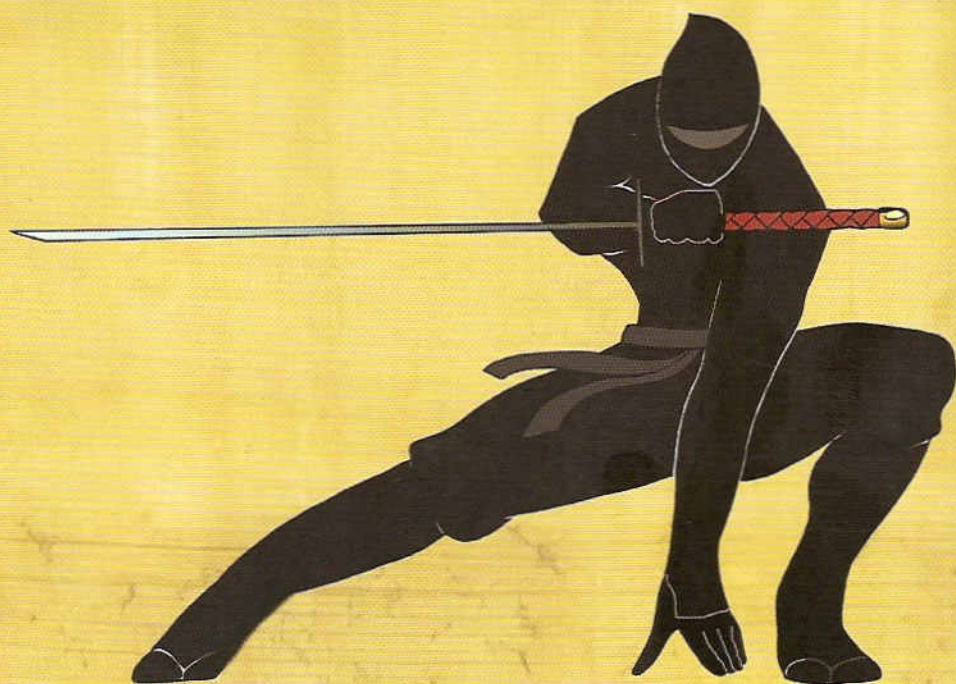
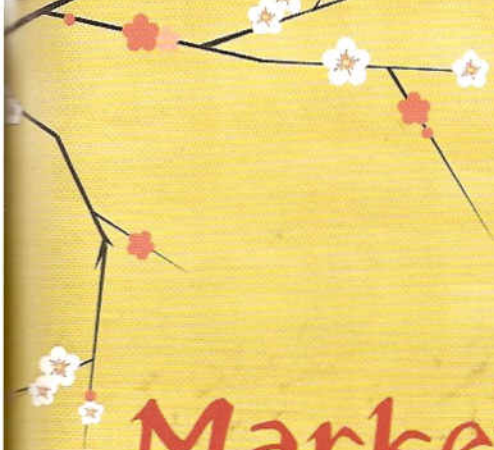


**FIGHT LIKE
A NINJA,
PLEASE LIKE
A GEISHA.**

THE NINE CODES OF NINJA MARKETING





Marketing is both a
science and an art.
It is also like war
- war with your
competitors for the
minds and hearts
of your customers.

Gene Stark draws some lessons
from the nimble ninja.





Originating 800 years ago in the mountains of Japan, the word 'ninja' refers to someone who practiced ninjutsu, a kind of martial art often called "the art of stealth" or "the art of invisibility". (The first Japanese character for the word ninjutsu, means endurance or persevere.)

Many ninja were also samurai, operating as spies in the service of their feudal lord. They are said to have made use of weapons that could be easily concealed or disguised as common tools and employed surprise as a major weapon in their victories against much larger and better armed forces.

Following the Samurai Battle Creed and interpreting its meaning using strategic marketing analogies can arm businesses with very powerful, everyday weapons with which to defeat their numerous and often much larger opponents.

1. Study the enemy

Market research is vital. Like a ninja, your business should be familiar with the battleground long before the battle takes place. If you fight on your terms you are much more likely to win.

a) What are your competitors doing?

In reality, ninja were used more for spying than assassinations. You can be a modern-day ninja when it comes to finding out what your competitors are doing. From websites to mystery shopping, there are many ways to gather information on your competition.

Regular intelligence gathering should focus on:

- Competitor offers
- Competitor positioning in the mind of the customer
- How they are communicating, both in terms of the media vehicles they are using to reach their customers as well what they are saying, their tone and style.

b) Even more important, however, is a deep understanding of your customers' needs. Do you satisfy them and entertain them while you are doing it? Like a geisha, if you know what it is your audience wants, it is not hard to relieve the stress and frustration from their buying process. (Contrary to popular western beliefs, the geisha were a class of professional women, not "sex workers", trained from girlhood in conversation, dancing and singing in order to entertain professional or social gatherings of men.)

Tracking the mindset of your prospects is often more difficult than tracking the actions of your competitors. This is where the ninja marketer's perseverance comes into play. Education is the answer. There are no shortcuts.

2. Avoid predictable attacks

Planning involves being aware of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. You will need to seek out the highest possible ground from which you can see the battlefield, launch attacks at will and most easily defend your position. Your positioning in the mind of the consumer is critical for success. Make it easy for the consumer to understand your position, expressing your benefits explicitly, not implicitly.

Use honesty as a weapon for both defence and attack. Here is an advertisement from an air conditioning and heating company that hits the nail on the head:

"We install the same units and charge the same prices as everyone else. The difference is that we're actually going to show up when we say we will. Always on time, or you don't pay a dime. Seriously. If we aren't there within the exact hour we told you we were coming, you pay nothing. Whatever you need is FREE. No charge. Sorry we were late. We are really sorry. We understand that time is money. Your time. Our money."

Tell the truth, even when it hurts. Your customers are already trying to figure out the downside, so why not just tell them? It's the best possible way to protect you from the potential backlash when they finally figure it out for themselves.

"So many ads just talk about what a product has, not what benefit it delivers. No one ever buys a product for the features it has. People buy a shovel because they need a hole in the ground."