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The most profitable strategies are built on differentiation: offering customers what they value that competitors don't have. But most companies, seeking to differentiate themselves, focus their energy only on their products or services. In fact, the company has the ability to differentiate itself at any point where it comes into contact with its customers - from the moment customers realize that they need a product or service at a time when they no longer want to, and decide to dispose of it, they hide the opportunity to position their offers in a way that they and their competitors would never have thought it was possible. Take the case of Blyth Industries, a candle manufacturer. By differentiating and rediffering its products, Blyth has managed to grow from a \$2 million U.S. candle maker used for religious purposes to the global candle and accessories business with nearly \$500 million in sales and a market value of \$1.2 billion. Blythe's story, to put it simply, is a manifestation of the power of strategic differentiation. Business history is full of stories of entrepreneurs who came across a great idea, which then became the cornerstone of a successful company. But finding ways to differentiate your company should not be an act of genius or intuition. It is a skill that can be developed and developed. We have developed a two-party approach that can help companies continually identify new points of differentiation and develop the ability to generate successful differentiation strategies. The first part, Displaying the consumption chain, reflects the customer's overall experience with a product or service. The second, An analysis of your customers' experience, shows managers how a brainstorming about every step in the consumption chain can cause many ways to differentiate even the most mundane products or services. As we have already said, the first step towards strategic differentiation is to map the entire customer experience with your product or service. We encourage companies to do this exercise for every important segment of their customers. The first step is to match your client's entire experience with the product. To begin with, gather groups from all areas of your company, particularly those employees who use marketing data, and those who have personal or phone contacts with customers. Charge groups with definition for each major segment of the market of all the steps that customers go through from the time they first know about your product, to the time when they finally have to get rid of it stop using it. Naturally, each product or service will have a slightly different chain of consumption. However, some activities are common to most chains. Consider the following questions, each illustrating one of these activities. Then, when a group begins to feel a special relationship between your customers and your products, ask questions about more complex activities related to your business. How do people realize their need for your product or service? Do consumers realize that you can meet their needs? Do they know that they even have a need that can be met? Your company can create a powerful source of differentiation if it can make consumers aware of the need in a way that is unique and subtle. Consider the problem of differentiating everyday consumer product, such as a toothbrush. For many people, brushing their teeth is a ritual they pay relatively little attention to. As a result, many brushes are used far beyond the moment when their bristles are worn and are no longer effective. The manufacturer of the Oral-B toothbrush has discovered a way to benefit from this widespread habit. The company, by introducing the patented blue dye into the central bristles of its toothbrushes, has found a way for the brush to communicate with the customer. As the brush is used, the dye gradually disappears. When the dye is gone, the brush is no longer effective and needs to be replaced. Thus, customers are aware of a need that has not previously been recognized. So far, the idea sounds like something out of Marketing 101. Of particular value is the fact that the need can only be filled by the patented Oral-B process. The company has turned differentiation into a competitive advantage. How do users find your offer? Opportunities for differentiation based on the search process include providing your product when others don't (24-hour phone order lines), offering your product in places where competitors don't offer them (mini McDonald's outlets in Wal-Mart stores), and making your product ubiquitous (Coca-Cola). Making the search process less complex, convenient, less expensive, and more familiar is all ways that companies can differentiate themselves. And when competitors can't or won't do the same thing - at least not immediately - you have the potential for strategic advantage. One example is the rapid growth in catalog sales on channels previously dominated by retail chains. Consumers can now get detailed, last-minute information about an exciting range of products over the phone or online, unable to withstand the inconvenience of visiting the salon and often lacking knowledge of the floor sales staff. PC Connection and Mac Connection, which computers through its catalog, running 24-hour-a-day, seven days a week toll-free phone number for information about computers, software and related products. When a subscriber expresses interest in buying a computer system, a company representative asks a number of questions to narrow down the opportunities for a few good candidates. The representative and the consumer can then discuss each option in detail. What is remarkable about this approach is that, in fact, it allows consumers to tailor the search experience to their own needs. How do consumers make their final choices? Once the consumer has narrowed the opportunity, he or she must make a choice. Can you make the selection process more convenient, less annoying or more convenient? Look for the ideal situation in which the procedures of competitors actually discourage people from choosing their products, while your