LIQUID AGENCY

Making the Pivot Playbook

Seven drivers
of impactful
business pivots

Abstract

This playbook is for organizations that know it's time to leap ahead and for leaders and teams who sense that the market and societal shifts we're observing today are redefining how value is created through the relationship between companies, customers and employees. For 20 years, our Silicon Valley instincts have helped us solve challenges for companies large and small—instincts that have become finely tuned to detect opportunities for rapid change and disruption.

Think of this playbook as a launching pad, a fulcrum, an axis, a catalyst. It won't help you stay the course, reinforce silos or double down on how things have always been done. It also isn't a panacea, a miracle elixir or a secret weapon. But you can use it to ask yourself some key questions, inspire new conversations and put some language to a problem you couldn't quite put your finger on. And above all—especially when you don't know why, when or how far—use it to leap ahead.

Introduction

We were inspired by the global pandemic to make this playbook and its accompanying rapid strategy offering we call *Pivot to What's Next.* Within the business context, the crisis took things that had simply been tropes—markets are rapidly changing, business is getting more complex, it's harder to relate to your customers, innovation is the lifeblood of companies, digital is everything—and made them the central focus of what is being called the "next normal."

Tropes exist because they echo a truth, and that's as true here as anywhere. Markets are rapidly changing. Business *is* getting more complex. But what we (and many others) have realized is we've come to an inflection point, a seismic shift in the nature of doing business. For the first time, all the variables, all the evolutions, all the transformations and all the tropes are true for the same reason. You can no longer focus on your pet challenge, because the ground has shifted under you.

Frankly put, we can't predict what the next normal is going to be. No one can. We're used to falling back on our existing experiences as being the key predictor of future success, as Jeff Hawkins suggests in *On Intelligence.* What worked once is likely to work again. But we find ourselves in a novel economy, one in which no one has experience. There's no longer a guide. It would be easy to see this as a constraint or a reason to slow down. But the opposite is true. Now is the time to pivot.

Seven Drivers of Impactful Business Pivots

In the course of these few pages, we've identified, analyzed and distilled seven drivers that form the basis of business transformation—what we call *Pivots:* Brand, Offering Ecosystem, Culture, Internal Systems, Channels and Touchpoints, Customer, and Employee. Together, these drivers form the foundation of how a business forms, orchestrates and activates its value.

For each of these drivers, you'll find a challenging question, a provocative pivot, some symptoms to be aware of and some opportunities to look for. Read through them, and pay attention to what triggers a thought or reaction to your situation.

BUSINESS		PERFORMANCE/CAPABILITY		EXPERIENCE		
Brand	Offering Ecosystem	Culture	Internal Systems	Channels & Touchpoints	Customer	Employee

DRIVER 1 | BRAND

Pivot your brand to be the driver of business transformation.

What if we viewed the role of brand in a bigger way, a way that could ignite the imagination for new possibilities that drive your business?

For many leaders, "brand" is still seen as something the marketing department owns, and its primary role is to represent what the company stands for. But brands have powerful equities embedded in their meaning that shape expectations from customers—and employees. And those expectations translate into permissions that audiences give your brand to provide new capabilities. Most business leaders don't always think to explore these equities in pursuit of developing new business strategies. Rather than creating new offerings and selling them to customers, how might we tap into what customers expect from your brand and imagine new possibilities that would take your organization to new heights?

For this driver, think of your brand as a center of gravity—the force that pulls all the key components of your business together and the core around which value is delivered continually.

Problem Lens

- Your core business model is at risk, and your brand reputation is holding you back from quickly moving into a new space.

- Your new offerings are slow to be adopted because you don't have a strong pulse on what your customers expect your brand to deliver.

- If your brand suddenly disappears tomorrow and your customers easily move to another option, then your brand is probably commoditized.

Opportunity Lens

- How might you leverage the equity in your brand to push into new categories that are embraced by your customers?

- What would happen if instead of positioning your brand to customers, you were to design a customer Tribe to evangelize your brand?

- How could you exploit your brand's strengths to alternatively position your competitors and create more differentiation?

DRIVER 2 | OFFERING ECOSYSTEM

Pivot your product offering to be a living ecosystem.

What if you viewed your company's offerings as an interconnected system, where if one part of your offering was suddenly impacted, the organism would provide stability?

Many organizations are defined by a single core offering. If that offering is ever threatened, the entire organization is at risk. When a single product or service is so successful it comes to stand for everything else, leaders often feel compelled to defend its position—at whatever cost. But this can lead to a culture of protecting the core and under-investing in diversification.

