

WHITE PAPER

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Six Battlefields – win the competition!

Most companies these days operate on established markets where it is essential to consistently dispel any competition. (Potential) customers generally already have a favourable attitude towards their current partner. So it's all about changing mindsets. SWOT analyses, positioning and value propositions compiled by marketing departments are largely no longer sufficient.

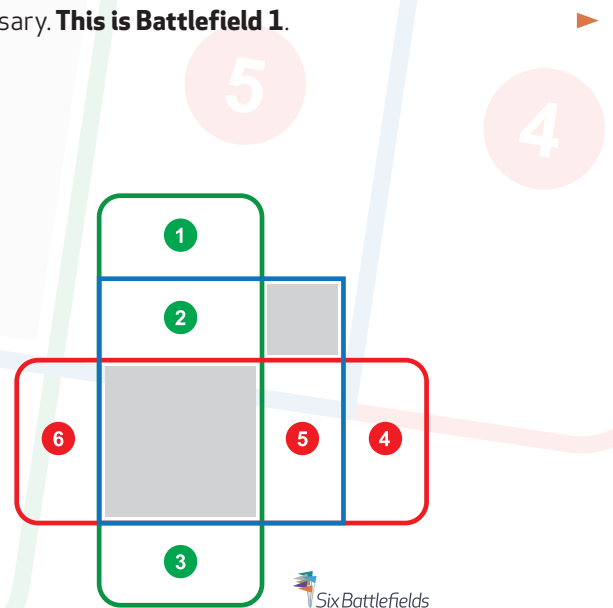
This is where Mercuri's newly developed Six Battlefields concept comes into play. It identifies six fields where it is essential to measure up against the competition so as to impress the customer. Each battlefield is associated with precise conversational strategies for achieving success over the competition and dragging the customer out of that 'everything's the same' apathy.

The individual battlefields comprise a combination of customer requirements, the company's own profile of offers and the offer profile of a specific competitor.

A training concept without charts, handouts or PPT presentations. Pure interaction with participants using a flipchart and presented by an experienced trainer. The target group is sales staff as well as product and marketing managers. The results can be implemented as early as the following morning!

This is based on the requirements of a customer or specific customer group. It initially defines the framework for confronting the competitor (marked in blue in the diagram).

If you now superimpose your own profile of requirements (labelled green in the diagram), this will reveal some performance characteristics which the customer views as unnecessary. **This is Battlefield 1.**

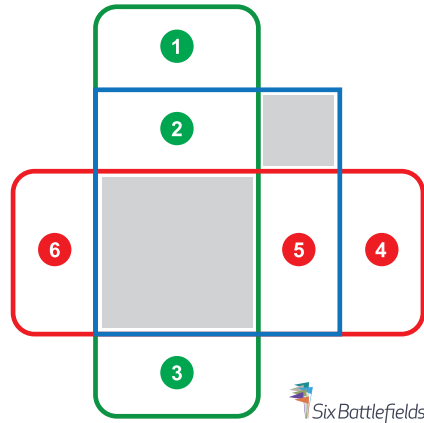


Mercuri International's concept Six Battlefields is a robust methodology to enhance the Sales Force impact in a strong competitive situation.

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Six Battlefields



- ▶ **Battlefield 2** concentrates on the company's own strengths which fall within the customer's scope of requirements and where the competitor has no equivalent to offer – your unique selling points (USPs).

Every performance profile also has its weak points. Battlefield 3 describes those weaknesses which are not relevant to requirements but could confuse the customer.

The same logic in reverse can be applied to the competitor's offer and forms battlefields 4-6.

The fields marked in grey indicate that both suppliers either can or cannot meet the customer's scope of requirements. These are important and need to be addressed but the battle with the competition will not be decided here. The decision over the outcome of the battle for the customer instead falls within fields 1-6.

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Battlefield 1: Expand your battlefield

This battlefield is not seen as essential by the customer at first. It comprises some of the strengths of your offer that the customer feels are not needed or not necessary and therefore deems them irrelevant. You therefore

need to first of all ensure that the customer accepts this as a battlefield before you can employ your arguments effectively as weapons against the competition. The customer first needs to recognise that your strengths are indeed needed. In sales terms, this is a classic need-selling situation in which you need to expand the customer's scope of requirements.

In doing so, you need to make the customer aware of specific challenges and make it clear that there is a considerable risk if these aspects are not taken into account when choosing a partner.

Discuss the customer's current market situations. Identify the customer's goals and potential obstacles in achieving these goals. In this way, you can identify what the customer 'really' needs and which of your additional strengths are relevant here.

Make it clear to the customer that there are risks or requirements which they may not yet have taken into account when presenting their requirements. Afterwards, you can explain to the customer that only your offering can provide the appropriate performance characteristics.

If you succeed, you can also generate additional USPs and competitive advantages. Battle 1 would be won!

Battlefield 2: Shoot from all angles

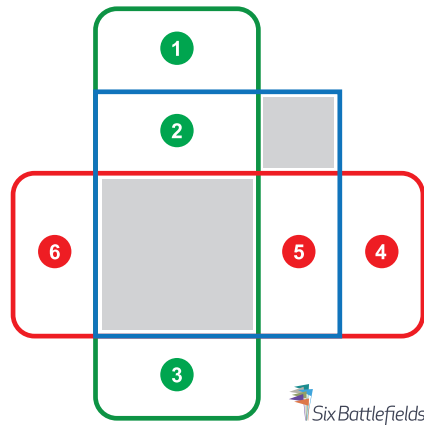
In this battlefield, the customer needs to recognise that only you can offer these performance characteristics. Unfortunately, we often notice that USPs are overlooked ▶

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- ▶ and are not specifically employed as a means of standing out from the competition. Make sure you address the customer's particular requirements, operating situation and needs. Stress that only you can meet these requirements and that there are no comparable offers, as far as you are concerned.

