# THE ORGANIC GROWTH PLAYBOOK

# PRAISE FOR *THE ORGANIC GROWTH PLAYBOOK*

"In *The Organic Growth Playbook*, Jaworski & Lurie drive marketing back to the place it should never have left: changing actual customer behavior. By focusing on deeply understanding the customer journey in order to deliver compelling behavior change value propositions, the Playbook provides an actionable blueprint for profitably and sustainably growing your business."

*Roger Martin*
*Co-Author, Playing to Win Strategy Advisor,*
*Author, and Former Rotman School Dean*

"Nearly all of the biggest and even best positioned consumer brands around the world are struggling for organic growth. Its clear the tried and true is no longer sufficient. By digging deeper and wider into the context for purchase behavior, Lurie and Jaworski demonstrate an insightful and time tested approach for finding the levers of growth. It works."

*Tom Long*
*Former CEO*
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"Growing one's company is part of every manager's job, from the CEO on down. Most managers know this. They just don't know how to do it. Jaworski and Lurie provide a tried-and-true approach to doubling or tripling a firm's organic growth rate. Any manager committed to growing their company should read it."

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"A brilliant, lucid example of how astute observation of practitioners by creative minds can provide workable, powerful, general principles. Absolutely essential reading for any manager concerned with achieving sustained growth in any industry."

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"Bob Lurie and Bernie Jaworski know if a company isn't growing it's probably dying, like most of us. However, in today's world of rapidly changing business models and elusive competitive advantage they offer a fresh map of thinking on how to grow in an unpredictable environment. Read this book."

*Larry Weber*
*Founder*
*Weber Shandwick*

AMA Leadership Series

# THE ORGANIC GROWTH PLAYBOOK:

## Activate High-Yield Behaviors to Achieve Extraordinary Results – Every Time

By

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AMERICAN MARKETING ASSOCIATION

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# CONTENTS

# AMA INTRODUCTION TO BOOK SERIES

Welcome to marketing in the twenty-first century – the age of data, social, mobile, automation, and globalization. The field is changing so quickly, it's difficult to keep up. There is increasing uncertainty about the profession's mission and responsibilities. Meantime, the demands marketers face are ever more complex and critical.

This is why the American Marketing Association (AMA) has engaged some of the world's most innovative professionals, academics, and thought leaders to create *The Seven Problems of Marketing* – a seven-book series that introduces and explores a new set of organizing and actionable principles for the twenty-first-century marketer.

Each book in the series takes a deep dive into one problem, offering expertise, direction, and case studies while striking a balance between theory and application. The goal is to provide a contemporary framework for marketers as they navigate the unique challenges and vast opportunities of today's dynamic global marketplace.

Here are the seven problems addressed in the series:

Problem 1: Effectively targeting high-value sources of growth.

Problem 2: Defining the role of marketing in the firm and C-suite.

Problem 3: Managing the digital transformation of the modern corporation.

Problem 4: Generating and using insight to shape marketing practice.

Problem 5: Dealing with an omni-channel world.

Problem 6: Competing in dynamic, global markets.

Problem 7: Balancing incremental and radical innovation.

Importantly, the books in this series are written by and for marketers and marketing scholars. All of the conceptual and analytical frameworks offered are born from practice. The authors have applied their tools and methods in client settings, allowing them to test and refine their ideas in the face of real-world challenges. You'll read true stories about how marketers have used innovative thinking and practices to overcome seemingly impossible dilemmas and bring about game-changing success. Theories are explored in a way that busy marketers can understand viscerally. Client stories have been incorporated to illustrate how to apply the analysis frames as well as deal with application and practice-based issues.

Our fundamental aim with this series is to hone the practice of marketing for the twenty-first century. The AMA has asserted that there is a critical tension within every enterprise between "best" and "next" practices. Marketers often choose best practices because they are safe and proven. Next practices, which push boundaries and challenge conventions, can be riskier. Few enterprises, however, transform themselves and achieve breakout performance with best practices alone. The next practices discussed in this series are often responsible for driving outperformance. The books in this series are designed to engage you on two levels: individually, by increasing your knowledge and "bench strength," and organizationally, by improving the application of marketing concepts within your firm. When you finish each book, we are confident you will feel energized and think differently about the field of marketing and its organizing principles. Through the explanation of theory and compelling examples of its application, you will be empowered to help your organization quickly identify and maximize opportunities. After all, the opportunity to innovate and make an impact is what attracted most of us to the field of marketing in the first place.

