7 Ways to accelerate your business

Find and clear the barriers holding back growth

themarketingcentre.co.za

SUPERCHARGED FRACTIONAL MARKETERS

7 Ways to Accelerate your business

How ambitious businesses find clear the barriers holding back growth, and where fractional marketing makes the difference.

Why has your growth stalled?

After a few years, or a few decades, at the helm, something shifts. What used to be a rewarding climb starts to feel like a grind. The business turns a steady profit, but the next stage of growth is not clear, and the hours you put in no longer seem to move the needle. Or worse, you are busier than ever and still not growing, taking on more work than you can properly service while the extra effort never quite turns into extra profit.

Growth almost never stalls by accident. It stalls for a reason, and in our experience that reason is usually one of seven: weak differentiation, pricing, product, culture, the state of your market, a lack of customer insight, or plain fear.

This guide walks through each one so you can recognise which is holding you back.

Differentiation

The peak of differentiation is owning your category so completely that your brand becomes the word for it, the way Jacuzzi, Kleenex and Velcro did. Very few businesses get there, but the ones that move towards it stay competitive, and the ones that ignore it slowly slide.

You can usually feel a differentiation problem before you can name it. Growth loses momentum, winning new business takes more effort than it used to, and you find yourself competing on price rather than quality. That last symptom is the real giveaway.

If your offering does not stand out, you have become the private-label budget line while someone else is the brand people actually ask for.

The way through starts by separating your givens from your differentiators. Givens are the things every credible business has, a good product, capable people and sound service, so they will never set you apart. Differentiators are the specific, hard-to-copy things your customers genuinely value.

Dove found this in 2004 with its Campaign for Real Beauty, standing out in a market flooded with identical models and bland messaging. More than 20 years on this message is still current - and relevant!

Finding your own answer often takes an outside eye, because when you are close enough to run a business every day, you are usually too close to explain why anyone should choose it.

Pricing

Pricing looks like the simplest thing in the world and turns out to be one of the hardest.

Uber is a powerfully differentiated brand, yet it took well over a decade to turn its first full-year profit, a useful reminder that growth and differentiation do not guarantee a healthy bottom line on their own.

The symptoms of a pricing problem are quietly corrosive: cutting prices while demand falls away, underperforming businesses of a similar size, or posting strong sales figures that somehow never reach the bottom line.

Whether you are raising prices to squeeze loyal customers or slashing them to chase new ones, the underlying admission is the same, that your offer is not standing on its own.

The shift that fixes it is to price around **value** rather than cost.

Demand is driven by what people believe something is worth, not by what it costs you to make.

Water is worth more than diamonds in any sensible reading of the world, yet scarcity and perception hand the diamond the higher price.

Getting your own pricing right is a genuinely commercial decision with real money at stake, which is exactly why it benefits from senior marketing input rather than a gut call.

Product

A lack of product development is easily mistaken for a lack of innovation, a word that gets tied to tech giants and start-ups. But a business that never brings anything new to market is resting on its laurels, and development is not only about the product itself. It is also about how that product is made, sold and serviced.

There are two versions of this problem, and they look opposite.

One is over-innovation: a bloated range with no clear bestsellers, spend spread thin and customers overwhelmed by choice.

The other is under-innovation: slow growth with no drop in quality, ticking along on repeat business until the market moves on. When Lego reported its first profit drop in thirteen years, it was suffering from both at once.

Breaking through does not mean reinventing everything.

Often the smarter move is a small, well-judged change that opens up a new group of customers, and the only way to know which change is to understand what your customers actually want.

That judgement, knowing which product move is worth making and which is a distraction, is where experienced marketing leadership earns its place.

Culture

Culture is the barrier owners are most tempted to dismiss as soft, and the one that quietly shapes everything else.

A negative or static culture shows up in every customer interaction, and it can undo good work fast. Even an aggressive, target-driven culture can backfire, as Wells Fargo discovered when staff opened fake accounts to hit their numbers.

