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Pain Points and Partnering: Creating a comprehensive IMC plan for STE Software

Professional Project

Submitted by

Connie Giordano

OCOM 675 – Capstone Seminar in Organizational Communication
Queens University of Charlotte, NC

April 24, 2005

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Integrated Marketing Communications Proposal

For

STE Software

April 24, 2005

Submitted by

Connie Giordano

Integrated Communications & Information Design

Marketing ♦ Technical Communications & User Support ♦ Web Design ♦ Planning & Analysis ♦ Training

Summary

The following proposal for an Integrated Marketing Communications Plan for STE Software has been created as part of the Queens University Organizational Communication Capstone Seminar project (OCOM 675) submitted by Connie Giordano.

STE Software is an entrepreneurial software solutions provider targeting small to medium-sized businesses in the Charlotte, NC, metropolitan area. Partners Saint T. Evans, and David Bullock want to position STE Software as a partner to potential clients in identifying and resolving business challenges they face daily with the appropriate combination of technology and human expertise. As a small company, STE Software lacks the financial and human resources of larger IT solutions providers in marketing their products and solutions. This proposal attempts to present an integrated, cost-effective approach to identifying and qualifying prospects, and pre and post-sales marketing to the appropriate target markets.

Background

STE Software was founded in 1999 by Saint T Evans to provide Y2K solutions to Charlotte-area businesses. Evans partnered with David Bullock both were employed with other software development firms with the goal of developing a software application suite targeted to the travel/tourism industry. Both Evans and Bullock are developers with extensive backgrounds in a number of programming languages and implementing both large- and small-scale multi-tier projects for companies in financial services, insurance,

hospitality, workflow and document management. Personnel within STE Software boast successful track histories of delivering innovative software.

Evans and Bullock collaborated and produced a call center application, followed by VS Destination Suite, which is based on a software infrastructure that allows data integration with multiple systems, and information sharing among all stakeholders in the client enterprise, including staff, vendors, customers, and prospective customers. They created their own marketing literature, which focused on the concept of an “electronic community” where all stakeholders could connect, share information, and ultimately streamline processes and automate procedures for better productivity. The literature also focuses on the concept of partnering with clients to better solve their business problems.

Evans and Bullock have begun strategizing on how best to expand their current prospect base beyond the travel and tourism industry. Their research thus far indicates that small to medium-sized businesses of at least 20 employees generating revenues of at least \$2 million annually might prove to be a sector with prime opportunities. In addition to focusing on this demographic segment, the partners want to expand their offerings into other vertical markets where they can capitalize on their unique selling proposition.

In essence, the primary issue began developing as the need to create a marketing strategy that would allow STE Software to identify likely prospects and reach these prospects with targeted messages that address their business needs. At the same time the marketing strategy would form a key piece of the overall business plan, which the partners could use to seek venture capital funding and/or business loans.

Marketing research literature suggests several concepts that lay the groundwork for stating the problem and opportunity facing STE Software. First, the concept of Customers’ Desired Value Change (CDVC) defines the buyer-seller relationship from the point of view of the buyer—STE’s prospective customers—in which buyers display perceived value and

desired value. Further, the complex internal and external factors surrounding the relationship have constant impact on it, causing the relationship to be in a constant state of flux. By researching and analyzing CDVC, the seller can more effectively manage the relationship to the mutual benefit of both buyer and seller. (Flint, Woodruff, and Gardial, 2004).

Second, the process and theory behind Customer Relationship Management (CRM) extends the concept of CDVC by analyzing the phases of the customer relationship from the perspective of the seller, providing the opportunity to build more effective marketing strategies that impact each phase of the relationship (initiating, developing and terminating), and providing the most effective level of resources for these phases. (Payne and Holt, 2001).

Finally, the concept of integrated marketing communications (IMC) provides a strategic and tactical framework for targeting communications to prospective and current customers to elicit the desired behaviors, or decisions or actions. (Kitchen, et. al., 2004).

Problem/Opportunity

Given the background on STE Software, and the concepts outlined above, the problem/opportunity facing STE Software can be stated as:

STE Software must capitalize on its customers' desired value change for mutually beneficial vendor/supplier partnership in IT by using CRM methodology to identify markets and prospects, and developing and implemented integrated marketing communications to support the relationship management goals.