Russ Klein
CEO, American Marketing Association

# BOOK SERIES OVERVIEW

In 2016, the AMA established its first-ever intellectual agenda. This intellectual agenda focused on complex, challenging, and difficult-to-solve problems that would be of interest to both academics and practitioners. A working team of scholars and practitioners, selected by AMA leadership, identified seven big problems of marketing as the foundation of the agenda. These problems were ranked from a much longer list of challenges. These seven big problems shared three attributes: they were pressing issues that confronted every organization, they were C-suite level in scope, and they could not be solved by one article or book. Indeed, the team felt that each problem could trigger a decade-long research agenda. A key purpose of the AMA intellectual agenda was thus to stimulate research, dialogue, and debate among the entire AMA membership.

The purpose of the AMA book series is to shed a deeper light on each of the seven problems. In particular, the aim of the series is to enable readers to think differently and take action with regard to these big problems. Thus, the book series operates at two levels: individually, increasing your knowledge and bench strength, and at the organization level, improving the application of marketing concepts within your firm.

Given the nature of these problems, no single book or article can fully address the problem. By their very nature these problems are significant, nuanced, and approachable from multiple vantage points. As such, each of the books provides a single perspective on the issue. This single perspective is intended to both advance knowledge and spark debate. While the books may emerge from academic literature and/or managerial application, their fundamental aim is to improve the practice of marketing. Books selected for the series are evaluated on six criteria.

1. *Seven Big Problems Focus*

   Each book is focused on one of the seven big problems of marketing. These problems identify key conceptual issues in the field of marketing that are the focus of emerging academic research and that practitioners are actively confronting today.

2. *Audience*

   The book is written primarily for an audience of thoughtful practitioners. Thoughtful in this context means that the practitioner is an active reader of both professional articles and books, is dedicated to enhancing his/her marketing knowledge and skills, and is committed to upgrading the organization's marketing culture, capabilities, and results. A secondary audience is academics (and students) and consultants.

3. *Integrated Framework*

   The book provides an integrated framework that frames the problem and offers a detailed approach for addressing it.

4. *Field-Based Approach*

   The authors have applied their frameworks in client settings. These client settings enable authors to test and refine their frameworks. Conceptual and analysis frameworks are enlivened via practice and case examples that demonstrate application in the field. Named and/or disguised client stories illustrate how to apply the analysis frames, how to deal with application issues, and other practice-based issues.

5. *Academic Literature*

   The integrative frameworks should be new to the marketplace. The conceptual frameworks should extend existing thinking and the analysis frameworks should provide new ways to conduct marketing-related analysis.

6. *Readability*

   The book should be intelligible to the average reader. The concepts should be clearly defined and explained, and cases written so that a reader can understand the content on a first read.

On behalf of the AMA, I am excited to bring these books to market. I am anxious to hear your feedback – both positive and challenging – as we move the field forward.

Bernie Jaworski
*AMA Book Series Editor*

# PREFACE

In the early 1990s, Bob began to notice an odd and disturbing lack of pattern in his work with clients trying to grow or grow faster. They were applying the gold standard methods of marketing: segmenting, targeting, and then positioning products to be differentiated in the minds of desirable customers. But the standard playbook did not reliably result in organic growth. In situation after situation, he observed that well-researched and well-designed campaigns to differentiate products in customers' minds sometimes produced double-digit growth, but often yielded nothing, and sometimes, confoundingly, led to overall sales declines. On the other hand, he noticed that some clients with "good enough" (but not particularly differentiated) products seemed able to achieve consistent growth. This seemingly random distribution of results left Bob with a puzzle – and a dilemma: should he continue to use the widely accepted standard methods and never be sure he could really help his clients grow, or should he figure out what was going wrong and try something different?

