

# Throw off your competition: lessons from the Nakatomi Tower

There are two types of people: those who believe Die Hard is a Christmas movie - and who will see this article as a natural holiday edition - and those who don't. Still, everyone can enjoy a few tips about beating competitors. In this Christmas special, Caroline Franczia, founder of UpperCut-First, analyses the consequences of an unsettling yet organised competitor disrupting your plans. You can still turn things around with fewer resources, much like John McClane at the top of the Nakatomi Tower.

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You didn't see it coming, you were cruising, and then suddenly, a lesser solution, a product that you did not even consider worthy of your attention, is attacking your market directly.

*Dispatcher: "Attention, whoever you are; this channel is reserved for emergency calls only."*

*John McClane: "No fucking shit lady, does it sound like I'm ordering a pizza?"*

Maybe a competitor came up using aggressive prices or with functionality similar to yours. Perhaps a large corporation has bought another startup. You did not even bother considering your direct competition but, with fresh money, R&D resources, and an army of salespeople, they are now quite worthy of your attention.

*John McClane: [after McClane sets off massive explosion] "Is the building on fire?"*

*Sergeant Al Powell: "No, but it's gonna need a paint job and a shit load of screen doors."*

## Unique Selling Proposition (USPs) and lifetime expectancy

Fighting against a rival or competitor is stimulating and undoubtedly beneficial in educating a market. So, if your competitors have caught up with or got wise of your USPs, you should take it as a good sign. They're a copycat. But why are copy cats interesting?

Because they push you to innovate consistently. Your USPs have a limited life expectancy and copycats allow you to give a rhythm to the delivery of your killer new features.

They also validate your total addressable market and the direction you have

given your product and services.

They educate a market, opening prospects' eyes to problems they have not identified yet identified, or identified incorrectly, opening the door for you to prove your value and expertise in the field.

*John McClane: "Welcome to the party pal!"*

## This is not a drill: prove your execution skills

Start by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of your competitor. Why didn't you see it coming? What is their profile? Who are they targeting? How do they operate?

*John McClane: "These guys are mostly European judging by their clothing labels and... [long pause] cigarettes. They're well-financed and very slick. [...] Add all that up, I don't know what the fuck it means, but you got some bad-ass perpetrators and they're here to stay."*

Dedicate a war room and a squad to this analysis and research. If you want to eliminate a competitor that has caught you unaware, you must revise your positioning. What happened? How did you let your company slip into the danger zone? Has the market been shifting without you noticing?

*Hans Gruber: “Do you really think you have a chance against us, Mr Cowboy?”*

It is time to break silos, and this is a good pressure exercise for your executive team. Personalities usually show their true nature under pressure, and you may be surprised by some people's reactions and possibly, see their egos rising. Know that you may even lose exceptional talent under such circumstances. Fear can send some people running while others rise to the challenge. That's ok! If one is not part of your united front in times of difficulties, then ultimately, they are unlikely to offer much value in the long run.

*John McClane: “Now, you listen to me, jerk-off, if you're not a part of the solution, you're a part of the problem. Quit being a part of the fucking problem and put the other guy back on!”*

Craft your plan. Focus on:

Caring for your existing customers: If you are not doing so already, ensure your customers are well taken care of – with no complaints, and a high NPS score. Make personal calls from C-level executives to C-level executives, show them confidence, and reassure them by providing a long-term vision. Anchor them back to the reasons why they chose you in the first place.

Securing your ongoing prospect with a value-added understanding of their problems, making sure to provide value at every step of your sales process: Make sure you understand the problems you are solving and attach your product and your expertise to the global solution you are providing.

Bringing your long-term vision closer in the timeline to differentiate: This is the moment you want your R&D people to reorganise the roadmap and deliver quickly on USPs.

Keep in mind that new killer features may look good on the product, but will

not help you win or upsell customers if they have no business impact.

It is time to be unpredictable and shake your competition's perspective on you by delivering a vision of major business impact USPs.

*Hans Gruber: "We do NOT alter the plan!"*

*Karl: "And, if HE alters it?"*

## To win the war, you'll need allies

The best form of defence is to attack. Attack with all your might and, more importantly, with your most powerful weapon: your existing customers and champions – they will be your best allies.

If you were not leveraging them before, now is the time. Your long-term customers who have become your partners will bet on you and assist you in neutralising your opponent.

*Sergeant Al Powell: "You know we got a pool going on you."*

*John McClane: "What kind of odds am I getting?"*

You may be surprised by how valuable your customers are. They can give you insight into what your competitor is trying to achieve. They can speak on your behalf to your current prospects. They might also want to look at using the opportunity to build a valuable and impactful business roadmap.

*Argyle: [Argyle shuts the limo door] “If this is their idea of Christmas, I \*gotta\* be here for New Year’s.”*

Whether your competitor takes you by surprise or you had seen it coming, the steps are easy to follow (\*Die Hard spoilers alert\*):

1. Do not panic *and make sure to wear shoes.*
2. Assess your competition *even if it implies writing their names on your arm.*
3. Work your unique selling proposition *and keep the detonators safe at all times.*
4. Choose your allies carefully *and do not rely on the FBI.*
5. Put a plan in motion *and scream “Yippee-ki-yay, motherfucker!”*

*Caroline Franczia is a regular columnist for Maddy Ness and the founder of Uppercut First. Experienced in working for large companies such as Oracle, Computer Associates, and BMC, Caroline also lived in Silicon Valley for four years before moving to startups (Sprinklr, Datadog, Confluent) where she witnessed on the ground the benefits of a well-thought sales strategy. These are the foundations of UF: a structure that accompanies the European startups in their sales strategy by giving them an undeniable advantage in their go-to-market.*

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