STE Software's market opportunities can be summarized as follows:

- Product strength is in the VS Destination which are in use. But STE Software should further capitalize on the VS Framework to expand beyond the travel/tourism market.
- As a software solutions provider, STE Software offers products, custom solutions and services, the right combination of which will provide outstanding value to customers.
- Concepts such as the “electronic community,’ while positive in nature, do not resonate well with small and medium-sized businesses that do not form emotional connections to the concept of purchasing technology solutions.
- Thus STE Software is not in the business of selling technology, they are selling relief to painful business problems.
- STE Software was founded on the concept of working as a partner to its clients, and the company can turn the obstacles of being small and “part-time” to its advantage by offering a truly partnered approach to solve its customers’ very real business problems

Need

STE Software is not well known outside its current customer base, but is respected for the expertise they offer. As a start up the company does not have the brand recognition of large software solutions providers, and suffers from the perception that they might not be around in the future, engendering a fear of investing in a solution that may not be supported in the future. The company needs a marketing plan that addresses both lack of recognition and fear of expensive, unsupportable technology.

STE Software collected a substantial amount of anecdotal data that suggests their prospects have the following perceived pain points:

- “lack of teamwork/communications”
- “too much paper work”
- “no information sharing”
- “systems don’t talk to each other”
- “we miss too many deadlines”
- “I need this info-the sales presentation is today!”

These perceived pain points can be distilled into the following actual pain points:

- manual processes
- lack of integration
- lost revenue/sales opportunities

With its technical and business expertise, existing products, ability to customize software solutions, and track record in developing solutions that automate processes,

streamline workflows and integrate multiple data sources, STE Software has the product/service combination to effectively address these pain points.

However, because they do not know whether these perceptions hold true beyond the prospects and clients they have contacted, STE Software wants to use survey research to identify both likely prospects, and the perceptions they hold, to determine the appropriate marketing strategy.

Benefits

Implementing a cost-effective and evolutionary IMC plan provides the following benefits to STE Software:

- Increases awareness of STE Software as a reliable, professional and cost-effective vendor.
- Improves qualification of prospect database and continuous pipeline of new prospects
- Establishes the first steps in a long-term CRM strategy.
- Provides the core of a demonstrated marketing strategy for business plan
- Allows modifications to reach targets more effectively as niche markets are identified and researched.

Proposal

1. Revamp the STE Mission.
2. Refine the target markets using online surveys.
3. Develop messages that address targets' pain points, in other words, make emotional connections to targets.
4. Develop and execute an integrated marketing communications plan that aligns with CRM goals as they develop.
5. Incorporate the IMC plan into the STE Software Business Plan.

Revamp the STE Software Mission

STE Software's current mission statement, taken from their website (www.ste-software.com) is:

STE Software is a team of diverse and talented individuals committed to maximizing our clients' success through our products and services. We provide innovative solutions to complex business problems utilizing the latest technologies and a proven infrastructure. We ensure our clients' satisfaction by treating them in a professional, competent and substantive manner. At STE Software we focus on understanding your business needs first and providing a technical solution to those business needs second. We strive to make our client's jobs and responsibilities better, not just different.

This mission statement should be clarified and distilled into the three key points of any mission statement—who we are, what we do, and how we do it. An initial attempt at redrafting the mission statement produced the following:

STE Software is an entrepreneurial software solutions provider to small and medium-sized businesses. We partner with each of our clients to provide technology-based solutions to real business challenges. Our

team of diverse and talented professionals is committed to understanding the nature of our clients' business, providing sound and ethical advice and service, and delivering innovative products built on a proven technology framework.

Key Messages

To address prospects real pain points in ways that resonate with their perceptions, the following key messages or themes are proposed:

When we design it... operations improve

When we develop it... you get the right technology at the right price

When we build it... everyone shares knowledge

When we maintain it...you can focus on what matters to your organization

When we partner with you... you will succeed

Surveys to Refine Targets

We have worked together to prepare an initial prospecting/qualifying survey to be hosted on Survey Monkey (See Appendix A). Subsequent surveys should be developed that are geared to uncovering additional relational data, and targeting specific functional areas (HR, accounting, etc.) and vertical industries.