procedures encourage people to come to you. Citibank for years has captured a significant share of the college's student market for credit cards, simply making it easy for students to get a card while competitors have made it difficult. Can you make the buying process more convenient and less annoying? Another example of this dynamic is the game right now in the business of used cars. For many potential customers, the experience of choosing a chase is a test- to the point that one CEO of a major automaker has noted that some people would prefer to have a root canal. But a new method of choosing cars is transforming the industry. Companies such as CarMax Auto Superstore and AutoNation USA are focused on selecting experience as their competitive focus. In the Car-Max cabin, customers sit in front of the computer and indicate what features they are looking for in the car. They can then, privately, scroll through detailed descriptions of cars that could meet their needs. The final (and only) price for each vehicle is specified. The sales assistant then allows customers to check the cars they are interested in and process all the documents if they decide to buy one. Selling is not done by sellers, but by the selection process that customers create for themselves. CarMax and AutoNation sell cars, allowing customers to create their own selection process. How do customers order and buy your product or service? This issue is especially important for relatively inexpensive, large volumes of goods. Can a company differentiate itself by making the ordering and buying process more convenient? American Hospital Supply has revolutionized its industry by radically simplifying the process of ordering and restocking products such as bandages, tongue depressors, syringes and disinfectants. The company installed computer terminals in every hospital and medical supply store with which it did business. The terminals connected these customers to the company's system, allowing direct shipment and automatic restocking whenever shipments fell below Level. Hallmark uses a similar approach for its greeting cards. Many companies, including ice cream makers and pet food manufacturers, also use this method to treat supermarket shelves, reaping the fruits of preferred access to these major outlets, and excellent displays. Another, more subtle advantage of this form of differentiation is that it imposes on customers the cost of switching, which may be tempted to try another supplier. Once customers have signed up, it is expensive for them to switch; this deterrent creates a barrier to competition and, again, a potential strategic advantage for the supplier. How does your product or service work? Delivery provides many opportunities for differentiation, especially if the product is an impulsive purchase or if the customer needs it immediately. Let's go back to our computer dealer catalog, PC Connection. Customers can call his toll-free number as early as 3 a.m. to receive deliveries of goods at the warehouse the next day. How does a company do this? Surprising turnaround times are possible, because warehouse and distribution facilities are conveniently located near the center of the Airborne Express. Packages can be picked up in a warehouse, transferred to the Airborne Forces and shipped to the customer in a matter of hours. This delivery strategy not only represents a real benefit to customers, but because there is a limited number of opportunities for such a warehouse hub connection, it will be difficult for competitors to adopt the same strategy. What happens when your product or service is delivered? Often overlooked the possibility of differentiation is to consider what should happen from the time the company delivers the product on time the customer actually uses it. Opening, checking, transporting and assembling products are often major problems for customers. This even applies to the provision of services. Consider how difficult it can be to get car crash claims handled and paid for by the insurance company. Now consider how progressive insurance in Cleveland, Ohio, solved this problem. The company has a fleet of regulators claiming on the road every day, ready to rush to the site of any auto-act on its territory. There they can record all the information they need and often settle claims in place for policyholders. This process has greatly increased customer satisfaction by eliminating the hassle and delays that so often accompany the usual reporting, inspection and evaluation methods. A side advantage for the company is that its approach has also reduced the frequency of fraud by reducing the ability to file false claims and inflate repair bills. How yours is set This step in the supply chain is especially relevant for companies with complex products. For example, the installation has created a huge barrier for computer manufacturers to break into the market for novice PC users. Computer novices are known to be intolerant of on-screen messages such as Disk Error 23. Compaq has discovered a valuable way to differentiate itself: it provides customers with a convenient video setup. Compaq Computer, with its Presario line, was one of the first to focus on installation as a source of differentiation. Instead of providing a book of instructions filled with technical terminology, Compaq offers its clients a poster that clearly illustrates the ten stages of the installation. The company uses colored cords, cables and sockets to simplify installation further, and rigged its computers so that hilarious video and audio presentations leads new users through the installation and registration process when they first turn on the machine. How is your product or service paid for? Many companies unwittingly cause their customers serious difficulties with their payment policy. Here's a test to see if payment can be such a problem for your customers: Take a walk to your receivables department and ask to see a copy of a recent invoice. If your company is anything like about 80% of those we worked with, the account will be almost incomprehensible. Why? Because invoices are usually designed by systems