

SIXTEEN OPPORTUNITY ACTIVATORS

*Note: The following Opportunity Activators are excerpted from my book **Master Opportunity and Make it Big**.*

It's true that opportunities are literally everywhere. But if they're everywhere, how can you focus on them? Where should you focus to find them? To help you on your way, I've summarized 16 activators you can focus on to find and perceive breakthrough opportunities. These are based on the secrets of the Opportunity Masters as well as my own 30+ years of experience developing opportunities for hundreds of companies.

These 16 are by no means the only activators of breakthrough opportunities. There are dozens and dozens of doorways to the perception of opportunities, but these are some of the best ones.

OppActivator 1: Pain

Very often when our bodies feel pain the brain understands that there is a need for reparation. Similarly, in the market, 'pain' or a deficiency creating the illusion of loss is a need gap that needs to be filled. And to find this pain you must leave the ivory tower.

Talk with your customers, channels, suppliers and employees. Ask them about what's bothering them – "In what ways are you not satisfied? What are the severe pain points that need to be addressed?" Remember: the greater the pain, the larger the potential opportunity may be.

After looking for pain outside, look inside. Ask yourself: "What hurts me the most? What are my biggest pet peeves?" As Sasha Mirchandani suggested, there may be opportunity for you to build a great new business around relieving your own pain, if many others also share it.

OppActivator 2: Customer centricity

As I mentioned before, the most important question in the world is: "What's in it for me?" Because of our innate selfishness, few people are in the habit of seeing things from the other person's perspective. There's tremendous opportunity in seeing things through your customer's eyes. It can provide you with insights to not only relieve their pain, but also to create delight.

Aditya Puri has consistently applied the values of customer centricity to make HDFC Bank India's favourite brand. He has invested in technology to not only improve convenience and ease of use, but also to mine data to provide a more personalized customer experience. We all enjoy listening to our own opinions, as well as speaking with our colleagues in our own company and own industry. Unfortunately, only speaking to insiders will create a myopic view and make you miss opportunities. It's even more important to speak with your customers. Like Harindra Singh has said: "If you're going to sell to people, you need to know them."

OppActivator 3: Segmentation

Once upon a time, Coca-Cola was sold only two ways: at fountains or in small glass bottles. Now it's sold in numerous sizes, flavours and formats. Why? Because over time, as markets evolve, more segments form, with their own tastes and needs. India is already a land of

enormous diversity. As it becomes wealthier, spending power is growing large enough to create demand for increasingly segmented brands, products and services. The key to successful segmentation opportunities is that the markets you target have large enough scale and growth potential to provide profits.

OppActivator 4: The Neglected

One of the best places to look for opportunities is in markets that are neglected, often referred to as “Blue Oceans”. In India, there are many needs and many consumers that are neglected. When nobody else is doing it, there may be great opportunities for you.

For example, by creating Via.com, Ashwini Kakkar catered to millions of consumers who were neglected by traditional travel agents. He also created a new proprietary channel by harnessing the energies of thousands of neglected shopkeepers and turning them into his sales force. You can also find great opportunities in neglected geographies. When Marico entered Bangladesh, it was the first to offer branded products in several categories. Surendra Hiranandani created a paradise in the neglected and “worthless” geography of Powai.

Catering to neglected consumers, channels and geographies can offer you the opportunity to ‘create the category’, as Jagdeep Kapoor did when he created India’s first branding consultancy. Several of the Opportunity Masters in this book created new categories. I created a new category when I launched OpenMind, the world’s first and only opportunity consultancy.

Demand for neglected products, services, consumers and geographies may not be obvious, because it is unknown. Generally, market research will not expose it. For example, when Fred Smith launched FedEx as the first overnight courier service, all the demand was latent since nobody had ever provided the service before.

OppActivator 5: Four Wives and One Husband

To identify opportunities around the periphery of your current business, it can be very helpful to look at new Whos, Whats, Wheres, Whens and Hows. To do so, ask yourself a few simple questions:

1. Who else can I sell this to?
2. What else can I do for the same customers?
3. Where else can I sell the same things?
4. When else can I sell, i.e., at different times?
5. How else can I sell, i.e., using different channels?