Costs

Survey Monkey provides basic survey hosting and data gathering services for \$19 per month. Costs increase as the number of respondents increase. The initial prospecting survey development is provided to STE Software at no cost as part of the OCOM Capstone

project. Subsequent survey development and analysis of results can be provided at an agreed upon rate for consulting services.

Integrated Marketing Communications Plan

The most effective long-term integrated marketing communications (IMC) plan for STE Software encompasses building an electronic presence through its revamped website, public relations, community relations, direct marketing (electronic and print), business/trade advertising and event participation, and relationship management to position STE Software as software solutions provider that provides the right combination of technology and people to help businesses solve real problems and forge ahead.

Methods

Website

The company's current website, www.ste-software.com provides the basic information the company conveys, but needs to be revamped to reflect the new directions of providing enterprise products (existing products that can be deployed relatively easily), enterprise solutions (customized), industry products (specific software products tailored to vertical industries) and industry solutions (customized for a client within a vertical industry). The owners have provided a proposed site structure and are working with a web design company to develop the look and feel.

The website is the centerpiece of STE Software's communication activities, and will be designed to both attract prospective customers, and support existing customers.

Tasks

- Web content development

- Testing & Revision
- Updates to content

Costs

Hosting is provided through STE Software's existing resources. Redesign and new content development (provided by Georapids and The Right Words respectively) is expected to cost well under \$5000 throughout the rest of 2005.

Marketing Literature

We propose redeveloping the marketing literature with a single high-quality, four-color brochure that focuses on image-building messages for STE Software. Additionally, the literature should also feature glossy inserts to the brochure, which would focus on enterprise solutions, various industry products (geared to specific vertical markets as identified) and industry solutions.

Finally, both as part of the marketing literature package, and as part of direct marketing efforts, we propose developing a series of one-pagers that provide case histories, and specifications that outline development, deployment, hosting and support features.

Tasks

- Brochure development (content, layout and design)
- Insert development
- Template development
- Brochure production

Costs

Production costs for four-color glossy literature vary tremendously based on choice of paper, physical specifications, reproduction choice, and quantity. Based on the

specification for the existing corporate brochure, on-line printing services (using a vendor such as mimeo.com) range between \$.35 and \$10.00 each, based on quantity and delivery method. Content development for the brochure is estimated at \$500, inserts at \$150 each, and one-pagers at \$75 each. This approach allows STE Software to invest in its literature more cost-effectively, choosing which inserts and one-pagers to produce when they determine it's appropriate.

Direct Marketing/Electronic Marketing

STE Software can take advantage of new technology to produce cost-effective, easily modified and highly targeted messages to key prospects, current customers, or a broad audience of potential customers.

- “Blast” emails to segmented distribution lists allow STE Software to test concepts and messages, direct prospects to the website, or link to surveys to gather more information and further qualify prospects.
- Blog and e-newsletters provide inexpensive ways to maintain direct, personal contact with prospects and customers, and build relationships based on current issues and solutions, with the added benefit of being constantly new and fresh.
- Search engine listings build on the online experience and provide ways to gather somewhat qualified prospects before direct contact is ever made. Identifying and refreshing keywords tagged on the STE Software website is a less expensive alternative to paid listings, but are less likely to put STE Software at the top of search results. Nonetheless, search engine listings allow STE Software to build its prospect database and track trends that could impact its CRM and IMC strategies over time.

- Referrals provide a credibility factor crucial to STE Software's image building efforts. Incentivizing current customers to refer others to STE Software via email links (from articles or blast emails), also aids in maintaining and furthering relationships with existing customers.

Tasks

- Email list procurement/refinement
- "Blast email" scheduling and content development
- Blog creation and maintenance
- Response tracking

Costs

The value of this approach to direct/electronic marketing stems from the ability of STE Software to control its costs, increasing or decreasing expenditures in these areas as business dictates. List procurement and paid search listings are relatively expensive items in this component, but less expensive (and somewhat less effective) alternatives exist. A number of outstanding Blog creation and maintenance alternatives are available, and blog software is provided at no cost by many vendors. Content development is the primary cost in most of these electronic marketing components.

