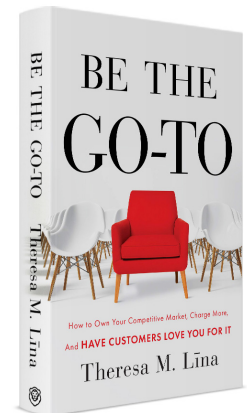


# Be the Go-To

How to Own Your Competitive Market, Charge More, and Have Customers Love You For It

by **Theresa M. Lina**



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## THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

What can the Apollo lunar mission teach companies about market dominance? Consultant and author, Theresa M. Lina is here to reveal the secrets to becoming the first name in customers' call lists with *Be the Go-To*.

The weakness with most marketing plans is that there is terrific analysis of the situation, the market, the competition, the strategy, and so forth—and then one giant bucket of tactics you may as well call “Stuff.” Not so with this book, where you’ll find detailed tactics for confronting the commoditization challenge, embracing the advantages of being a Go-To, discovering what a Go-To brand does differently from other companies, how to gain market dominance step-by-step, and more.

If you implement the plans and strategies outlined here in detail, you should see immediate improvements in competitive differentiation, brand image, and your ability to deliver more powerful results to customers at healthy prices.

## IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to set your business on a new, better path for market dominance.
- How to use early momentum to fuel even greater growth and infiltration with your key audiences.
- How to navigate the delicate world of client relationships to keep your perceived value at a maximum.
- How to accelerate and reach greater heights and never rest on current success.

## Introduction

Somehow, certain companies succeed at becoming and remaining dominant ‘go-to’ brands, able to command high prices relative to the competition, while others languish as me-too providers.

There are significant parallels between how successful businesses approach their work and how the United States put a human on the moon, what then seemed like an utterly impossible task. The fundamental circumstances were very similar, but the stakes were infinitely higher and the challenge infinitely greater at a time when technological superiority represented the power of liberty over oppression.

In this book summary, you’ll learn how great organizations rally all necessary players around a goal; manage the program, projects, and business processes; build and motivate numerous organizations and engage partners; demonstrate milestone successes along the way and continuously make the case to their audience for their continued engagement; and much more.

The approach outlined in this book works, especially now that enterprise customers and even consumers are demanding full solutions to their problems and not just generic products or services. They want to buy results—offerings that take them all the way to the outcome and not just buy functions or features. You’ll learn about what this means and how to do it.

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## Commoditization is Enemy #1

The most critical competitive threat to most companies is commoditization in the eyes of customers and the market as a whole, which then puts downward pressure on prices customers are willing to pay. This causes margins to shrink, which then reduces the money available to invest back into the business to fund growth, R&D, and continued training and development of people, marketing, and other important investments.

Determine the current gross margin and gross contribution margin for the parts of your business that drive most of your revenue. How do they compare to the rest of the industry? Are they sufficient to drive future growth and investment? (If you are a startup, project what these are likely to be once you have traction).

Answer these questions: What financial difference would it make for your business to be able to double your gross mar-

gins? What would you be able to do that you can’t do today?

Since your costs are always going to rise at least linearly, if not exponentially, you had better be doing two things: figuring out how to raise the value of your offerings in order to raise your prices at least proportionally to rising costs, and figuring out how to get the most leverage and efficiency possible out of your operations to reduce costs.

## Remedy: Be the Go-To Solution for a Market Problem

What’s it like to be a Go-To company? A Go-To sometimes turns work away. It names its terms. Prospects may even compete for its business, not the other way around. It’s one thing to differentiate and focus. But taken a step further, it’s incredibly powerful and profitable to become the Go-To brand in your chosen markets. In addition to obtaining sustainable differentiation, your firm will maintain healthy margins and grow revenues over time.

Market dominance simply means becoming the Go-To brand for a particular market need and being so unique and superior at filling that need that you are able to command premium prices, work with premium customers, and hire premium people. Any company, no matter its size, can pursue it. Your goal is to get people to seek you out and believe so firmly in your ability to make a unique contribution that they will pay you whatever it takes.

There are tremendous economic, operating, and long-term shareholder value advantages in being the Go-To brand in a given market. By having a reputation that precedes you, being able to name your price, and having customers seek you out, you stand above competitive jockeying as an also-ran. You earn healthy margins that fuel growth and investment in your future. And life is just easier.

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## What a Go-To Brand Does Differently

Companies that achieve Go-To status in their chosen markets follow a particular set of strategies that me-toos typically don’t. Here are eight things a Go-To brand does differently.

- A Go-To has maniacal focus.
- A Go-To starts with a central theme and market before it broadens.
- A Go-To is obsessed with its area of expertise.
- A Go-To has a higher purpose: to take market ownership of a problem.