For this driver, think of your core offering as not a single thing but, instead, a distributed ecosystem. If one part becomes compromised, the rest of the system sustains the organization because its value comes from its connectivity, not from its individual components.

Problem Lens

- Customers are finding it difficult to navigate and choose among your many offerings.

- Customers are expecting greater value from your offerings and you can't meet, much less exceed, their expectations.

- Internal teams don't have the capability or tools to efficiently respond in an adequate and timely manner to customer needs.

Opportunity Lens

- How might you switch from a product orientation to a set of well-articulated solutions? (Think of shifting from a flute to an orchestra.)

- How might your business run if one or more of your offerings were suddenly unavailable?

DRIVER 3 | CULTURE

Pivot your culture to be the accelerator for your business.

What if you viewed your organization's workplace culture as a purpose-led accelerator to power your business forward, both through challenging and good times?

All organizations have workplace cultures. However, without an intentional construct to guide the culture and unite its employees in action, the organization will never be able to successfully execute its vision.

Companies need to have a clear and authentic purpose in order to focus their employees' efforts in an aligned direction. Bringing purpose to the "every day" builds employee engagement and workplace cultures that will be resilient, even in times of disruption.

Purpose has many flavors—it can be customer-driven, society-driven or even employee-driven. No matter its focus, purpose serves as a rallying cry to unify around something larger. It serves as a way to build meaning for what employees are in service to every day.

For this driver, think about whether your company is aligning its employees around a shared understanding of your brand's meaning in order to make an impact on the business. Do you see consistent decision making in support of the work? Do your employees know where the organization should go if the CEO isn't there to remind them? Do they have the tools to get there? Do teams have the behaviors and ways of working needed to get to the destination?

Problem Lens

- Your teams seem a bit in denial mode and are working as if the business landscape hasn't changed.

- Leadership doesn't understand why employees aren't being proactive in finding new ways to deliver on the business strategy.

- There is an urgent need to change the way people work within the organization to stay relevant.

Opportunity Lens

- How might we revisit our values to ensure that we are using them effectively, even in an uncertain business scenario?

- What if we were to abandon behaviors that don't work for us anymore? What new ones would we activate?

- How do we build a culture that is able to build resilience and intentional action when everything around us is constantly changing?

DRIVER 4 | INTERNAL SYSTEMS

Pivot your internal systems to be a driver of the customer and employee experience.

What if your internal systems and processes met your employees' consumer-grade expectations and improved your customers' experiences with your brand?

Internal systems are often seen as an unmovable legacy and/or unimportant to elevating the experience for customers. But today, employees' expectations of the modern workplace have increased dramatically as they've become accustomed to consumer-grade experiences that improve their daily lives. More and more, people are choosing employers who provide better experiences and make their lives easier. Additionally, better systems and processes help employees deliver improved customer experiences—especially as the internal and external worlds become more integrated.

For this driver, think about the different systems and processes that your organization uses on a daily basis. Do they measure up to what consumers enjoy today? Do they reflect your brand's promise? How do they enable your employees to deliver consistent and seamless brand experiences to customers?

Problem Lens

- Leadership casts big visions, but won't allow the organization to change to accomplish them.

- Product roadmaps don't take into account the capabilities needed to deliver new features or offerings.

- Internal teams are expected to "just figure it out" when faced with infrastructural challenges, rather than being equipped to make meaningful change.

Opportunity Lens

- How might you develop a complete map of the customer journey that includes all the systems and processes that are a part of it?

- How might you assess the tools your employees use to do their jobs against the values your internal culture strategy has defined?

- How might you revisit your company's policies to remove blockers to innovation or servicing customers?

DRIVER 5 | CHANNELS AND TOUCHPOINTS

Pivot your channels and touchpoints to be a customer relationship builder.

What if you saw every touchpoint as an opportunity to invest in the overall relationship you have with your customers, no matter where they are in their journey with your brand?

A brand's channels and touchpoints are the parts and pieces that create the space for a brand to express itself and for customers to interact with it. But for many organizations, touchpoints are seen as a means to getting the sale or servicing unsatisfied customers. Often, a brand's touchpoints are developed and managed through internal silos, each with unique goals and incentives. This creates a disjointed experience for your customers and missed opportunities to invest in nurturing relationships that lead to a deeper bond with your brand.

