

A Strategic (IT) Fairy tale

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Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, there lived a beautiful little business called Cinders Limited. Cinders shared a global economy with two ugly conglomerates who kept bullying poor Cinders, stealing her customers and making sure suppliers gave them bigger discounts than Cinders received.

Cinders worked as hard as she could but never received the invitations to tender for the same attractive contracts that her larger competitors received on a regular basis.

“Maybe” thought Cinders one day, “this is all that I will ever get, and I should be happy with my lot.”

“Nonsense” said a voice.

“Who said that?” cried Cinders in surprise.

“It’s me – your Fairy God Consultant!” said a smarted suited lady, carrying a laptop case and a black umbrella.

“Where did you come from?” enquired Cinders.

“Oh, I’ve been here all the time, but you just didn’t need me until now.” explained the Fairy God Consultant. “Now, what’s this nonsense about not being able to tender for these attractive contracts. Are you not as capable as your ugly competitors? Would you not be able to give as good a service as they can?”

“Well, yes,” replied Cinders, “but the customers don’t even know that I exist!”

“OK, so what’s your plan - or Strategy as some of my friends call it – to change this sorry state of affairs?” asked the Fairy God-Consultant, topping up her intravenous caffeine drip.

“I suppose I don’t have one” confessed Cinders. “But I’ve never really needed one. I am not looking for any money from anyone.”

The Fairy God-Consultant sighed. “You shouldn’t only do a plan when you need money. It helps to do one every few years just to make sure you know where you are trying to get to and to keep track of how you are doing. Now tell me a little about your business.”

“I supply Garden Dwarves to wholesalers and garden centres”

“Don’t you mean Gnomes?”

“No, these come in sets of seven and come with a cleaning service called Snow Dirty” said Cinders with a grin.

“And who are your target customers?”

"I supply independent wholesalers across the whole land but not the big chains like Prince Charming plc."

"Why not?"

"They have a tender process each year but we never receive an invitation."

"Why not?"

"I'm not sure"

"Have you let them know you exist or sent them information on your company and your capabilities"

"No"

"Right then," order the God Consultant, "that's a good starting point. What should Prince Charming know about you – what are your strengths and weaknesses"

"We ask our customers to give us regular feedback and that consistently shows that we deliver on time and that they really appreciate our after sales service. We've also recently improved our vans to look better and make our brand more prominent."

"Any weaknesses?"

"We sometimes have had a problem with inconsistent pricing but we have recently invested in a new computer system which should make sure that doesn't happen any more".

"What about management?"

"There's me and my colleague Buttons who looks after distribution"

"Who deals with Sales and Marketing?"

"Well, we really haven't needed to do much of that before as we have been so busy. I suppose if we are to get into the larger contracts that is an area in which we could improve"

"OK, and what about the money? Have you been making money and do you have cash to invest in new areas?"

"We have had a very successful year last year, with a new range of Dwarves themed on the TV series "Big Bad Wolf" proving particularly popular. So we do have some cash we could invest."

"Right then. I think we have the start of a plan. Your target for the next few years is to get invited to pitch for some of Prince Charming's tenders, if you pardon the expression" giggled the Fairy God-Consultant. Cinders blushed.

"To do this, you need to get yourself noticed through some targeted marketing possibly by a new experienced Sales and Marketing person. You need to understand what the Prince is looking for and how your strengths can deliver these for him. However, you must also ensure that you keep all your current customers happy and seek to at least maintain your current business as without this you do not have firm base to work from."

"You should also be aware that your ugly competitors will not be happy when they discover that you are trying to get to the Prince Charming tenders and may seek to attack your current business. But from what you have told me so far I think you have a good chance of success. Now what we need to do is develop these ideas into a more detailed action plan so that you and all your staff know what you are trying to do. Are you up for that?"

"Well yes," enthused Cinders" but I thought Business Strategy was more complex than this?"

“It can be. There are lots of magic wands and spells I could use but the basics are the same – define what you want to do, specify the steps involved and then make sure you have the right resources to make it happen. Then, of course, the really tough bit is putting the plan into action. But the plan shouldn’t be set in stone. You need to keep track of how you are doing against it and if necessary change it. But with a little help I am confident you can make all your dreams come true”

The Fairy God-Consultant stayed with Cinders over the next year helping her find a new Sales and Marketing Manager, Colin Whitemice. Colin had previously worked for Pumpkin plc one of the other large nationwide wholesalers and therefore knew the tendering process from the customer’s side. Cinders and Whitemice worked hard at ensuring that the company’s presence was known by Prince Charming’s purchasing staff and eventually the big day arrived – an invitation to a tender was received.

The tender was for a set of garden ornaments based on the theme of the new Hollywood blockbuster about a high school student who kept falling asleep in unfortunate and humorous situations called “Class Sleeper”. Cinders worked hard to put together a tender that responded to all the areas requested in the invitation and was overjoyed when Prince Charming thought that Cinders was the perfect fit and they worked together happily ever after - much to the disgust of the two ugly competitors.

So you see boys and girls, having a clearly thought out business strategy, combined with hard work and a little bit of luck, can help your dreams come true. And while Fairy God Consultants may use all sorts of potions and spells to help, it is special little businesses like Cinders that will make the real magic happen.