



VAN BERGEN Consulting
Strategic Planning & Facilitation
Sales & Marketing Consultancy
Interim Management

A fully qualified Master Mariner, Philip van Bergen spent the first 21 years of his career with P&O Containers (now part of Maersk) - both afloat and ashore - latterly in business systems analysis and project management.

Since leaving P&O in 1991, Philip has held senior positions in companies varying from start-up to £300m turnover, with personal responsibility for revenues in excess of £200m and marketing budgets of over £650k.

He is an entrepreneurial strategist having VP and director-level experience in B2B strategy formulation, global sales & marketing and business start-up within terrestrial telecoms, satcoms, hardware manufacturing, e-commerce and engineering services.

Philip is available for consulting assignments ranging from three day strategic workshops to longer term interim management.



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Business Problems?

Got problems with your business, but not sure how to tackle them?

Need an expert to help you develop a strategy?

We have a wealth of experience in strategic planning within companies ranging from start-ups to a £200m turnover business unit.

Specialising in facilitating strategy workshops, we assist clients to formulate and crystallise their business strategy by defining unambiguous and measurable business objectives and then developing associated programmes to:

- Capitalise on unique core strengths,
- Overcome internal barriers to progress,
- Grasp market opportunities, and
- Neutralise external threats.

We also offer sales and marketing interim management and market research at competitive day rates.

Additionally we are able to provide bespoke creative services, such as websites, launch programme ideas / collateral and channel tools through one of our partner organisations.

Call us today for a no-obligations quote.



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What is Strategy?

When things first go wrong the inexperienced leader panics and puts in place administrative processes to monitor the symptoms in increasingly minute detail.

Familiar story?

This 'analysis paralysis' compounds the problem as valuable (invariably sales) resources are diverted from productive, coal-face activity into time-consuming administration and reporting at an ever-increasing frequency.

Things continue to go wrong, but in more detail - it's like watching a train crash in high definition slow motion. Failure becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy.

The reasons for things going wrong can stem from many root causes;

- Economic recession,
- New, disruptive technology,
- Unrealistic growth targets,
- Lack of sales resources, or demotivated teams,
- Lack of marketing resources (or even no marketing at all).

You would be surprised at the number of senior managers in large corporations who are afraid to say a revenue target set by the accountants or a remote holding company board cannot possibly be met with the available resources, and then go on to blindly lead the company over a precipice into terminal decline.

As far as the senior manager or director is concerned, the first hint of a problem may well show in the revenue figures, but by the time that manifests it's already too late. The true indicator of problems comes from the sales force, and the manager who ignores his sales staff is ignoring his early-warning system.

Strategy involves inoculating the company against infection, not merely micro-managing the symptoms. It is accomplished by planning and marshalling resources for their most efficient and effective use to achieve an agreed common goal or objective.

Unfortunately, most unfacilitated strategic planning descends into simply kicking off uncoordinated, reactive, ill-conceived, fire-fighting activities dictated by just one person, succeeding only in demotivating staff and putting any sensible goal permanently out of reach.

The solution is a formalised process that:

- Defines the goal concisely (normally the most difficult part, as it requires unanimous consensus),
- Flushes out all the associated issues, contingencies and assumptions,
- Consolidates them into logical areas,
- Tests their validity or feasibility, and
- Addresses them with fully resourced and funded programmes (or tactics) that are:
 - Stretching (there must be real effort),
 - Time-bound (there must be a date by which actions are completed),
 - Achievable (unachievable activities serve only to demotivate),
 - Measurable (if it can't be measured, it can't be monitored) and
 - Personalised (allocated to individuals for action, responsibility and authority: nothing motivates people more than having authority over a programme for which they have been given responsibility).

It is a fact that companies will over-estimate external opportunities and underestimate internal weaknesses. It usually transpires that what are perceived as opportunities haven't, as yet, been capitalised on due to some unarticulated internal hurdle or blockage, thereby turning them on further analysis into weaknesses.

Untrained managers also have a habit of setting unrealistic objectives. For example, it is pointless articulating an objective to be the leading provider of some service or product if you have no means of measuring either the addressable market size or your market share.

The facilitator's expertise lies not simply in leading the process, but ensuring that it is not just the senior manager, the largest ego or the loudest voice that has a say, as lack of consensus invariably results in a lack of commitment, which is the single largest barrier to change. It is thus crucial that the facilitator is an external agent outside the reporting structure who is well versed in group dynamics and capable of drawing out the reluctant contributor.

It is also important that strategic planning takes place off-site - preferably Friday to Sunday - as constant interruptions occasioned by daily office life (phone calls, emails, etc.) are not conducive to focus. This also prevents the most senior manager or director making his or her excuses to not be present, for in order that a plan should succeed, it is essential there is a senior management sponsor.

However, simply producing a strategic plan is not the end of the story - it must be monitored and corrective action taken when deviations occur; possibly resulting in a complete re-write in light of new intelligence. Strategic planning is a cyclical activity relying on constant feedback.

In the words of the prophet (and to use a hackneyed phrase), companies that fail to plan end up planning to fail.