For this driver, think about how each touchpoint across the customer journey contributes to investing in the overall relationship with your customer. Just like with every relationship, there are bound to be ups and downs. So put yourself in your customers' shoes to understand what they might be feeling and anticipate what they need at that moment. Remember, the value of the customer to your organization extends well beyond the first sale. Customer satisfaction isn't the end goal: it's a table stake. By taking a relationship-first mentality, you build sustainable reliance and strong connections in good times and bad.

Problem Lens

- Your touchpoints are designed to maximize internal efficiency or ease thorny politics, instead of balancing business goals with customer motivations.

- Your customer journey model is linear, instead of iterative.

- Customers interact with your offering once, but then drop off the radar.

Opportunity Lens

- How might you understand the ripple effect your touchpoints have on each other or on your customer?

- How might you look beyond point interactions to think about lifetime relationships?

- How might you focus on the broader end-to-end experience your customers have, rather than tracking the performance of discreet touchpoints?

DRIVER 6 | CUSTOMER

Pivot from customer interaction to customer understanding.

When was the last time you looked beyond *what* your customers were buying from you, to *why* they were buying from you?

As marketers, we have grown accustomed to segmenting our customers based on the unique needs they have and developing personas that attempt to bring these segments to life. But personas can only go so far. Often, they only show you demographic- and goal-based characteristics. They don't give you a psychographic understanding of what motivates your customers to choose your brand based on how they self-identify.

For this driver, think about your customer segments all belonging to a single Tribe. Then, imagine gaining a deeper understanding of the beliefs they have in common, rather than focusing on what makes them different. How might you leverage these common beliefs? What models can you develop to help your Tribe build and assert their own identity through your brand? Nothing is more powerful for a brand than to have customers who are engaged because of personal meaning. If there's one business lesson we've learned from the global pandemic, it's that brands who back up what they say, who make critical business decisions to honor the shared beliefs they have with their Tribes, are the ones who will be here for the long haul.

Problem Lens

- The organization doesn't know who the customer is or what they need.

- There is misalignment between the needs of the customer and the way the brand is delivering value.

- Online ratings and reviews, or other customer feedback, don't impact product and service development or roadmaps.

Opportunity Lens

- How might you create a unified resource for all things customer information—a one-stop shop for anyone across the organization to come to if they have a question about a customer?

- How might you empower a team or teams to be customer advocates—people with a specific mandate to understand the customer and then socialize that knowledge across the organization?

- How might you invest in creating sustainable ways to keep up with the changing needs of customers, like regular research or customer involvement in product development?

DRIVER 7 | EMPLOYEE

Pivot from working remotely to belonging remotely.

How can your company foster belonging with employees who feel disconnected?

With the new mantra of "working from anywhere," it is imperative that companies find new ways to connect, engage and support their employees. Pivoting to what's next will only be possible if people are aligned to carry the organization forward. And while articulating purpose, values and ways of working are powerful and necessary components to drive meaning, focus and alignment, a "WFA" workforce also needs to be unified by smaller and more tangible artifacts, such as rituals and cues.

For most employees, the experience of working for a company has been defined within physical walls. Now, companies are needing to rethink what it means to work and belong through a remote-first lens. Whether it's Monday virtual breakfasts, an onboarding toolbox or an online collaboration platform, these experiences bring to life the culture's key tenets and desired behaviors throughout the employee journey.

For this driver, think about what can bind your team together. Think about the repetitive yet meaningful rituals that could be developed to build habits and behaviors. Think about objects that communicate care or promote a desired mindset. And finally, think about the systems that people can rely on to build psychological safety and get their work done as seamlessly as possible.

Problem Lens

- Your organization/team is having a hard time working together as a team since they are not in the same physical space.

- Teams are operating more on mandates rather than on a unified purpose.

- Teams and individuals don't really know what it means to belong to the organization.

Opportunity Lens

- How might we cultivate organizational resilience through new rituals and cues?

- How might we evolve our current rituals and cues to reflect our new workplace environment?

- How might we build employee experiences that allow people—and therefore brands—to show up at their best?

Conclusion

We hope this playbook encourages you to ask hard questions and think ahead to find your next pivot. New challenges always call for fresh thinking, so when you're ready to explore your organization's future and pressure test your ideas, we're here for you. We've helped companies get to what's next for over 20 years, fueled by a pioneering spirit to solve the biggest challenges. And while we don't know exactly what the future has in store for us, we do know how to help people get there. Let's pivot to what's next together.

Ready to Pivot to What's Next?

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LIQUID AGENCY

We create experiences for brands and their customers and employees, all aligned with the organization's true meaning and purpose. When your experiences line up, people do the same, and real business value is the result.

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