Even if a customer continues to emphasise that all offers are comparable and plays down the need for the specific USPs of your offer, don't be overly concerned. This may be simply a purchasing tactic and your arguments may well be taken into account. Stay calm and confident.

Battlefield 3: Reinforce the borders

Of course, all offers have their weaknesses too. Your competitors will be happy to identify these to the customer. And there are different kinds of weakness. There are weaknesses that you possess that are also strengths of the competitor (we will address this under Battlefield 5). There are also weaknesses which do not fall within the customer's scope of requirements. So-called 'pseudo-weaknesses' which do not seem to be relevant. This is Battlefield 3.

Approach these pseudo-weaknesses in a calm and open manner. Ideally, address them in a proactive and confident way. You can only gain, as well as appear more credible and make the customer immune to any potential attacks from competitors. Simply admit your weaknesses but indicate that they do not represent a disadvantage for the customer. Demonstrate that the weaknesses will not play a part in any situation encountered by the customer.

In many cases, these weaknesses even represent hidden strengths. Long delivery times paired with high prices, for example, make it clear that the price is in line with the market. Otherwise there would not be such high demand, leading to the long delivery times. Therefore, so long as the customer has no problem with making arrangements in advance, this weakness will not have any effect.

Battlefield 4: Make sure competitor attacks miss their mark

The competition will normally also have strengths/performance characteristics which the customer does not need. To ensure that these 'pseudo strengths' do not become weaknesses in your own offering, they need to be addressed. Do not count on the customer noticing that these 'pseudo strengths' are not relevant. They are often eye-catching and sound attractive. These include, for example, images such as strength of innovation and comprehensive performance characteristics. Strength of innovation alone is not a strength. Often the customer does not need this. There are sufficient appropriate solutions on the market and many innovations come at the expense of quality and reliability. A range of performance characteristics which are not needed costs unnecessary money. A lower level yet entirely sufficient performance is often a more profitable investment for the customer. It is often said that you should not argue against your competitors. This only causes the customer to adopt defensive behaviour, show solidarity with the competition and talk of entirely comparable offers. However, there is no danger of this in Battlefield 4. Quietly recognise the strengths of the

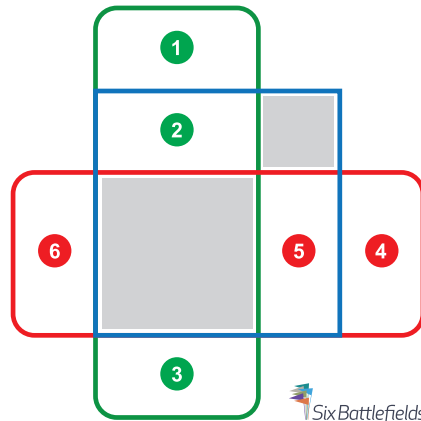
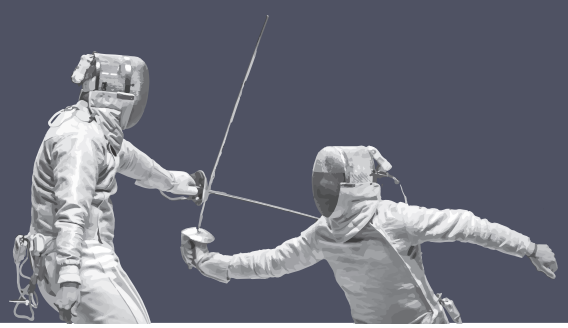
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► competition and do not downplay them, either proactive or as a reaction to the customer's objections. That said, stress that these strengths are not relevant, if necessary pointing out that there are two sides to every coin. Make it clear that this is an unnecessary battlefield and let any attacks miss their target. In doing so, you will then mitigate the combat strength of your opponent.

Battlefield 5: The frontline of the competition

Now you have to deal with the elite forces of your competition – their USPs. But first, make sure you avoid a frontal attack.

Continue to weaken your competition and limit their movement capabilities on the battlefield. Do not argue directly against the strengths of your competition. Instead, like on Battlefield 4, question their significance for the customer. Are the unique strengths of the competitor really needed? How often does such a need actually arise in practice? Perhaps this might enable you to downplay some of your competitor's USPs and move them towards Battlefield 4 – the competitor's 'pseudo' strengths.

However if confronted with actual USPs from a competitor, get ready to fight. Don't avoid the issue and don't be forced onto the defensive. You should also make sure you don't underestimate the competition and take their USPs seriously. Battle one-on-one and specifically tackle the competitor's USPs. Show that your USPs (Battlefield 2) clearly offer more advantages overall. Don't shy away from directly comparing the offers, describe and discuss the advantages and disadvantages but leave the final assessment to the customer. Remain objective and credible throughout.

Battlefield 6: Attack your competitor's borders

Competitors also have weaknesses which either irritate the customer or are not really relevant. However in this case, you should not point this out to the customer directly. Instead, address these weaknesses indirectly. Make your customer aware that your offer does not contain 'specific' weaknesses. In doing so, you can attack your competitor at the borders and support your own strategy on Battlefield 5. Your competitor will then appear weaker overall.

Conclusion:

The Six Battlefields concept offers a completely new approach to analysing the relevant competitive situation in a very detailed and structured manner. It can provide you with powerful ammunition during key moments in the battle for a customer. After all, whether you want to or not, you will have to approach specific competitors as opponents in the individual battlefields – your customer will make sure of that.

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