

On the Mark

Helping you **mark** your credit union for success



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Introducing On the Mark Strategies

Helping You Mark Your Credit Union for Success

Taking a page from his book, *Think Huge*, and his blog, Mark Arnold followed his passion and started a new company – On the Mark Strategies – to help credit unions succeed. Services available include:

- Strategic planning
- Brand planning
- Leadership/Management training
- Marketing planning
- Staff training

Mark resigned his position as senior vice president of Neighborhood Credit Union in February so he could extend his reach in the industry and help even more credit unions succeed.

“Mark helped our credit union grow tremendously these past 12 years,” said Chet Kimmell, Neighborhood Credit Union’s CEO. “We appreciate his vision, leadership and passion. We wish him great success as he undertakes this new initiative of helping more credit unions.”

Mark has 20+ years of credit union industry experience and is passionate about the industry. You can read more about Mark's move in the blog post "[Starting On the Mark Strategies is Thinking Huge.](#)"

“A major tenet of thinking huge is thinking passion. Some of my passions include speaking, writing, marketing, strategic planning and credit unions. I love all those things,” said Mark. “Helping credit unions succeed is what On the Mark Strategies is all about. I’m currently working with a number of credit unions all over the country on their branding and planning efforts and hope to continue helping more credit unions.”

Mark will continue producing his monthly e-zine, *On the Mark*, and will continue writing both of his blogs to provide credit unions with valuable information that will help them improve their organizations. He’s also looking forward to several upcoming speaking engagements, not to

mention teaching at CUNA Marketing Management School and Southwest CUNA Management School.

For more information about On the Mark Strategies, visit Mark's website. For information on how Mark can help your credit unions succeed, call 214.538.4147 or send him an e-mail.

Marketing Matters

If Service Isn't Your CU's Sweet Spot, What Is?

It's the age old question many credit unions still have difficulty answering. What does your financial institution do better than any other? If you answered "service," go directly to branding jail. Do not pass go. Do not collect \$200.

Service is not the answer. Think about it. Have you ever driven down the road and seen a billboard that says, "We have great rates, but our service stinks?" Have you ever pulled a bank advertisement out of your mailbox that says, "Our service is lousy but our free checking rocks?" Of course you haven't, because everyone claims to have great service. If credit unions want to differentiate themselves, they have to find their sweet spot.

The sweet spot is a term used to describe that one thing you do best for your target audience that your competition cannot. If you were to draw three circles on a sheet of paper (your products, your competition, your target customer), the sweet spot would be the spot where all three intersect. Naysayers insist this can't be done with financial services. They say financial products are too much of a commodity. Successful financial service providers have proven them wrong.



American Express Found its Sweet Spot*

With fewer products in its portfolio than most credit unions offer, American Express turned a profit amidst immense competition from other credit card companies in the 1990s by focusing on its design targets – those customers they could serve better than anyone else. The company focused on several groups of deeply loyal customers who were very high spenders and very profitable.

One design target identified was points junkies - business executives and management consultants who liked accumulating frequent flyer and hotel guest points. American Express created the Rewards Plus Gold Card for this group. It had a higher annual fee than the regular American Express card, but in addition to the standard membership rewards, it awarded double points on all spending with partner hotels and airlines. It also allowed the primary cardholder to have five cards for family members. Points from all five cards could be bundled for even larger rewards.

The design target was considerably small for this product, so American Express offered these cards as member upgrades and relied on word-of-mouth advertising to grow the line. It became the company's most successful product.

Finding Your Credit Union's Sweet Spot

Every credit union has a sweet spot, because every credit union has a target audience it can serve better than anyone. It may be bilingual employees and products targeted specifically to a Hispanic demographic. It might be lending policies that consider people and character in lending decisions, instead of only using complex mathematical formulas to approve or deny loans. A few years ago when the economy was just falling apart, credit unions had a huge competitive advantage. They actually had money to lend and were willing to lend it. Your sweet spot is already there for you to capture. You just have to figure out what it is.