This book is about trying something different – not just for the sake of being different, but in the quest to find a reliable methodology for accelerating organic growth. By the mid- to late-1990s, the core thinking – and the first iteration of the tools – was consistently enabling clients to grow faster. In the early 2000s, Bernie began to teach the tools as he and Bob continued to test and refine them in a wide variety of firms – big and small, in B2B and B2C industries, in developed and emerging economies. They worked. In fact, they worked so well that clients began to embed the new approach into their own processes of planning for growth. Over the past five years, the two of us have worked together to further develop the methodology and articulate its core principles.

The result of those years of effort and experience is captured in this book. Its purpose is simple: to provide a comprehensive, integrated method to consistently accelerate organic growth. As we learned in our journey, this requires both a new approach to marketing as well as some key changes to organization-wide capabilities. While firms can achieve significant value by applying the methodology to an individual product or brand, the benefits are vastly magnified when the whole organization is aligned around the approach.

The key audience for this book is thoughtful practitioners who must struggle to achieve aggressive growth targets each and every year. We therefore provide detailed instructions on how to apply the tools and illustrate the process with four comprehensive client stories of organizations in different industries that successfully implemented the approach. A second audience for this book includes academic researchers and teachers. One of our aims is to challenge the conventional orthodoxy of marketing that differentiating products in the minds of customers is the golden key for unlocking growth. Differentiation is necessary, but it's not enough. In our view, organic growth cannot be achieved by changing mindsets, but only by changing behaviors. The focus of our approach is, therefore, on finding and influencing the few, key customer behaviors during the purchasing process that disproportionately drive growth.

A note on method. This book is based on trial and error in the field. It emerged from what we learned working side-by-side with clients to accelerate organic growth. We were fortunate in also being able to learn from the experiences of several outstanding colleagues who used these methods with their clients. We've had some wonderful successes along the way, some of which are highlighted in this book. We've also learned from some failures at the outset that helped us adjust and fine-tune our approach.

All those experiences and the hard work of our many colleagues and clients are reflected in this book.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the entire book and introduces readers to the core concepts and methods of our approach. Chapters 2–10 delve into a detailed explanation of the five principles at the heart of the *Playbook* approach and includes four end-to-end client stories illustrating the methodology. These chapters lay out the tools and techniques needed to apply the approach in your own business. Chapters 11 and 12 cover some of the lessons learned from applying these tools in different types of firms, industries, and geographies. These two chapters are a must read for those seeking to implement and embed the *Playbook* principles within their organizations.

We are excited to share these ideas that we have developed, debated, and refined over the course of many years. We hope you enjoy the book and are able to apply its lessons to deliver stronger, more reliable organic growth in your own organizations.

Bernie Jaworski *Los Angeles, CA*
Bob Lurie *Chilmark, MA*

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# 1

# OVERVIEW OF *THE ORGANIC GROWTH PLAYBOOK*

A few years ago, Sam Wilcox, Vice President of launch products at one of the world's largest life sciences companies, was in a tough spot. While the company's newest drug, Terrafix,[1] had achieved revenues over $680 million in its first year after launch, its rate of growth had stalled. To make matters worse, the nearest competitor was investing heavily in promoting an alternative therapy, while another competitor was getting ready to launch a third product with a therapy similar to Terrafix. Senior management was pressuring Sam for a new, more aggressive go-to-market plan.

The Terrafix team had invested tremendous effort in developing a clear, differentiated product message – and it appeared to be working. Physicians were aware of Terrafix and it had a solid reputation as an effective, reliable therapy. It was positioned well versus its next best competitor. The drug was claiming a unique space in the minds of targeted physicians. Yet, for some reason, this wasn't driving sales growth. When Sam reviewed the data, it showed that only a small fraction of the patient population at risk for the medical condition treated by Terrafix was getting a prescription for it. He knew something more had to be done.

To better understand the disconnect, Sam's team mapped in fine, quantitative detail the various ways that patients and doctors interacted before, during, and after their annual physical exam. What they found through this study confirmed Sam's hunch: many patients who were at risk for the disease were not receiving a diagnosis that would lead to a prescription. In fact, in most cases, doctors had performed a qualitative, subjective assessment that left them uncertain about the patient's actual risk. And in the absence of a clear-cut diagnosis, most doctors chose not to treat with medication.