for systems rather than customers. Given the prevalence of this situation, your company may find ways to set itself apart by making the entire payment process easier for customers to understand. You can discover even more opportunities by rethinking why your company uses its current payment policy in the first place. We once worked with a company in the energy control business, which hardly sold its services to the owners of residential cooperatives. In each chicken coop, the company faced opposition from solid core owners who resisted the capital costs involved in installing an energy management system. In the end, the company gained a huge share of the cooperative market by changing its policy. Customers no longer pay installation fees; instead, they pay over time, out of energy savings. How is your product stored? When it is expensive, inconvenient, or down to the peril of customers to have a product just sitting, opportunities for differentiation abound. Air Products and Chemicals, a manufacturer of industrial gases, has come to dominate its market segments, solves the problem of storage. Realizing that most of its customers - chemical companies - would prefer to avoid the burden of having to store huge amounts of dangerous high-pressure gases, Air Products has built small industrial gas plants next to customers' facilities. The move pleased customers; it will also reduce the cost of switching. Best of all once the Air Products factory On the spot, competitors had little room to move in. What difficulties are there? Customers face when they have to transport a product from one place to another? Whether it's a room trip or through the state, this step in the supply chain is another often overlooked possibility of differentiation. Ask yourself the following questions: Does the customer find the product fragile? Hard to pack? Uncomfortable to move? Think of how John Scully's marketing team at Pepsi-Cola used packaging as a way to distinguish Pepsi from Coke. Sculley's team created a separate, albeit temporary, advantage for Pepsi in the early 1970s, designing plastic bottles that were lighter and thus easier for customers than heavy glass bottles of the time. The beauty of the move was that it not only made holding soda easier, but it also diminished the advantage of the famous contoured glass coke bottle. At the time it was difficult to produce plastic bottles in this form. Why does the customer actually use your product? Finding more effective ways for customers to use a product or service is powerfully different. And such opportunities abound, especially for companies whose products are expensive and used relatively rarely. General Electric Transportation Systems, which makes diesel-electric locomotives, used the move in the consumer chain as the basis for rethinking its business. With few exceptions, the railways that are customers of GE locomotives are not all that attached to a particular unit. What they really want to know, if they have cargo on the ship, will the locomotive be there to tow it? GE is working on an agreement by which the company will ensure that the locomotive will be available on demand. Under this arrangement, GE will take over the control of all engines in the customer system. This will save the customer from repair and maintenance problems, as well as allow you to get economies of scale by managing the entire network. Moreover, the entrance barrier created by such a system can be huge. What do customers need help with when using your product? The company with the most useful response has a significant advantage here. GE, for example, has the hugely popular number 800, which is available 24 hours a day to help people who are having difficulty using any of the company's consumer products. Similarly, Butterball Turkey has 24-hour field hotline cooking questions from hundreds of customers every Thanksgiving. Butterball recently added its hotline with an Internet homepage and a turkey cooking guide that its customers can download. What about refunds or exchanges? Too many companies have invested their best in selling a lifecycle product, that long-term loyalty requires attention to the needs of customers throughout their experience with the product. Handling things is good when the product doesn't work can be as powerful as the satisfaction of necessity that motivated the original purchase. Nordstrom takes its return policy without question seriously, and the result is a high level of customer satisfaction. Nordstrom is a great example of a company that has taken this issue to heart. The clothing retailer recorded a national advertisement in the 1970s, when one of the store managers took a set of tires from a customer, despite the fact that Nordstrom did not sell tires. By focusing on its no-question return policy and actively promoting it, Nordstrom has strengthened its position as a company that provides unique customer service. Customers may be unhappy with the brands they return, but they are not dissatisfied with the store. How is your product repaired or serviced? As many users of high-tech products will witness, the experience of repair - both good and bad - can affect the lifespan of subsequent purchases. The ideal solution used by Tandem Computers, which manufactures computers with parallel central processing devices for applications where downtime is a major problem, is to try to repair the product even before the customer realizes that such a service is needed. Tandem employees can detect a faulty component using remote diagnostics, send the appropriate part and instructions to the customer by express mail, and go through the customer's repair process over the phone. This approach has almost completely eliminated costly and inconvenient downtime for the company's customers; it has also eliminated the need for expensive field service. Otis Elevator uses remote diagnostics in a different way. In high-traffic office buildings, where elevator maintenance is a major inconvenience for both residents and visitors, Otis uses its remote diagnostic capabilities to predict possible service disruptions. It directs staff to carry out