

# King of the Mountain Marketing Model

A PYRAMID White Paper

Working to help a client maintain leadership in a fiercely competitive category, we developed a thinking process or model which we refer to as King of the Mountain.

This model helps us force our minds to go through the entire process when attempting to maintain leadership or marketing position. Hopefully, it can be as useful for you as it is for us.

Below is a summary of the rules.

## HOW TO PLAY KING OF THE MOUNTAIN

To remain King of the Mountain, play the game by rules known to be effective.

It is funny that as small children, each of us has an instinctive understanding of the correct strategy for playing and winning the popular game, King of the Mountain. We might not have the strength, weight, or talent to be able to execute. But we know how to win.

Somewhere between childhood and now, we forget. We forget the deceptively simple rules for staying on top. It happens to sports teams. It happens to armies. It happens to companies. It happens to brands.

In summary, the rules are:

- Rule 1 - Guard the summit.
- Rule 2 - Fight from an uphill position.
- Rule 3 - Use superior weapons.
- Rule 4 - Leverage your allies.
- Rule 5 - Move secretly and deceptively.
- Rule 6 - Don't let the enemy gain momentum.
- Rule 7 - Don't let the enemy see you sweat.

These are also the rules for King of the Marketing Mountain, maintaining market leadership ... but first and foremost, to benefit from them, you must have the will to be the leader.

**You must value the position.**

*Is it important to maintain the position? What horrible things might happen to you if you don't? If the answers are unclear, create various winning and losing scenarios, and assess the importance.*

Assuming that you do value the position, and do want to defend it forever, we offer the following:

### **Rule 1 - Guard the summit.**

In King of the Mountain, guarding the summit requires that you protect every conceivable avenue of assault. You cannot guard the summit by covering only the three ridges coming up the north face. You must protect the west ridge, and both southern routes. And even though the east ridge is steep, you better keep an eye on it, too.

In the King of the Market game, you must also protect every conceivable avenue of assault. Avenues of assault include three categories: target user groups, product variations, and distribution channels.

**Cover every flank. Neglect no user group, no matter how small. Be first in all new product areas, even if they turn out not to be worthwhile long term. A wait and see strategy is absolutely the worst way to guard the summit.**

Leave the competition no unopposed path through which to gain a summit foothold.

### **Rule 2 - Fight from an uphill position.**

In direct hand-to-hand combat, the tall guy has certain undeniable advantages of leverage. In King of the Mountain, fighting from uphill produces the same kind of advantages, magnified.

Everything is harder for the guy who is fighting uphill. Always keep your opponent downhill.

In the King of the Mountain game, this means getting there either first or with substantially taller troops. It requires skillful deployment of resources against all paths to the summit. Be there early.

### **Rule 3 - Use superior weapons.**

It's hard to win at King of the Mountain if you're using only your hands and the guys coming up the hill are throwing rocks. The same is true if you're a little guy, and the neighborhood version of the Bears defensive line is charging up the hill. The relative strength and superiority of weapons is vitally important.

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## PYRAMID's King of the Mountain Marketing Model (Continued)

In King of the Mountain marketing, weaponry includes three classes of goods: products, marketing techniques, and spending.

### **Products**

You cannot protect the summit with inferior products.

You can win individual battles with parity products, but you have to swing harder (spend more heavily) to produce the superiority.

Our recommendation to anyone who wants to maintain market leadership is to work twice as hard as the next guy to produce and maintain superior products. They don't have to be technically superior. But they must include some feature that makes the target like them better.

### **Marketing Techniques**

The second leg of weaponry is marketing techniques. Fight with superior techniques. Within each technique, have the most advanced model.

For instance, if advertising is important, have dramatically better copy than the competition. If the trade is important, have more effective trade programs and deals.

In the world of weaponry, you don't have to use all weapons, just those that work, and those that work better than your enemy's.

Another key point on weapons is that it is in the leader's best interest to be the first to develop new, even more effective weapons, so an aggressive development and testing program should be part of your strategy.

### **Spending**

It takes strength to fight off challenges. Just having bodies in the right place is not enough. They must be strong bodies.

You can't save resources when you are losing the battle. You must use the reserves. You can save resources only during times when no battle is being fought.

Too many companies forget that sometimes you cannot decide how much you will spend. It is decided for you by your competitors.

### **Rule 4 - Leverage your allies.**

It is a lot easier to remain King of the Mountain if half of the neighborhood decides to help keep you there. The same is true for King of the Market.

There are several classes of allies: the trade, professional endorsers, official bodies, the press, your other brands, etc. Look for others. Get them on your side.

### **Rule 5 - Move secretly and deceptively.**

A surprised enemy is a weak enemy. The element of surprise has two dimensions for successfully playing King of the Market.

First, do not let the enemy see where you are heading unless it is in your advantage to do so for deceptive purposes. The principle is: Look strong when you are weak, look weak when you are strong. Second, know the enemy. A strong market leader knows more about the competitor than the competitor does himself. If there is any mystery in your mind about why your competitors are succeeding or behaving the way they do, find out. Know what they are doing and why.

In a real war, the most important element is spies, because on them depends an army's ability to move. In market warfare, competitive research, knowledge, and analysis are your spies.

Take your steps one at a time, and as quietly as possible. Do not shout to the enemy that you are throwing down your sword unless you want him to come out in the open so you can blow him away with your new cannon.

### **Rule 6 - Don't let the enemy gain momentum.**

This should be clear enough to understand from games, sports, etc. Energy is a function of momentum. Energy then fuels the will to win.

In King of the Mountain, if you let a few guys get up on the hill, the rest know that they are there, and that the worst is over. They then benefit from what is known in psychology as the goal gradient.

### **Energy increases as you near the finish.**

The opposite is true also. An enemy making no progress gets demoralized. A demoralized enemy is much easier to beat.

### **Rule 7 - Don't let the enemy see you sweat.**

Even when you are in critical stages of near defeat, it is clearly in the leader's best interests to look cool, assured, and filled with boundless reserve energy for the fight.

Never let a shark smell blood. The same is true for a competitor.

Remember that in any fiscal period, somebody at the competitor's office has the decisional authority to decide what resources they will continue to risk in the battle for your spot. Rarely is there absolutely no money left, all credit used. There is always more for the person who has the courage to risk it. If you look wounded, tired, or in any way not up to the fight, they will decide to pursue you with renewed vigor, and that decision will directly affect the resources needed to defend yourself.

Send the kind of clear messages that discourage would-be competition.

PYRAMID is a management consulting firm that focuses on branding. PYRAMID helps clients **build** and **brand** competitive advantage that is both compelling and sustainable.

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