By contrast, the team found that patients who had taken a newly available objective diagnostic test were four times more likely to receive a prescription for Terrafix. Simply put, when doctors could review an objective diagnostic test with a clear indication of disease, they took action. It became clear that the solution wasn't to build a more differentiated position for Terrafix, but to get doctors to perform the diagnostic test.

In a significant departure from their initial launch strategy, the team made a choice to reorient their marketing and sales from a traditional product pitch extolling the benefits of Terrafix. Instead, they focused on two behavior-oriented campaigns: one to convince more primary care physicians to order the objective test and the other to persuade patients to ask for it. This new choice – to focus on changing a couple of critical behaviors – led Sam's team to rethink nearly everything.

First, they resegmented their patient and physician populations so that they could more precisely identify and target those who would be most likely to ask for or order the test. Then they began a deep exploration of what factors might motivate – or deter – patients in the target segments from asking for a test. This led them further away from their traditional product benefit focus. Instead, these factors ranged widely from the (limited) physical availability of the test to the importance these patients placed on their own sense of well-being. They had little to do with the product itself.

With clarity about whom to target, and what shaped their decision to order or ask for a test, Sam's team redesigned and reallocated its marketing and sales in a radically different way. Marketing and sales resources had previously been spread across a host of promotional activities to tout the brand, primarily to physicians. Going forward, the team aggressively funded an unbranded communications campaign encouraging patients to ask for the test, positioning it as a natural, appropriate extension of the kind of "taking care of my health is taking care of myself" behavior on which the exploratory research had shown these patients prided themselves. The team also invested heavily in similarly unbranded efforts to make the necessary diagnostic testing more widely available and economically feasible, and to remind physicians to use it.

We'll return to the Terrafix example in more detail in the next chapter. For now, the important thing to note is how different the team's new approach was from the conventional strategy – and how different the results were. The new campaign led to a 60 percent increase in the number of objective diagnostic tests performed. As predicted by the team's analysis, this growth in tests translated directly into a higher rate of Terrafix prescriptions and increased sales. In the first year of the campaign, total annual revenues rose by 9 percent, while the marketing spend for this more focused campaign actually decreased by $15 million. In the three years after the relaunch, Terrafix's sales grew by nearly 50 percent to $1.31 billion.

Sam's story, while remarkable, is far from unique. Time after time, we've seen this holistic perspective on customers' purchasing behaviors bear fruit by revealing unexplored opportunities for influencing specific behaviors to unlock growth. In this book, we share four detailed stories and dozens of shorter examples of companies that have sparked growth by identifying and activating key customer behaviors. While these examples span a range of product types and industries, they all share certain similarities – namely, a commitment by product teams to make concrete, fact-based choices intended to increase the frequency of high-yield customer behaviors. These choices provide a consistent line of sight for the marketing, sales, and product teams that enables them to align activities in pursuit of common goals.

## SENIOR MANAGEMENT'S MOST PRESSING PROBLEM: REVENUE GROWTH

The challenge Sam faced was one that we've observed again and again: being responsible for revitalizing a good product with an unsatisfactory growth rate. Consistent, profitable revenue growth is the primary goal of senior executives and is generally considered the gold standard in evaluating managers' performance.[2] The reason is simple: reliable revenue growth is the largest single factor influencing a company's stock price and business success. General managers or product managers who consistently achieve profitable double-digit growth are rewarded with significant pay increases and promotions. Legendary CEOs such as Jack Welch (GE), Lou Gerstner (IBM), and James Burke (Johnson & Johnson) significantly outperformed the growth rates of their industry peers. More recently, CEOs like Ratan Tata (Tata Group), Eric Schmidt (Alphabet), and Larry Ellison (Oracle) have built their careers on their ability to generate growth even in difficult economic circumstances.[3]

### CEO of the Year and Organic Growth

Many of the most widely admired CEOs have garnered recognition for their ability to drive steady, profitable organic growth year after year.[4] For example:

- Harvard Business Review ranked Lars Rebien Sørensen of Novo Nordisk as the top CEO for 2015. When asked about the firm's strategy, Sørensen noted, "*Outsiders sometimes come in and say, 'You're dependent on diabetes for 80 percent of your revenue – you should diversify.' But I've always believed that you should do things that you know something about, that you're good at. We've tried a lot of diversification strategies in the past, but we've failed because of the inherent scientific and commercial uncertainty and our own naïveté. So our expansion has been completely organic.*[5]"
- Fortune magazine ranked Nike CEO Mark Parker their businessperson of the year in 2015. He doubled revenue growth since 2006 and the company took a commanding 62 percent share of the market with 8.5 percent steady annual growth. Nike also reported a profit of $3 billion during 2015 – nearly 11 percent of sales.[6]

Our focus in this book is on helping you grow your company more rapidly and reliably – without resorting to acquisitions. Buying another company is, of course, a quick way to grow revenues. And it's often a valuable way of acquiring skills, assets, and access needed for further growth. Growth through acquisition is certainly easier and quicker than growing by outcompeting rivals. Nonetheless, profitable, steady organic growth – be it by taking market share from competitors or by convincing existing customers to consume more of the product – is the acid test for companies and managers. No matter how skilled you are at dealing with the myriad functional challenges of running an organization, if you can't find a way to increase sales from existing or newly developed products, your company will, sooner or later, cease to exist. It will be acquired, dismantled, or shut down. It's that simple.

A cursory look at the business news on any given day reinforces the importance of sustained, profitable, revenue growth. Many of the top stories revolve around firms that failed to achieve revenue targets and the consequences of these shortfalls. The result is typically a drop in stock price and a questioning of the firm's strategy (see The Organic Growth Challenge).

**The Organic Growth Challenge**

The three short illustrations below appeared as we were writing and are typical of these missed growth expectations:

- Netflix experienced slower subscriber growth in the United States as its core market of affluent young to middle age subscribers appeared to reach a saturation point. As subscriber growth slowed to 0.3 percent versus the previous quarter, the stock price dropped by 14 percent.[7]
- McDonald's missed stock market analyst projections regarding revenue growth, stoking fears that the fast food industry was headed into decline. The stock fell 3.8 percent.[8]
- IBM continued to pursue a strategic transformation. It reported 16 straight quarters of year-over-year revenue declines – with more to come, according to analysts. Other tech giants such as HP and EMC also struggled to accelerate growth, prompting concerns about the future prospects of these industry leaders.[9]

The pervasiveness of the growth challenge is due to the fact that virtually all managers – not just CEOs – face difficult competitive conditions with an inadequate tool kit for growth. Nearly all markets today are characterized by multiple competitors with similar capabilities, talent, and products. Moreover, in all these markets, customers almost always know the product offerings. They've heard many messages about the products and are familiar with the performance of a good number of them.

So, most managers in most markets find themselves trying to grow a good (but not great) product. Their product is largely viewed by customers and potential customers as similar to all the others. They know their product has some strong selling points, perhaps an aspect of functionality or perhaps an element of service, in which they're clearly better than competitors. They also know – though they're often reluctant to admit it – that their product has some weak points relative to their competitors' products. Most of all, they know that they're competing in a roughly equal sports league. Everyone is playing the same game, with largely the same talent, product, and offering. It's not easy to carve out a path to sustained growth and success in that kind of competitive environment.

What compounds the intrinsic competitive challenge is that most managers use the same approach to finding a way to grow. This approach has been taught in every business school and reinforced on the job everywhere in the world for decades. It's a four-step process: segment, prioritize and target, position, and promote. The idea is for product managers to segment the market into identifiable groups of customers with distinct product needs, select several of those segments to target, identify a value proposition to position the product in a distinct and compelling way to customers in the selected target segments, and then promote – communicate about the product and make it available – as aggressively as possible to those customer segments. This classic approach is based on the idea that if a company positions its products well, growth will follow.