Start by making a list with three columns: Product(s), Target Consumers and Competition. List everything you can think of in each column and then spend time analyzing which ideas might intersect. You can do this exercise for one product or an entire line of products. You can also do it for one target consumer group or multiple consumer groups. The key is to be honest with your observations about your credit union and your competition, and to focus on what you already do well. Finding your sweet spot doesn't necessarily mean creating a new product right now. It means taking what you do well and making that part of your brand identity.

In the book *Big Winners and Big Losers: The Four Secrets of Long-Term Business Success and Failure*, author Alfred A. Marcus explains the long-term business strategies that about 30 U.S. companies used to find their sweet spot and outperform their industries for a full decade. These were some of the principals that made them successful:

- Concentrated on core strengths
- Did not chase opportunities considered too risky
- Had solid plans to upgrade or enhance existing products
- Met customer needs through extensive collaboration
- Offered solutions, not just products
- Identified markets with growth potential
- Extended reach of their high-growth markets
- Stayed true to who they were

Notice there is nothing on the list about changing directions when their competitors did. Credit unions sometimes introduce products or services just because their competitors do. That's not being authentic to your credit union. It's duplicating something you may not even do well. The key to finding your sweet spot is to be authentic. Do what you do best and bring that authenticity into the marketplace. If you are giving your members what they really want, they'll be back for years to come.

*source: [Harvard Business Review](#)

Blog Updates

Follow Mark's blogs for frequent and timely information on topics like marketing, branding, generations, leadership, Think Huge and more. Blog posts are updated weekly. Here are links and summaries from some recent posts.

[Demonstrate the Power of Your Credit Union](#)

Can you imagine how much new business your credit union could garner if you could demonstrate just how powerful your products and services are on your website? Many credit unions think they already do this, but do they really? Does their website engage members? Does it use out-of-the box thinking to get the the attention of their audience? This blog post uses a product demonstration website as an example of how credit unions can demonstrate their own power to consumers.

[Simple Test for an Effective Marketing Piece](#)

You have a marketing campaign that's a winner. It's so good that you know it will win Best of Show at a national marketing conference. You get to said conference and it barely gets mentioned, if recognized at all. We all know judging marketing pieces can be subjective, but there are definite elements that make marketing pieces more effective. In this blog post, Mark shares a quick acronym you can use to judge the effectiveness of any marketing piece you produce.

[Being an Individual in a World of Peer Pressure](#)

Beiber Fever. Twilight Mania. Do people really buy in to these mass obsessions or are they just jumping on the bandwagon to mask their fear of individuality? Peer pressure may start in childhood and peak during the teen years, but it never really ends - unless we let it. Mark's teenage daughter wrote this post and gives her take on how thinking huge can help all of us overcome daily peer pressures.

Online Buzz

Comments and Ideas from Mark's Blog Readers

[What are Your Credit Union's Core Values?](#)

"You've agonized, or not, over "defining" core values. Now what? How have you internalized and brought to life the core values for your team? Or, have you proudly stored/hidden the words away to be ready and pull them out to show that, yes, your company has a core values

statement?"

- **Janine McBee** -

Starting On the Mark Strategies is Thinking Huge

"Neighborhood Credit Union's loss is the entire industry's gain! As someone who has worked with you in the past (speaking together at the same conferences and collaborating on some other projects,) I know for certain that credit unions will continue to benefit from your passion, expertise, and enthusiasm!"

- **Sean McDonald** -

"Great post Mark! Culture can be the greatest strength of an organization. As you note, regardless of whether a culture is proactively created or defined...every organization has a culture. I absolutely agree with you that your members will always experience your culture, for better or worse. As you said, they "feel" it... Culture is a BIG DEAL! Get input from those delivering it everyday. Get real or get out!"

- Sean Temple -

We want to hear from you. If you have used an idea or learned something of value from one of Mark's blog posts, be sure to leave a comment on the blog so others can benefit from your experiences, as well.

speaking • branding • planning

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