Public Relations

Often under-utilized by small or startup businesses, public relations programming allows STE Software to develop comprehensive messages that can target specific markets at a fraction of the cost of advertising. The typical PR program involves creation of a standard fact sheet, press releases, and talking points that address new client agreements, new product / implementation successes, industry recognition, customer success stories, and schedules for pitching features or interviews in trade publications..

Tasks

- Develop boilerplate copy
- Create template/letterhead
- Acquire and refine media list
- Develop and execute schedule of media relations activities

Costs

Again, the primary cost factors in PR program development involve consultant time to develop content, as well as to research media placement opportunities and pitch placements to media representatives. PR services such as PR newswire represent an alternative to developing and maintaining a media list, and distributing releases, but the cost factor for a startup is often prohibitive.

Trade Show/Conference Participation

Trade shows and business conferences provide excellent opportunities for face-to-face contact, networking, and image building. The expense incurred in participating in trade shows still prohibitive to STE Software. We recommend researching shows in vertical markets over the next 12 months, to determine which events provide the best value for the investment. In the near term, STE Software should capitalize on its standing as a minority-owned small business and its relationship with Black Enterprise (and investigate other avenues such as the Chamber of Commerce, university-sponsored incubator programs, and others) to sponsor or present at small business conferences.

Tasks

- Research existing shows and conferences
- Develop presentations/booth design

- Create plan for follow-up and further qualification

Costs

In addition to sponsorship and participation fees which may range from several hundred to several thousand dollars). Consultant time for presentation development is a cost that can be minimized if STE Software chooses to build on templates or scripts from past activities.

Business/Trade Advertising

Like trade shows, trade advertising requires a higher level of investment, and we recommend trade advertising in the longer term, as STE Software identifies vertical markets and introduces products and solutions for those markets. In the near-term, STE Software should consider expenditures in business periodicals and directories geared to small businesses and minority businesses.

Tasks

- Ad space negotiations\purchase
- Ad content development

Costs

Typical display space in directories such as the Black Pages ranges from \$350 to \$1000 for quarter-page or larger. Space in periodicals such as the Charlotte Business Journal run at higher rates, but are negotiable, and based on scheduling may provide a prime opportunity to build awareness.

Schedule

The schedule for executing these elements of STE Software's integrated marketing communications plan is somewhat dependent on the partners' "launch plans" for moving into a fulltime venture and seeking funding. However some components of the plan are already underway or due to be started shortly. Based on resource availability, we recommend the following timeline:

| | |
|--|-------------------|
| Online survey | May 1, 2005 |
| Website revamp | June 30, 2005 |
| Marketing brochure and first inserts | July 31, 2005 |
| Blog launch | August 15, 2005 |
| Initial "blast email" campaign | September 1, 2005 |
| Business/directory advertising content development | September 1, 2005 |

Feasibility

This IMC plan allows STE Software to build its CRM strategy over time, as the company identifies new markets, acquires additional resources and refines its overall business strategy. The partners understand the importance of and have committed to core elements such as revamping the website and developing new marketing literature. Electronic marketing elements and PR programming can be developed in alignment with the business plan, and can be enhanced or trimmed as budget factors dictate. With a consistent, realistic underlying message that resonates with small and medium-sized

business owners/managers, STE Software has the flexibility to adapt components of the plan as new opportunities present themselves and as conditions change.

Conclusion

STE Software wants to position itself as a partner to potential clients in identifying and resolving business challenges they face daily with the appropriate combination of technology and human expertise. The right communication mix, built on a CRM strategy that evolves as the business evolves is the best solution for STE Software's marketing challenges. We appreciate the opportunity to work with STE Software to realize its long-term success.