preventive maintenance in the evening, when traffic lights. What happens when your product is removed or no longer used? In a world in which it is becoming increasingly economical to simply replace many products as they age rather than spending money to fix them, what do customers do with outdated products? Canon offers an interesting example of how a company can differentiate itself at this stage in a chain. It has developed a system that allows customers to return the printer cartridges from Canon. The cartridges are then rehabilitated and resold as such. This process makes it easier for customers to return the cartridges they use: all they need to do is opt out of the prepaid package at the United Parcel Service collection station. At the same time, this enhances Canon's image as an environmentally friendly organization. Analyzing your customers' experience While displaying the supply chain is a useful tool in itself, the strategic value of our approach is the next step: analysis analysis Customer experience. The goal is to get an idea of the customer by assessing the context in which each step of the consumption chain unfolds. It is important to remember that the client always interacts with people, places, events or activities. These interactions determine the customer's feelings about your product or service in every link in the chain. When they are viewed strategically, they can shape the dynamics of competition for that customer's business. Essentially, this step involves considering how a series of simple questions are, what, where, who, when and how to apply at each link in the supply chain. We found that the most helpful way to approach this exercise is to a group of people from the company start the path with any of their questions and brainstorming until their ideas run out. Sometimes this question will not lead to any particular insight. It's not a problem; the goal is to collect a list of possible differentiation points. Once the ideas are on the table, you can evaluate each one and choose the ones that are most promising to your situation. To analyze the customer's experience, let's look at how five simple questions are applied in each link in the chain. Blyth Industries, the candle manufacturer we mentioned earlier, is a good example of how customer experience analysis works in practice. By studying the options raised by their analysis, Blyth employees were able to adopt a prosaic product that is easy to emulate and create a profitable competitive advantage. It is important to understand that Blyth does not make any sense in being able to create a legendary sustainable competitive advantage - the much-loved lyrics of strategies - in any segment of the candle market. Rather, what the company aims to do is be the first to create and then dominate many small niches in quick succession over time, to get savings from distribution and scale by the huge number of products that it has on the market. Consider some of the opportunities that Blyth employees discovered when they applied questions to their business: What? What do customers do at every point in the consumer chain? What else would they like to do? What problems can they experience? (These issues may not be directly related to your product or service.) Is there anything

you can do to improve your experience while they are at this stage of the circuit? Candle makers can explore the possibility of providing a full candle experience. Candles, when you think about it, can play a role in everyday life in many different ways. Among other things, they are used to celebrate birthdays, create a festive atmosphere for parties, warm dishes from the buffet, combat power outages, and create a mood for romantic evenings. Candles can be in specialty stores, shops, craft fairs, in supermarkets, and in card shops. In addition, their use can be accompanied by a huge variety of containers, displays, accents and products that create mood. All this suggests that candle makers can do well to explore the possibility of providing a full candle experience by producing or marketing additional products as well. Where is? Where are your customers when they are currently in the supply chain? Where else could they be? Where would they like to be? Can you arrange for them to be there? Do they have any concerns about their whereabouts? Because candles can have so many uses, it's not surprising that there are so many potential places to use them. Candles can be found on the beach, on picnics, at proms, at weddings, at home, in restaurants, on children's birthdays, and in places of worship. What quickly became apparent for Blyth was that the problems and behavior patterns of their customers were likely to be different in each location. This understanding suggests that location-based differentiation is possible. For example, think about how candles are used at home. Virtually every room in the house has potential: dining room, living room, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, and basement all presumably can provide settings for the use of candles, each for different reasons. That? Who else is with the client on any given link in the chain? Do these other people have any influence on the customer? Are their thoughts or problems important? If you could arrange it, who else could be with a client? If you could organize it, how can these other people influence a customer's decision to buy your product? By cooking on the line of thinking Blyth is used about home candles, consider using candles in the dining room. Who else is going to be there? Other people may be members of a nearby or extended family, business partners, close friends or groom. Each type of person means a possible differentiation point; Each type means a different experience, a different mood and a different time. When? When at what time of day and night, what day of the week, what time of year are your customers on a particular link in the chain? Does this time cause any problems? If you could organize it, when would they be on this link? Take a dining script with your family. Blyth found that question when found a lot of opportunities for