jazz Masters Scholarship to Berklee College of Music. He is also a veteran of the United States Navy.

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