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Creative Brief

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Integrated Communications & Information Design

Marketing ♦ Technical Communications & User Support ♦ Web Design ♦ Planning & Analysis ♦ Training

Situation

Organizational Background

STE Software was founded in 1999 by Saint T Evans to provide Y2K solutions to Charlotte-area businesses. Evans partnered with David Bullock in XXXX while both were employed with other software development firms with the goal of developing a software application suite targeted to the travel/tourism industry. Both Evans and Bullock are developers with extensive backgrounds in a number of programming languages and implementing both large- and small-scale multi-tier projects for companies in financial services, insurance, hospitality, workflow and document management. Personnel within STE Software boast successful track histories of delivering innovative software.

After successfully developing a call center application for the Charlotte Convention and Visitors Bureau, Evans and Bullock continued collaborating as STE Software in their spare time, and produced VS Destination Suite, which is based on a software infrastructure that allows data integration with multiple systems, and information sharing among all stakeholders in the client enterprise, including staff, vendors, customers, and prospective customers. They created their own marketing literature, which focused on the concept of an “electronic community” where all stakeholders could connect, share information, and ultimately streamline processes and automate procedures for better productivity. The literature also focuses on the concept of partnering with clients to better solve their business problems with technical solutions geared to the way they do business.

STE faces challenges similar to many startup businesses, including insufficient resources to effectively market their products and services; time constraints inherent in building part-time business while employed elsewhere; and obstacles in creating a fully functioning network of resources to plan and build their products until they can launch STE Software as a full-time enterprise. However, Evans and Bullock have the resourcefulness

critical to succeeding as entrepreneurs, searching out potential alliances through prior business contacts, family and friends, and building slowly and steadily towards their ultimate goal—revolutionizing how small and medium-sized business actually do business. In addition to developing the software solutions, they offer, through their alliances and partnerships, hosting services, consulting and training.

STE Software contacted Giordano in July, 2004 to revamp their existing marketing literature and create new literature focused on “custom solutions,” with an eye towards expanding their client base beyond the travel/tourism industry. Bullock and Giordano had been coworkers at a software development company, and were familiar with each other’s expertise, accomplishments and work styles.

Initial discussions focused on identifying key themes that would appeal to prospective clients, and in fact formed the basis of their mission statement:

“The mission of STE Software is to provide innovative software solution to our clients that revolutionizes how they do business. STE Software is a team of diverse and talented individuals committed to maximizing our clients success through our products and services. We ensure our clients satisfaction by treating them in a professional, competent and substantive manner. At STE Software we focus on understanding your business needs first and providing a technical solution to those business needs second. We strive to make our client’s jobs and responsibilities better, not just different.”

Issue Background

At the same time as the marketing literature was being revamped, Evans and Bullock continued to refine their business strategy and during several lengthy conversations came to some very significant conclusions:

- Our product strength is in the VS Destination products because they have been built and are in use. But we need to capitalize on the technical foundation to expand beyond this market.
- We provide products, custom solutions and services, and we need to find a way to market the right combination of these to our prospects.
- The Electronic Community, while an idea that sounds nice, does not connect in any real way with the customers we are trying to woo. Once they get it, it's a useful concept, but it does not resonate with cold-call prospects.
- We are not selling technology we're selling relief to painful business problems.

STE Software was founded on the concept of working as a partner to its clients, and the company can turn the obstacles of being small and “part-time” to its advantage by offering truly “personal service.” Thus the primary issue developed as creating a marketing strategy that would allow STE Software to identify likely prospects and reach these prospects with targeted messages that address their business needs. At the same time the marketing strategy would form a key piece of the overall business plan, which the partners could use to seek venture capital funding and/or business loans.

Perceptions

STE Software is not well known outside its current customer base, but is respected for the expertise they offer. As a start up the company does not have the brand recognition

of large software solutions providers. STE Software is also relatively local to the Charlotte, NC area. Many entrepreneurial software firms suffer from the perception that they might not be around in the future, engendering a fear of investing in a solution that may not be supported in the future.

In prospective sales calls, Evans and Bullock also found the following perceptions of technology in general, and of the kind of services and products STE Software offers:

- Most prospects know they need to make an investment in IT.
- Small and medium-sized businesses often lack the internal staff to support existing computer systems.
- Small and medium-sized businesses often do not have an overall IT strategy, instead they know they have various computer systems to handle some functions, and deal with issues as they come up.
- Small and medium-sized businesses have an affinity for working with vendors who will partner with them before, during and after implementation.
- Packaged software solutions such as PeopleSoft, SAP or various Microsoft products can handle much of the business's requirements for managing daily activities, but they are hard to adjust to specific unique needs.
- Owners and managers want to focus on daily business concerns, and lack the expertise to understand how to leverage technology to solve problems or take advantage of opportunities.

