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*Escaping the Competitive Herd*

Introduce your top leadership to the concept of competitive herding. Make sure they understand the reasons companies have a natural tendency to herd. Lead the team through a series of steps:

**Honest Self-Diagnosis.** How different is your company/brand/product/service from your competitors? I'm sure you are different in some way, but are you different in a meaningful way, an obvious way, a way that deeply matters to potential customers? Or do you find yourself constantly trying to convince potential customers that you are different? To put it another way, within the context of your market, are you considered to be a company/brand/product/service for which there is no substitute?

**Rigorous Self-Analysis.** How strong is your herding instinct? Is your organization characterized by any of the herding tendencies outlined in the presentation—(1) a tendency toward competitive hyper-vigilance; (2) a tendency toward over-listening to customers; (3) an over-commitment to excellence across too many dimensions—thereby creating a dynamic in which you are becoming less differentiated from your competitors over time, as opposed to more so?

**Idea Generation.** How could you modify your value proposition so that it could become truly different from your competitors? Remember, when we think of improving or modifying our value proposition, we have a tendency to think only of improvement through “addition” (i.e., by adding new features, benefits, attributes to our value proposition; by adding additional choices to our product or service line; or by adding to an already-existing feature). Instead, here are some other concepts that might help you think about differentiation in a less conventional way:

- *subtraction*: simplification, the stripping down of the value proposition in some compelling way
- *lopsidedness*: the notion of being exceedingly superior along certain dimensions of your value proposition, and unapologetically inferior along other dimensions
- *inversion*: not necessarily removing the negatives associated with your values, but considering the ways in which those negatives might be regarded as being positives in the eyes of your customers
- *transformation*: changing the overall reference points for your value proposition, so that the consumption experience is more akin to comparisons outside of your category. (Example: A visit to IKEA being more like a visit to an ultra-modern, funky theme park rather than a dreary, discount furniture warehouse.)

**Take A Subset of the Ideas Generated to the Next Level.** What would it take to pull any one of these ideas off? What would it require of the organization? How would all of the pieces of the strategic marketing puzzle have to be modified to present it effectively to the market?