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Techie Speak interviews



John Soper

Principal, Paradigms Marketing Group

"The trends of integration and distribution of information through ubiquitous, standardized networks is still very much alive and well. Whether it is B2B, B2C, C2C - or whether the clients are mobile tablets, cell phones, or home entertainment systems, the core Internet value proposition has not changed."

Excerpts from an exclusive interview with Techieindex

1. Despite the tough economy, New Paradigms Marketing Group managed to survive 10 years in the market. To what do you attribute this strong showing? Do you portray yourself as a success story for your clients?

They have been ten exciting years, starting in the last tech recession, moving through the boom, and then through this latest cycle. Our service offerings focus on Market, Alliance and Business Development strategy and tactics, which grow businesses -- the peaks and valleys have provided especially excellent opportunities for us to grow our business helping others to grow theirs. So it's been a good environment for us.

But like our clients, it's easy to get lost in the excitement of the market boom and the pressures of the decline. I attribute our resilience through all this to following the advice we give to our clients: Keep a careful balance and linkage between a focused, visionary strategy and a determined, tactical implementation. Many companies we find lean too heavily

Interview - Archives

Mark Ross

CEO and Chairman,
80-20 Software

William Siedman

CEO and President,
Cerebyte

Patrick Morrissery

Director of Product
Marketing, Business Objects

Andrew S Jordan

Marketing Manager,
Samsung SDS

Andrew Moreau,

Media Director, Alltel

Jack Jia,

CTO - Interwoven

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one way or the other. Tactics without a clear strategic goals is aimless, but too often the practice when companies rush for revenue or funding. On the other hand, a strategy that is inflexible to change or to tactical opportunity will result in a company with a great plan and no revenue.

This all sounds very obvious, but in practice is very hard to implement. Every company has a strategy or plan of one sort or another; and every company obviously acts tactically. So on paper this looks OK. But in practice the strategy is often poorly aligned with the tactical plans, or there is a lack of discipline in the execution.

We see this all the time in the more established companies we have helped, and that is often where it is most difficult to correct. In these companies the problems are so ingrained that it is harder to deal with – which is why we spend more time with larger companies.

Start-ups are actually easier. One company particularly struck me because it had a really great vision at 20,000 feet. And it was working hard to obtain funding and revenue at the street level. When we came in we saw right away that the strategy only lived at 20,000 feet and was of limited usefulness in managing the tactical plans. They could not identify their core business clearly – and as a result, their product development went one way, their business development another, and their corporate development still another. Without all the corporate inertia typical of an established company holding them back, we helped them rather quickly pull this together.

When this is done right – and this is what we have been doing for years – it is actually very exciting to see the pieces come together and drive profit.

2. New Paradigms Marketing Group has established itself as a successful consulting practice in helping technology companies maximize profitable market growth that is sustainable, resilient and scalable. The journey began in '93 amidst the economic boom of the mid 90's. How did the boom facilitate the growth of your firm and how much did the slump that followed, affect it?

We actually benefited from the boom and the bust. And some interesting ways: Our focus on Market, Alliance and Business Development led us to some interesting client situations. Not only was money flowing too freely, but, ideas and change were swirling so fast it was hard to keep your focus, much less your head! But this was a time when a balance between focus and adaptability was essential. We were in the middle of working with one company on that adaptation of their marketing to the emergence of the B2C Internet, when, with the ink barely dry, the intranet took hold as a force. We adapted again. Those companies that manage a “flexible focus” are among those that survived the slaughter. Java was another example. We worked with several companies that focused on Java. But as we all know, a technology that was periodically repositioned, and lived on hype for a long time was a challenge to pin your star to. We had a lot of fun working through those times and



helping winners.

The dramatic downturn has also been very exciting. In the boom, people thought they could do no wrong; in the bust days, they thought they could do no right. Wrong. This cycle looks very much like technology boom-and-bust cycles over the last 200 years. For the technology sector that means realignment and consolidation, then attacking the emerging market opportunities. For individual companies it means a significant amount of tactical and financial adjustment; but it also means teasing out the new opportunities and adjusting to them, or there will be nothing at the other end. One company we worked with required quite a bit of time focusing pushing their sales funnel harder, and working with partner prospects to shore up financing. But equally, it required looking for new markets and new product positioning. Reliant on the telecom market, they were especially hard hit, but we found other places to go. We had to work on both issues -- short-term revenue and building new market opportunities -- simultaneously, and that really tested our metal.

3. Strategy, implementations and turn-around seem to be your forte. You have over 15 years of experience with some of the industry's technology companies as well as a variety of start-ups. How have these years as a leading member of the management team helped you in your growth as a VC Consultant?

That's very clear. You're toughest client is always yourself. Looking at our own business issues has certainly heightened our sensitivity toward strategic and tactical market development issues. And it has helped us develop techniques to solidify market development plans and implementation tactics. Simply put, it is a lot easier to say, "I get it."

