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### For Immediate Release

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## **You Do Need This Product, Right? *Right?* (And Six Other Deadly Sins that Stunt Organic Growth)**

*If you're like most B2B suppliers, you're probably making certain predictable mistakes that can greatly impact your ability to compete. Dan Adams explains what they are...and how avoiding them can help you survive and thrive in a tough economy.*

You already know that organic growth makes for a stronger company. In today's tough economy it just makes sense to grow from within by developing outstanding products and services that win over new customers and keep current ones coming back. (The alternatives are to grow via debt financing or an army of flush-with-cash buyers on a spending spree—and clearly, neither is easy to come by these days!) Problem is, your competitors are playing by the same rules. But according to Dan Adams, you can outwit them... simply by putting a halt to the mistakes you (and they) are making right now.

“Unless your company has smarter employees, some inherent unassailable advantage, or a markedly different approach to satisfying customers, those competitors always seem to throttle your growth,” notes the author of *New Product Blueprinting: The Handbook for B2B Organic Growth* (AIM Press, 2008, ISBN: 978-0-9801123-4-4, \$35.00). “But what if you and your competitors were committing some serious mistakes that stunt organic growth—and *you* corrected them? Wouldn't that be enough to propel

you to the front of the line?”

It makes sense. And Adams should know: he has spent his career helping some of the largest business-to-business companies in the world overcome the obstacles that clog up their organic growth engines—the ability to develop new “stuff” that customers want to buy. Through New Product Blueprinting (the process described in his book), his company helps clients bring clarity to the “fuzzy front end” of product development.

“In 20 years the common mistakes B2B companies make will be as glaring as trying to improve quality with inspectors rather than statistics,” he says. “Correct them now and you’ll enjoy a substantial head start on years of healthy organic growth.”

Adams identifies the seven deadly sins that too many B2B companies commit:

**Sin #1. Imagining *customers’* needs in *your* conference rooms.** Does your new product process begin with the word “Idea,” perhaps with a light bulb next to it? So whose idea is it: yours or your customers? Unfortunately, says Adams, most suppliers start with *their* solution, “validate” it by showing it to some customers, and measure market needs by watching sales results... *after* product launch!

“Companies should invert this process: *Begin* with customer needs and *end* with supplier solutions,” asserts Adams. “While doing things in the in the wrong order may ‘feel’ better to you, it is far less likely to result in sales and customer satisfaction. Besides, intelligent B2B customers can detect your “validation” a mile away. They correctly sense you are more interested in your idea than in them... and that doesn’t do much for the long-term relationships you need to build.”

**Sin #2. Relying on sales reps to capture customer needs.** A salesperson is unlikely to uncover a full set of market needs if he is a) rewarded for near-term selling, b) unable to reach true decision-makers, or c) not calling on most of the customers in your target market segment. But put a good salesperson on a *team* with marketing and technical colleagues, train all in advanced B2B interviewing methods, and you’ll run circles around your competitors.

Be wary of VOC (voice-of-the-customer) consultants who want to exclude your sales force from interviews because “they can sell but not listen,” warns Adams. In the long run, your company will fall behind competitors that have taken steps to develop a team of engaged and enlightened sales people.

**Sin #3. Counting on just a few VOC experts.** Some companies rely on a handful of internal VOC experts to interview customers. You’ll do far better training a critical mass of employees—who routinely interact with customers—to gather customer needs. Keep your VOC experts as coaches and trainers, but implement “VOC for the masses.” You’ll overwhelm competitors by turning a trickle of customer feedback into a torrent.

**Sin #4. Using hand-me-down consumer-goods methods.** “Traditional VOC methods rely on questionnaires, tape recorders and post-interview analyses,” says Adams. “That’s fine for consumer-goods, but your B2B customers are insightful, rational, interested and fewer in number. They’re smart and will make you smarter if you engage them in a peer-to-peer dialogue. Use a digital projector, let them lead you to *their* areas of interest, probe with skill, and you’ll be shocked at how much you’ll learn you never knew.”

**Sin #5. Gathering only *qualitative* customer feedback.** “I once had a new client who came to me extremely frustrated,” recalls Adams. “He had spent months interviewing customers, only to hear his boss say, ‘Nah, I don’t think they want *that*; they want *this*.’ Unfortunately, *interviewers often hear what they want to hear...* and then parade some customer quotes for support.”

What you need, adds Adams, is *quantitative* data, which measure customer importance and satisfaction on key outcomes. Skip quantification and your new product will be based on assumptions, bias and wishful thinking.

**Sin #6. Listening only to immediate customers.** Unlike B2C producers, your product might be part of your customer’s product, your customers’ customer’s product, and so on. It’s a mistake to interview only your direct customers, because they are usually unable or unwilling to disclose downstream customers’ deepest needs. Also, B2C producers assign “one vote” per consumer... while you need to weight the buying power and value chain position of downstream customers.

**Sin #7. Ignoring competitors when you design your product.** “I find most product development processes are far too casual—and late—in assessing competitive offerings,” says Adams. “Your new product only makes a *lot* of money if two conditions are satisfied: A) it offers significant value to customers, and B) customers cannot get this value elsewhere. Interviews only tell you about Condition A. You need side-by-side testing to learn about Condition B. This allows you to attack competitive weak spots, avoid getting blind-sided, and optimize pricing.”

So why *is* it so important to focus so intensely upon customer needs? Consider three points, says Adams: First, the average new product success rate is only one in four. Over 30 years of research says the number one reason is inadequate market understanding.

Second, the “how” continues to get easier than the “what.” You have twin goals of understanding *what* your customers want, and then *how* to satisfy them with your solutions. In these days of open innovation and global access to technology, the “how” is easier than it’s ever been... if you have a solid grasp of the “what.”

Finally, you reap benefits beyond good product design when you use respectful

peer-to-peer interviews. You *engage* customers in the design process, which *primes* them to buy your product later.

“Our clients often enjoy benefits well before product launch,” says Adams. “Their interviews cast them as caring, competent suppliers, so they have a better shot at other near-term business.”

“Never forget that listening to your customers is huge,” he adds. “We’re living in an age when global competitors are trying to drag you into their commodity quagmire so they can bludgeon you with their price sticks. By engaging customers in a respectful peer-to-peer dialogue and genuinely soliciting their ideas, you position yourself as a valuable partner and not just a vendor—and that in and of itself is a reason to stick with you.”

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#### **About the Author:**

Dan Adams, president of Advanced Industrial Marketing, Inc., is passionate about B2B new product development. In over 30 years working within and with major B2B corporations, he has explored every aspect of product development, building New Product Blueprinting from the ground up. He is a chemical engineer and holder of many patents and innovation awards, including a listing in the National Inventors Hall of Fame. Adams was head of strategic planning for a billion-dollar company and has extensive experience in Fortune 500 marketing, business development, and leadership positions. He is an award-winning speaker and conducts workshops in every region of the world. Advanced Industrial Marketing, Inc. (AIM), was built on the belief that understanding your customers’ deepest needs is a competitive advantage you should learn—not outsource. AIM conducts workshops globally to train commercial and technical teams in advanced B2B product development, provides strong post-workshop coaching support...and then gets out of the way.

#### **About the Book:**

*New Product Blueprinting: The Handbook for B2B Organic Growth* (AIM Press, 2008, ISBN: 978-0-9801123-4-4, \$35.00) is available at bookstores nationwide and from major online booksellers.

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