Because they do not know whether these perceptions hold true beyond the prospects and clients they have contacted, STE Software wants to use survey research to identify both likely prospects, and the perceptions they hold, to determine the appropriate marketing strategy.

Other Factors and Constituencies

Small Business Administration Resources-Identifying a broad prospect base

STE Software is not only a small business, but also a minority-owned business. Evans and Bullock have taken advantage of the resources provided by the Small Business Administration (<http://www.sba.gov/>) to review and plan business strategy, and also conduct some basic marketing research. They determined that businesses with at least 20 employees and revenues between \$20 and \$75 million would be the most likely prospects. Their research identified approximately 600 small businesses in the SBA database within the Charlotte SMSA, with 50 of those falling within the revenue range they sought. However, they recognized that this range was an educated guess, and some genuine prospects would fall outside the range.

Resource Constraints

Both Evans and Bullock are currently employed by other firms, limiting the amount of time they can spend on STE Software. However, current employment also allows the partners to continue to explore business and technology issues, stay on the forefront of business issues and needs in Charlotte, and to develop a network of contacts of both potential alliances and business prospects.

Both Evans and Bullock have families that also demand a share of their time, and family remains a priority to both. In addition, Bullock is completing an MBA in Technology from Georgia Tech, which requires time for both study and commuting.

Current Economic Conditions

After a long slump, the U.S. economy is showing signs of rebound in the technology sector, although outsourcing of technology services is still a major concern. IT job postings have picked up dramatically in the last four months. Some experts consider this to be the natural result of pent-up demand, as companies are turning back to making investments in IT that they could not consider during the worst of the recession.

Alliances and Partnerships

Most of the partnerships STE Software have forged come into play when an in-depth proposal is being developed, or when a signed client has a specific need. STE Software currently has alliances with several organizations to supply the following resources:

- Web site architecture and UI development: Georapids (www.georapids.com).
- Data center which hosts applications in production, provides backup and recovery services.
- Training provided as either web-based and platform training for the solutions being developed by STE Software.
- Network consulting to provide assessment and design of infrastructure for clients hosting their own solutions.

In developing and recommending solutions for its clients, STE Software prides itself on vendor independence. The company does not recommend one software vendor over another when the project requires off-the-shelf components, or connectivity or configuration elements.

Opportunity

STE Software offers a cost-effective solution to small and medium-sized businesses that recognize:

I have a business to run, people to manage, and bills to pay. I don't know as much as I should about how technology could help me run my business better, but I know there have to be better ways of doing some of the things we do now. . My people, my suppliers and my customers should be able to share information a whole lot more easily than they do now, because if they could communicate more and better, we could make more sales, and happier customers. I'd like to find somebody who would take the time to learn how my business operates and then figure out the best ways to make it operate more efficiently, someone who can help me make informed decisions about how to use computers and software more effectively, what to buy, when to design it from scratch and maybe even take over running the computer systems.

Target

CEO/Owner of professional services firm

I've built a pretty successful business, but it's getting harder to sustain revenue growth. We need to find more cost-efficient ways to deliver services, and make sure we are

doing it better, more quickly, and for satisfied clients who know they can get in touch with us when they need to. I'd like to make things run more smoothly to reduce costs, which would also enhance our reputation as professional and customer-oriented. That would allow us to grow. I don't have the resources to hire and manage a staff of people to run the computer systems we have, but I know it needs to be done.

Executive of manufacturing company

Parts and supplies, equipment maintenance, personnel scheduling, inventory control, transportation, payables and receivables—it's all the tip of the iceberg in what it takes to keep us in business. We have computer systems that handle most of this, but they don't talk to each other, so it's easy for orders to get lost, shipments to get delayed and that means trouble. I want to keep a lid on costs, so I want to find ways to make what we already have work together, like being able to order parts on-line and know that they'll get shipped same day. If we could make the turnaround happen faster, that would make us more efficient and more profitable.

