

Look! Outside! It's someone else's perception of us!

We are all capable of looking inward just a little too much, and not seeing what others see about us. In business and in life, self awareness is a critical skill. Step 3 of the Vista Brand Roadmap encompasses the systematic approach to looking outside ourselves and learning what the market thinks about us. The results from Step 3 can be surprising at times, but we always learn something that we did not know before. Here, we highlight two healthcare companies, Greenway Health and Amendia, both from Atlanta, and what we learned when we pivoted our focus to outside the brand.

In the case of Greenway Health, we learned three very important and brand-changing truths as we spoke to customers and partners and as we took a 100,000 foot view of the marketplace that Greenway sought to serve.

First, we learned that Greenway's brand identity did not match the perception that the marketplace held. We are a third party asking direct questions, so we received direct answers that Greenway management most likely would not have heard, because people tend to soften their answers when speaking directly to principals of the company. While Greenway largely thought their identity reflected their deeply innovative spirit, their customers and partners perceived Greenway as a more antiquated serving only electronic health records products. We knew the CEO's vision was much larger than an EHR company and his views were much more modern. There was an obvious disconnect in perceptions. Based on these "voice of customer" insights, we recommended a complete rebrand of Greenway. It was not an easy task, but it was an honest recommendation based on the unvarnished truth.

Second, we learned by researching Greenway's competition that all the power players in the market were offering essentially the same products

and services, with little to no brand differentiation. All brands offered the same features and benefits in their software. That's when we discovered that Greenway had a competitive advantage: *an unprecedented devotion to customer service*. At their annual conference, PrimeLeader, we witnessed Greenway customers - doctors, nurses and administrators alike - seek out their customer service representatives that they'd never met and hug them like they were long lost cousins. As desirable as this is in business, it is rare. It revealed an obvious competitive advantage. These authentic customer perceptions gave rise to strategies and campaigns that highlighted Greenway's warm culture and unique corporate spirit of service.

Third, in our 100,000 foot view of the marketplace, we found a clear and dramatic trend. During the previous year, the size of Greenway's target market segment had changed dramatically. A year before, 83% of Greenway's prospects were physician practices with fewer than 10 doctors. During that next year, that number had plummeted to 46%. Doctors were giving up their small business to join large healthcare companies like Northside Hospital and Piedmont Healthcare because changes in technology, government policy and reimbursement rules required too much administration for small physicians practices to handle profitably.

We recommended, based on external data and voices, that Greenway's strategic story and growth drivers showcase it's unprecedented devotion to customer service while focusing on larger, growth-oriented market segments - enterprise healthcare providers.

In Step 3 for Amendia, the message we received from the marketplace was much simpler, and did not require an change in market direction. We uncovered that the messaging the brand was sending to their customer surgeons was creating an unhealthy gap in expectations around what the company can deliver and when.

Amendia was the only healthcare device company that had developed a 3D modeling, prototyping and manufacturing capabilities that could generate

brand new, FDA-ready products in days rather than years. In fact, in the very beginning the company could turnaround a spinal implant prototype, with the aid of 3D printing, to surgeons for refinement and approval within 72 hours. That nimble capability was an attractive and driving factor in Amendia's initial growth. What customer surgeon wouldn't like to see their idea in 3D form in a few days? However, because they had grown so fast, this created a large burden on the engineering function, one they could not sustain through their rapid growth phase. These stories of 72 hour prototypes became corporate folklore and part of their story but did not change after the demand for the speedy turnaround could no longer be supplied. With good intentions, their messaging outpaced their actual abilities, they began to overpromise and under deliver.

Their message to physicians was that they could create a prototype in 72 hours. In fact, they could do that prior to experiencing phenomenal growth, which naturally slowed their production ability with a bottleneck at the engineering stage of each prototype. Interestingly, however, it wasn't their inability to produce a prototype in such a short period of time that was causing the disconnect between their brand and their customers.

What their customers told us was that they *did not need a prototype in 72 hours*. In fact, if such a process could be completed in a month or two, that would satisfy the demands of Amendia's customers. Where the disconnect lied was Amendia's customers did not like the brand's broken promises or inability to correctly manage expectations.

That insight from the view of the marketplace enabled Amendia to streamline their engineering function, update their messaging to their customers, and execute on a promise that they were able to keep. And in many cases, beat expectations.

We can all look at ourselves in a mirror and see some of our own flaws, but we cannot possibly see ourselves with the same eyes as our customers,

prospects, partners, and community see us for the simple reason that we are not them. Therefore, working through Step 3, while sometimes surprising, is a necessary and valuable part of preparing for growth, because growth only occurs when our brand matches the demands of the marketplace.