88% of workers say company culture is important when choosing where to work, and 61% would leave their current job for a company with a better one. (Built In, 2024)

The signs of a culture problem are hard to miss once you look: you cannot explain your own mission clearly, you struggle to attract the talent you want, and productivity is flat. Culture forms whether you shape it or not, so the choice is only whether you shape it on purpose.

The best businesses do not hire people who are more productive than everyone else, they build a place where good people can be.

That takes leadership that models the behaviour it wants and communicates constantly, and it often takes an honest outside perspective to see the culture as it really is rather than as you experience it day to day.

Markets

Remember video and DVD rental stores, a Blockbuster on every corner?

Markets shift, sometimes fast enough that a business simply cannot survive, and more often through a slow decline that has no obvious internal cause.

That slow version is dangerous precisely because it is so easy to mistake for one of the other barriers in this guide.

The symptoms are a declining top line, regular customers drifting away with too few new ones to replace them, conversion thinning out across the funnel, and competitors cutting prices.

The clearest tell is when loyal customers stop buying even though you have changed nothing. If your longest-standing buyers have quietly lost interest, something outside your business has moved.

Small tweaks will not turn a declining market around. It takes decisive change in what you sell and how you sell it, and a clear-eyed view of where your healthiest demand now sits.

That kind of repositioning is high-stakes and hard to do from the inside, which is why it is one of the situations where fractional marketing leadership makes the most difference.

Customer Insight

Take an honest look at your advertising, your brochures and your website.

Are they speaking to your customers and how you help them, or are they mostly talking about you?

Businesses grow by solving customer problems, which means you have to know those problems better than your customers can articulate them.

The warning signs are innovation with no clear direction, marketing that lacks focus, and a business that never really reviews its own data. It is not enough to know a customer's age, income or job title.

You need to know what they are trying to achieve, and how many other people are trying to achieve the same thing. Generic offers aimed at generic customers fall flat: up to half of all loyalty points issued are never even redeemed, which tells you how little a bland discount really moves people.

Real insight comes from curiosity and a bit of nerve.

Richard Shotton, author of The Choice Factory, once uncovered a brand's biggest problem on no budget at all, simply by showing people the same man holding a Woolworths bag and a Cotton On bag and asking which looked more attractive.

What matters is depth over volume: understanding why a handful of archetypal customers buy is worth far more than counting how many do.

Building that picture properly, through real research rather than assumption, is a core part of what a fractional marketing team brings.

Fear

The last barrier is the most personal, and the hardest to admit.

When a business leader is afraid, worried or short of confidence, that state quietly stifles growth, trims profit and steers strategy off course.

To grow you have to take risks, which means facing the fear of failure that keeps you clinging to what is not working.

Fear shows up as inertia. Routine tasks take too long, one-off projects run late, promising ideas never quite reach the light, and you genuinely do not know how well the business is performing.

The clearest sign is refusing to look at the numbers at all, because some part of you does not want to know what they hold.

Working through it takes a few honest steps: learning enough about marketing to stop treating it as a black box, building a real strategy with measurable goals, focusing on what works instead of chasing every new tactic, and knowing your customers well enough to feel confident about your direction.

The final step tends to be the one that makes the rest possible, bringing in outside expertise so you are not carrying every decision alone.

Where fractional marketing comes in

Read back over those seven barriers and a pattern appears. Each one is easier to see from the outside than the inside, and each one calls for senior marketing judgement to clear.

That is a lot to hold while you are also running the business, and a full-time marketing executive is a heavy cost for most growing companies to justify.

This is the gap fractional marketing fills. The Marketing Centre gives businesses access to senior marketing expertise, fractional marketing directors, managers and digital experts, on a part-time basis.

They help you work out which barrier is actually holding you back, then bring the experience to clear it, for a fraction of the cost of a full-time hire.

Growth always plateaus for a reason. Find the real one, deal with it decisively, and get expert help to do both, and you put your business back on the road to growth.

the marketing centre

Supercharged Fractional Marketing

Proven marketing leaders.
Real business results.

For more insight on marketing and what it can do for your business, subscribe to our newsletter at themarketingcentre.co.za

Ready to supercharge your growth?

Book a discovery call | info@themarketingcentre.co.za