Director of local government services

We have to be able to let citizens know that we have the services and how to get them. And we have to meet a lot of legal requirements for how we do business with suppliers. We're just a local government agency... those big software companies don't care about us or what we have to do everyday. Everyone on staff has their own specific job to do, so they never see the big picture, or how what they do affects the people who use our services. And the paperwork is overwhelming. If we could just figure out how to do some of these more automatically without having to walk file folders and papers from one office to another, then we could spend more time providing the services and making an impact.

Objective

Communicate to the targets that STE Software offers the right combination of personal and professional service, technical expertise, and innovative solutions to solve real-world business problems, and help clients achieve success.

Competition

Competition in end-to-end software solutions is extraordinarily broad, and ranges from small entrepreneurial firms to large global development and consulting companies. The following list is not exhaustive, but shows a range of the competition that STE Software faces.

Local Software Solutions Providers

Innovative Software Solutions (<http://www.webpgmr.com/index.asp>): The website for this provider describes similar services, focusing on “MAPS-Management Administration and Planning Services” products, which appear to be geared to insurance and financial planning services. The site also highlights travel and tourism as one the vertical industries they address.

CompuData (http://www.computdata.com/corporate_overview.asp); an international company based in Charlotte that provides systems and product integrations, it prominently mentions SAP, Microsoft and others among product lines.

Titan Technology Partners (<http://www.ttpartners.com/aboutus/what.html>); provides IT consulting, enterprise management and outsourcing solutions, and focuses on support for PeopleSoft/Oracle implementations.

Other local software solutions companies, such as Impact Technologies (<http://www.impact-tech.com/index.html>) provide base products, custom solutions, and consulting in specific vertical markets.

Global Providers

PeopleSoft/Oracle (http://www.peoplesoft.com/corp/en/public_index.jsp): the merger of these two giants provides back-end database and front-end financials, HR and other industry-specific applications using PeopleSoft, Oracle, and JD Edwards branded products. The center top section of the PeopleSoft website proclaims a similar message to what STE Software has tried to convey on a small, local scale:

Oracle and PeopleSoft: Information-Driven

The 2005 combination of Oracle and PeopleSoft marks a major turning point in the evolution of the software industry, helping customers around the world use high-quality information to collaborate, align stakeholders, and communicate a single truth to all their constituents.

Microsoft (<http://www.microsoft.com/BusinessSolutions/default.aspx>): The Business Solutions area of Microsoft provides a range of products, with ability to get consulting and customization, to a number of vertical markets (automotive, construction, government, etc.) and across several business functions (HR, Financials, e-commerce, service management, etc.). Microsoft offers its own off-the-shelf products and those provided by vendor partners or subsidiaries, such as Great Plains Software, Axapta, and Navision.

The large providers have greater share of mind than small entrepreneurs. With a wide range of off-the-shelf products, they also provide the greatest competition for IT dollars from small and medium-sized businesses. They do not necessarily compete for the dollars in the custom solutions or consulting arenas, which is where established local and regional IT organizations can and do compete for those IT dollars.

Key Response

STE Software strives to partner with every client, to understand how their businesses operate, and then recommend and implement the right combination of services and solutions to help clients work smarter and succeed.

Support

STE Software has a credible (if somewhat outdated) web presence, a growing presence in the minority business community, a track record of success in the travel/tourism industry, and partners who are highly regarded in the development and implementation communities.

Brand Character

STE Software's brand character needs to address the issue that small and medium-sized businesses view technology as a substantial cost factor, have little understanding of its strategic implications for revenue generation or operational streamlining. Thus the challenge is to connect on an emotional level with the challenges these businesses face in

order to communicate that the company can help them succeed without worrying about the intricacies of leveraging and staying on top of technology.

Special Considerations

STE Software wants to identify prospects and their “pain points” through a survey, administered on-line, to confirm that the direction they have chosen is the correct one. Time constraints with the on-line survey may result in incomplete data to fully confirm the proposed direction, but should provide some initial indicators. The survey’s other goal is to help qualify potential prospects.