



## Pause, Play, or Delete? By Matt Lynch

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**O**n our antiquated DVR system at home, the pause button will only hold for so long; fifteen minutes is the time-out trigger (although I couldn't begin to explain who set that arbitrary limit). After that time, the system is programmed to restart the show from the beginning. If the viewer doesn't restart the show before 15 minutes elapses, they miss the opportunity to see that part of the show without having to at least fast-forward through the portion they've already seen.

Much like a DVR system forcing the viewer back to the beginning, this could also be true for you, as the deciding executive, living through and managing an enterprise through current times. Like many others in the business world, your strategic initiatives may have timed out, forcing you to at least go back to the beginning to review. In some cases, delay may mean the original op-

portunity may be lost, creates more risk, or surfaces different obstacles.

When the go/no go decision lands on their desk, the informed leader decides with confidence.

They do so based, in part, on an assessment of the risk of each option. Today, new and unprecedented circumstances can challenge even the most experienced executives to question previously confirmed decisions.

In our strategy consulting practice, we're actively engaged with a number of clients who are moving forward on major strategic initiatives without hesitation, and a few that have hit the pause button. Whether moving forward or holding off, there could be new data or changing factors to consider, not the least of which is the fact that many or all of the team members involved in the projects are working from home, or at least not working together in the same physical environment in which the



project plan was first approved.

Two primary categories of data are commonly considered when firms are contemplating strategic initiatives: internal and external. We start by confirming the source and time frame in terms of when the data used for the original decision was assembled. It's important to consider aging or relevancy of data used to make the original recommendation or to develop the strategy including:

- Resource availability and preparedness
- Financial capacity
- Changed market conditions and/or competitor behavior
- New priorities

### RESOURCE AVAILABILITY AND PREPAREDNESS

Project teams selected before hitting the pause button are perhaps all in a different position in terms of schedule capacity and/or their working conditions. This includes internal employees often across multiple functional areas (IT, Product, Marketing, Finance, etc.), and often external resources from vendors who were involved in the initiative. We're finding, at the very least, new team members assigned to projects or delays moving forward to allow for originally planned team members to finish assignments on which they were deployed. They couldn't wait any longer for the project to begin (past the 15 minute limit to repeat the DVR analogy). In addition to the availability issue, there is a question of preparedness. We're finding team members who are struggling to adjust to working remotely and are unlikely to be as productive or engaged as they otherwise would have been. In other cases, we're seeing improved productivity. In which category are your team members?

### FINANCIAL CAPACITY

For some of our clients, the initiatives currently in motion were approved 12-18 months ago, during the prior-year (or maybe two-years-ago) budget cycle. Without question, beyond the standard project ROI tracking, nearly all businesses are revisiting financial plans and previously approved capital commitments. Some are focused on just staying in business, while others are seeing new opportunities to accelerate growth or even enter new lines

of business. The point being, the review of sources and preferred uses of capital will influence when or whether to hit the play button, or maybe the delete button, on various initiatives.

### CHANGED MARKET CONDITIONS AND/OR COMPETITOR BEHAVIOR

As referenced in our Roundtable discussion and by contributors to this edition of the ERJ, the change we're all living through is fast and disruptive. It's fast, in part, because we're being pulled through it or forced through it in our businesses and in our daily lives; we have, by necessity in many cases, been required to involuntarily change the way we do business. As a result, market conditions and how competitors respond to such is less predictable. How do the current conditions compare to the world as we knew it when data was gathered in support of the original business decision? For one of our clients, we quickly completed a limited client survey to validate product preferences hadn't changed from the time they did their original assessment. How are you validating changing market conditions and how might this influence your strategy?

### NEW PRIORITIES

Every business has finite resources in terms of time, talent, and financial capacity. Initiatives compete for those limited resources. It's the job of the senior team to make resource allocation decisions. In the time since the pause button was hit, it's possible another initiative or opportunity has surfaced and could be determined to be a higher priority.

As you reflect on what you read in this issue of the ERJ, consider this question: Is it time to revisit the reason you hit the pause button to determine whether the uncertainty has cleared sufficiently to see the way forward? ■



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