For example, Dr. Mukesh Batra of Dr. Batra’s markets to a different **who** by opening homeopathic pet clinics. He sells to a different **where** by opening clinics in foreign countries. He offers different **whats** by expanding his areas of specialization to 52 different diseases. By providing care over the internet, he’s expanded into a new **when** (24 hours a day), and through a new **how**: cyberspace.

OppActivator 6: Branding

India offers abundant opportunities to brand the unbranded. There are numerous categories and segments in which competition is largely disorganized, or in which there are

no national or regional brands. For example, Marico's Harsh Mariwala began his career by creating India's first brand of coconut hair oil and has since gone on to create the first brand in several categories.

More recently, with MSL, Rafique Malik has created the first branded shoes to sell below Rs. 300. The potential market is enormous, and it has no organized competitors.

You should also look for opportunities to co-brand, i.e. using the brand equity of others to build your own brand. Kotak Mahindra's Uday Kotak used the free equity of co-branding with Mahindra, Goldman Sachs and Ford to build his own reputation before launching his own brands.

OppActivator 7: Solutions

The famed marketing guru Theodore Levitt said: "Your customer doesn't want to buy a quarter inch drill; he wants a quarter inch hole." The fact is, people simply don't really care about your products or services. What they care about is the solutions these products and services provide to them. The jobs they get done for them. To better provide solutions, you must understand why and how consumers try to solve their problems. A good way to do this is by actually watching your customers or potential customers as they try to get their jobs done.

Great opportunities lie in providing solutions that are simpler, cheaper, faster or more convenient. These are sometimes known as disruptive innovations. Another option is to offer more complete solutions to cash-rich, time-poor consumers, as Ashwini Kakkar has done with Mercury Travels. There are often great opportunities to add products to services, as Dr. Batra has done with homeopathic products that supplement his medical services.

Or you can add additional services to products to provide more thorough solutions. By mapping the customer's **job to be done** journey from one end to the other, you can even provide what are known as 'Full Stack Solutions'. The key is: Don't fall in love with your products. Fall in love with your customers and get to know them intimately, so that you can capture lucrative opportunities to provide better solutions for **their** most important jobs.

OppActivator 8: Trends

It goes without saying that things change. The pace of change is increasing all the time. To stay on top of change, it is essential to monitor trends that can create opportunities. Nishith Desai built India's most successful new law firm by monitoring trends, so that he could provide solutions for needs that would be created by them. Opportunities can emerge from all kinds of trends, including fashion, technology, demographics, emerging segments, products, markets, channels and competitors.

What are the most important trends in your industry? You need to stay on top of them all the time and continuously consider the new opportunities that they could create. In sectors in which technology changes rapidly, it's essential to ride the wave created by this evolution. Neeraj Roy has ridden three successive waves of technological change to keep Hungama on a course of sustained, profitable growth.

OppActivator 9: Threats and Challenges

Harinder Singh has often said: "Your biggest challenge can also be your biggest opportunity." What are your biggest challenges to both your company and your industry? What threats to your business keep you up at night?

Remember this: The wheel never stops turning, and relevance can disappear overnight. When you are threatened, rather than being paralyzed by fear, look for ways to create new relevance through the opportunities that change always brings. Every time Nirmal Jain's business model was threatened by technology change or market evolution, rather than standing still, he grasped the opportunity to enter new areas of business.

OppActivator 10: Values

Do you expect others to treat you with honesty and integrity? Do you appreciate it when they do? Of course you do. But do you yourself always live up to the golden rule: "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you"? Of course you don't.

Because they're so rare but always appreciated, good values are a great opportunity. HDFC Bank has built India's most valuable brand based on consistently solid values. You can improve your own brand the same way.

What do good values mean? They mean being consistently honest and transparent. It means doing what you've promised and admitting when you fail. It means living up to the golden rule all the time. Think – how can you improve your own values or the values of your business?

OppActivator 11: Failures

Have you failed in past? Have you considered why? Have you learned your lessons and tried again? Have your competitors had opportunities that failed in past? What have you learned from those? Failure can be a rich source of opportunity. Often, failure is caused simply because the timing wasn't right. Nirmal Jain struggled to build IIFL for ten years, only to succeed when a bull market finally emerged.

Opportunities can be recovered. If you have lapsed into irrelevance, you can recover. If your timing was wrong before, maybe it's right now. Are there opportunities you've long planned for that never got off the launch pad? Did you have false starts before? These may now be opportunities.