4. You helped in bringing together a compelling business plan for Sun Microsystems. You also provided sound development analysis for GP Associates. And, you've got a lot more on hand where you seemed to work wonders. On hindsight, were your analyses dead on target each time, or were there areas you could've taken a different approach, thus seeing an improvement in results?

Oh, sure, we learn everyday. One of the biggest lessons occurred in 1993, just before the inflection point of the commercial Internet. I remember discussing a start-up plan with a group of investors – the plan was to market software over the Internet, a new idea at the time. The responses were far from visionary – “we can't handle that load of email”; “we will be flamed;” “the bandwidth won't support the distribution;” “people won't do transactions on the Internet;” and so forth. All the thinking was from “inside the box,” oblivious to the coming paradigm shift. I wish I had been more forceful in persuading them to take advantage of change that was coming, and in fact to help guide it. But seeing this area of Internet commerce grow, just made me more determined to seize other opportunities in the decade that followed. And now in the post-boom-and-bust days, new opportunities are waiting. If there is one failure in the Valley today in

confronting this downturn, I believe it is a failure of imagination.

5. Start-ups are a dime-a-dozen these days. Is the technology developed by them reliable in terms of performance, benchmarking, support, etc.? What are the strategies incorporated by a new company to survive among large organizations?

There is a wide range of stealth companies in areas such as Internet infrastructure, web services and mobile computing, that are ready to hit the market and ride up the next wave. One important strategic imperative is to avoid the temptation to go it alone in areas of the business where you can leverage true strategic alliances. Build your marketing, distribution and product alliances and manage them carefully. Alliance development is one of our areas of specialization – we have found development and management of a truly strategic alliance portfolio to be an often-overlooked area. Relatedly, we also believe that development of an exit strategy should involve mergers and acquisitions (and not just IPOs), and developed as part of your alliance strategy.

6. In an economy, that has not yet shown signs of picking up from the slump it has been in, for the past two years, which could be the best start-up areas for high tech professionals?

In the enterprise arena, much of the action will be in application integration. Standards based integration will happen, and on standard Internet protocol platforms. The only question is the details. Web services provide a promising set of standards. This in turn will put pressure on the infrastructure, for those who want to play in those layers – from open source server development to support services. In the consumer area, the last mile problem is finally giving way to critical mass which we believe will to integration and convergence in the home front, finally.

7. Considering the present condition of the economy these days, what is the best advice you can give to an new entrepreneur? When you represent a Company as consultant, what is the approach you take to enhance on its present revenue in this fiscal year?

We look at the obvious – what's in the funnel and how can the sales cycle be accelerated, and which should be – that is, find the "profit pools." Often we find money "lying around." But beyond that, we can find revenue in closely aligned sub-segments and alternate channels, which don't take extensive time or effort to exploit. Finally, the cost side of the market development effort can often be trimmed. We find that outflows of dollars are chasing old strategies and stay alive just through inertia. In one case, we saved over \$5M in dead-end royalties and other costs. It takes some tough negotiation, but it can often pay off. It's amazing how much money can be left on the table.

8. How do you consider the market's strength these days? Where do you see the trend leading?

The trends of integration and distribution of information through ubiquitous, standardized networks is still very much alive and well. Whether it is B2B, B2C, C2C – or whether the clients are mobile tablets, cell phones, or home entertainment

systems, the core Internet value proposition has not changed. We are struggling through a time of absorption, consolidation and over-coming social/financial/legal obstacles – and we will come out the other end expanding and building markets. But the landscape is forever changed. The buy side is much more sophisticated; they will start to buy again, and we can expect, and sellers should be ready to deliver, much more bang for the buck. The sell side is regrouping and will figure out how to provide it. What it lacks right now is nerve and imagination. The challenge for companies like New Paradigms Marketing is to help technologists continue to develop on the infrastructure that got us here, and to adapt to the new market development environment. The companies that truly adapt to this new environment now – as opposed to treating it as just a business cycle downturn -- will be the winners of this decade and the next.

About John Soper

John Soper has over 15 years of experience with some of the industry's technology companies as well as a variety of start-ups. He has had responsibility for leading a wide variety of marketing efforts, bringing his background to focus especially on challenges technology companies face in developing new markets, and expanding and defending current markets.

He blends a unique set of skills to help the technology companies he works with: Insight and intelligence, backed by a high quality graduate education; a strong working knowledge of technology and the dynamics of the technology industry; an excellent understanding of the legal, financial and organization structures; expertise in statistics, research and analysis; the ability to deal with people effectively to deliver results; and a "failure is not an option" attitude.

John received a Bachelor's degree from Ohio Wesleyan University, a Masters degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, with numerous additional courses at Wisconsin and the University of Michigan.

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