

## The BlackBerry can be saved

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Consumers are hanging up on BlackBerry in droves as they are lured to sexier and sleeker smartphones and tablets. The depth of the challenges facing BlackBerry's maker, Research in Motion (RIM), are illustrated by its stock price free-fall of more than 80% during the past two years and lower-than-expected BlackBerry sales.

BlackBerry's rise and fall has been quicker than most, but it is still a familiar story: A scrappy company carves out (or perfects) a new product or service, becomes a Wall Street darling and is seemingly invincible. That is, until the next big thing catches the industry Goliath flatfooted, and the company once deemed "too big to fail" is either knocked out or slips into obscurity. These seismic changes are seen in many corners of the economy: from publishing and media companies trying to monetize their assets in an era of free content, to the healthcare industry trying to adapt to new cost pressures while the Supreme Court decides the legality of proposed reforms.

Coming up with the right turnaround strategy is hard enough, but it can be even harder to get your new strategy stick. I've outlined five steps that BlackBerry executives can use to make the hard changes required to succeed, but these can apply to any industry:

**1. Keep the strategy-development period short.** During the next 1,000 days, spend up to 100 days defining the new strategic direction and the next 900 days implementing it. BlackBerry almost certainly needs to refocus on the business and government customers that were its original source of strength (as it's signaling that it's doing). It also needs to define how this new focus will benefit its customers and its shareholders. This could include:

- Explaining the security benefits of separating sensitive business data from personal applications.
- Creating more sales channels through complimentary solutions providers.
- Exploring "heavy duty" business applications for businesses such as UPS and rental car companies.

**2. Aim high, but separate aspirations from commitments.** BlackBerry needs to set goals that will excite investors and its own staff. But it's also critical that the company rebuild its credibility, and that begins by beating expectations. Many organizations mix up aspirations with commitments and end up missing multiple forecasts. Management needs to set near-term expectations below what they think they can really do and reconfigure discretionary spending accordingly.

**3. Communicate simply and directly.** Assume that people can only remember one line when it comes to communicating the strategy. Sure, you'll need longer versions for the management team and board, but the rest of the world needs a one-liner. Think of the rallying cry of the Texas Highway Commission's anti-littering campaign: "Don't mess with Texas!" BlackBerry's latest brand statement — "we need tools, not toys" — is a good start, but it's missing the benefit statement explaining BlackBerry's true advantages versus their consumer-oriented competitors.

**4. Lead by example.** Executives need to champion the change. This means acknowledging that things could be better (which is easy in BlackBerry's case). But it's much harder to communicate why a company needs to chart a new direction absent a clear and credible threat. A leader who is willing to commit to change, and make the case for change, is the indispensable starting point. In BlackBerry's case, this could start with making some tough decisions about what it's going to stop doing. Focusing on enterprise customers is great, but you can't simultaneously pledge your commitment to the consumer market where BlackBerry is fighting a losing battle.

**5. Move quickly.** Too many companies work up a great strategy and then do... nothing. That's a mistake. You need quick actions that clearly signal change. Part of Apple's success is due to its enormous range of app-store applications. BlackBerry needs to work better with other people's software. Personally, the business app other than email that I use the most frequently is our CRM contact management tool. This works great on Apple devices but horribly on BlackBerrys. Announcing high-profile apps deals targeted at enterprise customers in the next six months could be a great way for BlackBerry to show commitment to the new strategy quickly.

It's often hard to let go of the comforts of the status quo, even if we know the current system is broken. Although we understand intellectually why we need to change, we still hope that everything will somehow return to normal. But when change is the norm, leaders need to be ready to guide their teams through uncharted waters using a combination of sound strategies and unwavering commitment — all while providing the clarity and tools to ensure that the entire organization is rowing in sync toward the same goal.

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