OppActivator 12: Key Performance Indicators

Managing better is always an opportunity. However, as management is a very broad subject far beyond the scope of this book, I'd prefer to focus on a more approachable opportunity area - Key Performance Indicators or KPI's.

It's particularly useful to monitor the satisfaction of all your stakeholders. Do you currently use KPIs to monitor satisfaction? If you don't, it would be an opportunity for you to develop them. If you already do, how do you know that your KPIs are correct? Do your KPIs actually reflect what's important to customers, employees, vendors, channels and other stakeholders? Are they as relevant as they could be? Are managers doing things to satisfy your customers, or are they more focused on satisfying the performance indicators?

There can be great opportunity in reviewing your KPIs to ensure that they are adding value. There's even greater value in designing KPIs that actually point you in the direction of new opportunities for your business.

OppActivator 13: Nopportunities

Very often, businesses spend a great deal of time and money doing things that provide very little return. I call these things nopportunities, as they are not opportunities. You alone have the opportunity to stop doing nopportunities.

Getting rid of nopportunities always improves your bottom line and frees up capital and time for what you should be focusing on: breakthrough opportunities. For example, if you had sold a product for ten years that never made you money and the market for it is declining, would you consider it an opportunity or a nopportunity? If you held a stock in your portfolio for ten years that never appreciated, would it be an opportunity or a nopportunity?

The fact is, nopportunities are such a pain point, that managers often tend to spend more time on them than they do on actual opportunities. Obviously, eliminating nopportunities is a huge opportunity! But first, you must identify them. One useful way to identify nopportunities can be by using the Pareto Principle, also known as the 80/20 rule. Typically, 80% of the results of any activity come from only 20% of the effort employed.

It's likely that around 80% of your sales come from 20% of your salespeople. It's quite possible that around 80% of your profits come from only 20% of your products. By doing an 80/20 analysis, you can identify the products, segments and customers that are simply not profitable. In other words, they are nopportunities. You may be able to capture big opportunities for efficiency by eliminating them.

OppActivator 14: Processes

Good processes can be great opportunities. Without processes, how can you scale? How can you offer consistent quality and service? Consistent outcomes and quality come from good processes. Just think: does your accountant use a process? Does your physician use a process when he conducts an examination? Do engineers use processes? Yet, strangely enough, many Indian businesses use poor processes. Very often, processes are ill-defined, inefficient or totally absent.

For example, although most people agree that capturing relevant opportunities is crucial to success, only a handful of companies in India use a systematic process to uncover, recover and discover opportunities for sustained, profitable growth. Often, processes are designed with the wrong objectives in mind. For example, I have been the unfortunate victim of customer service processes that are certainly not designed to create customer satisfaction.

There can be great opportunities to create processes where none exist, or to improve processes to ensure that they are creating the outcomes that you intended.

OppActivator 15: Go Glocal

It's a big world out there, full of great opportunities. Very often, it's not necessary to reinvent the wheel. You can simply keep your eyes open and copy opportunities that have succeeded in other countries. But always remember, when adapting an opportunity to India, you must adapt it to local tastes. Amit Jatia, who brought McDonald's to India, believes that you must be glocal, always adapting the international product to local tastes.

The days when India functioned as a hermit state are over. You need to consider the world to be your market. You need to look at export opportunities. But, whether you offer a product or service, the same lesson holds true when exporting Indian opportunities to other countries. Vithal Kamat has opened Indian restaurants in many countries. Wherever he is, he always goes glocal and adapts the menu to local tastes.

OppActivator 16: Open Your Mind

It's very hard to perceive opportunities if you insist on being close-minded and conventional. If you think you already know it all, then you're unlikely to welcome new opportunities. Opportunity Masters always keep their minds wide open. It is rarely an opportunity to simply copy your competitors. You should always consider opportunities to be different or to do things differently.

The conventional wisdom is often wrong or simply out of date. Like Nishith Desai, consciously practice being a contrarian. Uday Kotak became one of the richest men in the world by challenging the status quo. Just because everyone else in your industry thinks differently from you, it doesn't mean you're wrong. Identifying opportunities is not a popularity contest.

Like Harsh Mariwala, you should always be open to innovation. But be careful. Always remember that while an opportunity may be an innovation, an innovation may not be an opportunity.