

## **Step on the Gas, or Get Left Behind** ***Tips for Accelerating Your Strategic Planning***

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By Randy Myers

The pace of business has been speeding up at least since the debut of the electrical telegraph in the mid-19th century. More than 150 years later, companies that can't negotiate lightning-fast changes in the competitive landscape get left behind — fast.

“The way competition and technology change today, you have to be prepared to redo your strategic plan at almost anytime,” says Sylvester Di Diego Jr., managing partner of [Strategy Dynamix LLC](#), a Morristown, New Jersey-based consulting firm. “If you don't have a rapid process for doing that, you're going to be relying on old planning.”

Di Diego has helped more than 100 companies refine their business strategies, including a startup biomedical engineering company that called him about 18 months ago with promising technology and a patent, but little clue about how to translate them into a marketable product.

Working with Strategy Dynamix, the two-person company identified a product it could deliver quickly, created a sales and distribution strategy, found a distributor, hired a marketing manager, and even landed some grants from the federal government and the state of New Jersey to help fund future growth. Today, the company employs 10 people.

If you'd like to accelerate your company's strategic planning process and keep growth prospects on the fast track, Di Diego offers these five tips:

**Get the right people in the room.** The owner or president may have the ultimate authority to set strategy, Di Diego explains, but leaving the people responsible for implementation out of the planning process can lead to wasteful missteps. Conversely, keeping the boss out of the loop until the last minute can then require a time-consuming sales pitch after everyone else is in accord. Get everyone involved from the get-go.

**Put them in the right environment.** You want your team members conducting their planning where they won't be interrupted. If that can't be done on-site, consider a hotel conference room or other off-site venue.

“The best way to do strategic planning,” Di Diego explains, “is to create an interactive process where you're building layer by layer through the different elements of the business and the competitive landscape. That feeds on itself if you're able to do it in sequence, away from interruptions.”

**Find a facilitator.** You may be the leader of your company, but you may not be the best person to lead its strategic planning sessions. “If the CEO has the confidence to let a facilitator run the process, he or she can listen and contribute more, won't have to play the authoritarian role, and will be less likely to cut off imaginative thinking,” Di Diego explains.

Meanwhile, the facilitator can keep everybody working constructively. Whether that facilitator is an employee or third-party contractor, Di Diego says he or she should understand your business and be experienced at leading strategic planning sessions. If you don't know one, the [International Association of Facilitators](#) maintains a list on its website, as does the [National Facilitator Database](#). The latter lets you search specifically for facilitators experienced in strategic planning.

**Commit to making a decision.** “Too often,” Di Diego says, “people put a lot of time into these efforts and then their recommendations are put on a shelf with no action taken.”

CEOs may not be willing to commit ahead of time to implementing all of the ideas that come from strategic planning initiatives, but they should commit to seriously considering and then accepting, modifying or rejecting them.

**Get started now using the facts at hand.** Sometimes, Di Diego says, business owners delay strategic planning because they don't think they have the necessary information. In today's fast-moving world, that doesn't always work.

“Start now, and use what you already know,” he urges. “People usually know 85 to 90 percent of what they need to know. Once you get started, you can figure out where the open areas are and address them.”

Before concluding the planning process, Di Diego says, make sure you win agreement on the plan from all the parties involved, assign responsibilities for implementation, and create performance metrics to measure progress.

Finally, anticipate any obstacles to obtaining resources or approvals needed to execute the plan. Remember that you and your business don't have time to waste.

*A former reporter and editor for Dow Jones, where he wrote for The Wall Street Journal and Barron's, Randy Myers is a contributing editor for CFO, Corporate Board Member and Plansponsor magazines.*