***** *Except, it doesn't.*

The facts are startling. It's common knowledge that a very high percentage of all new product launches (into competed categories) fail – either outright or by failing to achieve a meaningful bump in sales. A recent *Harvard Business Review* article noted that 75 percent of new product launches in consumer packaged goods and retail fail to earn $7.5 million in their first year. And only 3 percent hit the target of $50 million, which is considered the gold standard for a new product launch.[10] The numbers in business-to-business (B2B) industries are equally poor. And it's well known that most of the money spent on marketing and sales efforts to boost growth of existing products earns a poor return, or very often no return at all.

Some of this poor performance could be due to poor work on the part of managers and their teams. In fact, poor execution is the reason given in most companies for failure to achieve growth. But most teams actually do good work, often very good work. We know, because we've watched dozens of them and worked with dozens more. We came to realize that the real root cause of the failure to grow was that these teams were using an ineffective process for identifying how to grow in competitive markets.

It's time for a new approach – a new playbook that is purposely designed to deliver above average growth both reliably and consistently for any manager and any team with a good product.

## THE ORGANIC GROWTH PLAYBOOK

The central idea of *The Organic Growth Playbook* is that faster sales growth results from designing offers and campaigns that have a relentless, integrated focus on changing one or two high-yield customer behaviors. This is in sharp contrast to the conventional growth approach, which focuses on differentiating product offerings from those of competitors.

### *Organic Growth Playbook* Versus Conventional Approach

| *Conventional Approach* | *Playbook Approach* |
|---|---|
| • Focus on differentiating products in the minds of target customers. | • Focus on changing customer behavior in their buying process that provides most leverage. |
| • Segment based on benefits, demographics, or attitudes. | • Segment based on likelihood of engaging in the key behavior. |
| • Develop customer profiles centered on product use and attitudes. | • Develop customer profiles that reveal critical drivers and barriers of key behavior. |
| • Develop a value proposition focused on creating a differentiated perception of product. | • Develop a value proposition that is focused on changing behavior. |
| • Spread marketing investment across 4Ps in product messaging. | • Focus investment on behavior change – not product messaging. |
| • Fully activate market with a multisegment focus. | • Disproportionately and sequentially fund a few segments. |

The core logic of the conventional approach is that if a brand is sufficiently different and better than competitors' brands, consumers will come to prefer it and will actively seek it out for purchase. But it very often doesn't work out that way. Every customer goes through some type of buying process before purchasing a product or a service. They may talk to friends who've already bought the product. They may visit stores and sample the product. They may look up information about the product or service on the internet. They may articulate and debate the pros and cons of the product. Sometimes their buying process is lengthy, involving multiple activities and iterations. Other times it's short and simple. But, in every customer's process there's an action that *decisively* shapes which product or service they ultimately purchase. By visiting one type of store instead of another, they end up considering only a subset of available brands. By talking to a friend – instead of researching a product on the internet – they're convinced of the merits of one brand over another. Having set out with a notion of buying brand X, some activity – the visit to the convenience store instead of the grocery store, the internet research instead of the talk with a friend – puts them onto a different path, one that ends in the purchase of brand Y. *The Organic Growth Playbook* is built around this important insight. It lays out an approach you can use to change the behavior of customers at critical places in their buying process, thereby shifting them onto paths that favor the purchase of your product or service instead of a competitor's. When your team can impact what customers do during the key phases of the buying process, sales can grow much faster, and with less effort.

The *Playbook* does follow the structure of the four-step conventional approach. It calls for segmenting your market, prioritizing and targeting just a few of those segments, developing a value proposition for each target segment, and designing offers and promotional activities around those value propositions. Where it differs is in the content of those steps, in how the market is segmented and value propositions developed. Its focus is on customer behaviors rather than product. When you segment, target, position, and promote around high-yield behaviors in the buyer's decision-making process rather than focusing on product positioning, you can boost your growth rates by 1.5 to 2 times – and count on doing so reliably. But if you continue to center your growth planning on product positioning – as the classic approach dictates – you'll continue to struggle or fail more often than not.

We certainly didn't set out to create something radical when we began working with our clients to help them drive organic growth for their products and services. Initially, we just wanted to help them produce better results with the conventional process. Time and time again, however, we saw smart, skilled, highly motivated business managers follow the classic approach only to see their growth plans fall short. Over time, we realized that the reason the classic