differentiation. Candles are used in the dining room with the family for birthdays, anniversaries, holidays and graduation days, as well as while eating marking other special occasions. Each case gives a certain experience. Important for candles, each also evokes different emotions. Blyth staff were able to identify what has become several successful new areas of differentiation by exploring how their candles can be Special shapes, colors or fragrances. They also came up with many ways to pack candles and combine them with accessories such as napkins to suit each situation. Candles intended for use with family members on Thanksgiving, for example, can be scented with cinnamon, painted in tones associated with the holiday, and sold with special holders. Because there are many holidays and other occasions when families get together in the dining room, you can start to get an idea of the possibilities for differentiation. In addition, the process can be repeated for many different companions and tweaks as the imagination of your employees can contemplate. Blyth, for example, also found a huge opportunity to differentiate its products for romantic dishes. The CEO of Goergen has worked hard to develop scented candles in various forms in order to affect the atmosphere of such occasions, so that, as he says, the food becomes dining, and the dining room becomes a romance. As? How are your customers' needs addressed? Do they have any concerns about how your company meets their needs? How else could you get involved in their needs and concerns? Think about how candles are used outdoors, say at a barbecue company. Citronella candles come to mind. In addition to creating a festive atmosphere, they are an attractive way to protect people from insect bites. As we have seen, there is considerable potential for differentiation even in products so simple that at first glance they seem to be commodities. Candles are just one. Gasoline is different. (See exhibit Is there a way to differentiate the sale of gas?) Understanding customer experience in any chain for any product gives companies the opportunity to identify and explore many unconventional ways of creating value. The challenge then becomes a choice of this wealth of possibilities; Considering how each idea meshes with specific company skills, assets and systems; and focusing only on those that can generate a competitive advantage. Each idea can also open the way for the development of a new competency. Even a simple product such as gasoline can be differentiated. Let's look at the connection between buying a consumption chain. What else do your customers do when they buy gasoline? Among other things, they can be commuting, on vacation trips, on business trips, on vacation, shopping, or planning to use equipment (such as mower or cultivated). If you are pursuing a business trip option, the next question is, who are they with when they buy gasoline on a business trip? Your client may be alone or accompanied by a colleague. He or she may be with a spouse or a significant other. Your client can also travel with a group of people. If you pursue the idea that your client is one, the next question is: where is your while he or she is on a business trip? Your client can stop first at a local gas station and then again between cities along the way. With these ideas in mind, think: when does your customer buy gasoline? Anytime: day or night; during the week or on weekends. Which leads to: Does your client have any problems in any of these situations, and how does your company solve them? Among other things, your client may worry about getting lost or running out of gas. Also, your client certainly doesn't want the car to break. If you take a closer look at concerns about personal safety, one way to differentiate the gasoline sales process will be to reconfigure the structure of your gas stations along these highways, which are the main business routes. For example, you can make sure your station is well lit and controlled; Provide the attendant for gas pumping; Provide a travel advisor at each station who has detailed knowledge of the area; such a person may be able to inform your client about the safest routes, areas under construction, congested areas, and good restaurants and hotels; arrange for customers who buy gas to rent a mobile phone at a gas station, perhaps negotiate with a phone company to share the proceeds of use. Too many companies pursue what seems like new ideas without carefully assessing whether their organizations are appropriate for doing so and how quickly competitors can respond. Robert Goergen knows that Blyth Industries has certain strengths of its competitors there, including several unique production methods and, more importantly, a deep knowledge of fragrances. These particular strengths, combined with a strong customer understanding based on market research, give Blyth an advantage. Thus, Goergen evaluates the possibilities for differentiation based on these considerations and moves forward only with ideas that promise the strongest returns. Focused creativity Almost every company with which we have ever worked, has in it dozens of people of considerable creativity and imagination. Unfortunately, too often, a company never benefits because this talent is not properly focused. It can even be squelched by the homogenization pressures that any major organization would normally impose. An important advantage of the process we talked about above is that it opens up creativity in the organization, so that the ideas of specific people can contribute to the overall understanding of the customer, so that the company, in fact, knows its customers almost better than they know. Companies that do this successfully find themselves deeply attuned to their markets. And as entrepreneurs, they imagination they have instead of money that they can not surpass the competition where it counts. Version version this article was published in the July-August issue of Harvard Business Review for July-August 1997. Reviews. exact differential equations examples and solutions pdf

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