- A Go-To evangelizes a prescriptive point of view on the problem with conviction, and builds a following around that view.
- A Go-To doesn't sell, it solves. It becomes more than a product or service, instead becoming the complete solution required to give a customer a desired outcome.
- A Go-To Constantly adjusts and adapts based on changes in the market, their customers' needs, and more.
- A Go-To takes a less-is-more approach.

These qualities and actions are what can separate you as a Go-To from the me-toos. They are the crux of a market-dominance strategy. By establishing your company as the Go-To expert in its chosen markets, you are the first name that comes to mind when a prospect has a particular problem to solve. You become widely known and respected as the primary thought leader on a particular market issue, have unmatched expertise in a particular market, charge premium prices, and earn high margins.

### The Apollo Method for Market Dominance

The Apollo Method for Market Dominance consists of four major phases that may happen sequentially or concurrently in the journey towards becoming the Go-To brand in your space. Sequence and timing will depend on your particular situation.

The first phase, Launch, is all about deciding on and publicly declaring what you want to stand for in the marketplace. You launch yourself into the market. This includes a unique and prescriptive point of view on a common, critical, and urgent market problem, and a unique, results-oriented solution.

The Ignite phase is about building momentum. You build support among powerbrokers and continuously ignite a movement in the marketplace around your point of view and solution.

The Navigate phase is where you walk your talk and guide customers along the journey. You deliver on your promises to the marketplace, developing and taking your solution to market to thrill customers with powerful results they're willing to pay you well for.

The Accelerate phase is all about picking up speed to further cement your status as the Go-To and stay far ahead of the pack, since me-too copycats will inevitably emerge.

### Launch Phase

The primary objective of the Launch phase is to figure out and declare what you want to be the Go-To for—the one 'thing' you want to mean and in what marketplace, captured in just a few words. You must determine the problem you intend to own in a particular market, formulate a unique solution to that problem, and then publicly declare intellectual and execution ownership for that problem. You also need to develop a concise point of view on that problem that you can boil down to just three sentences as a start—Why there's a problem, what needs to be done about it, and how you've uniquely solved the problem.

Now is the time to put your infrastructure fundamentals in place so that you're ready and supported when you rev up sales efforts and business starts coming in. You want people up the learning curve and the kinds worked out of your processes by game time. Just be sure not to overinvest. You want to layer in infrastructure on a just-in-time basis as you build stable revenue streams with healthy margins that support ongoing investment.

Once you've identified your Go-To positioning, identify the baseline items you'll need in order to declare ownership and get your operation started.

### Ignite Phase

Your goal is to Ignite the market and start a movement around your point of view and solution. You'll do this by building your reputation as a major industry player and becoming closely associated with your simple, boiled-down, memorable theme.

The theme is centered on a common, critical, and urgent business problem most companies in your target sector do or will be facing. You're going to frame it in a provocative and counterintuitive manner in order to attract attention and rise above the market noise. You're going to be completely consistent, pounding the same theme over and over and over again. Every communication you put into market will be built around it. This will help people develop a top-of-mind association between you and the theme.

The more contagious your point of view, the faster and more effectively it will spread and reach a tipping point. Your goal is to establish a groundswell, a rolling-thunder effect, so that you build and gain momentum over time that eventually takes on a life of its own.

### Navigate Phase

The Navigate phase is where you deliver on your promises and walk the talk. Your goal is to take clients on a journey toward solving their problem and leave them so thrilled that they are willing to pay handsomely for the valuable end results you deliver and, ideally, start promoting you to others. The Navigate phase encompasses sales and marketing, solution development and delivery, and operations.

You cement your position as a market leader through an industry “community of believers” who become ambassadors for your point of view and approach. You expand your infrastructure at an appropriate pace, and importantly, you measure progress and adjust accordingly. Don’t get lost in the weeds, though. The objective is to help customers navigate their way to such a valuable outcome that they are willing to pay a premium to get it.

### Accelerate Phase

The Accelerate phase is all about refreshing the vision and picking up speed to stay ahead of market changes and competition. You are operating in constantly changing conditions and must therefore constantly adapt and course correct. Adjust your vision, strategy, point of view, solution, and operations as needed, starting with an honest assessment of your current situation. Meanwhile, strengthen and expand customer relationships, break into the Early Majority, and broaden to other segments as appropriate. Continue to provide leadership across the market and grow your community of believers to further solidify your position as a market influencer and Go-To.

Above all, maintain a healthy paranoia, because no matter how firmly established you are as a Go-To, the market will inevitably fill with me-toos.

Jeff Bezos put it best in the company’s IPO filing in 1997—

“Day 2 is stasis, followed by irrelevance. Followed by excruciating, painful decline. Followed by death. And that is why it’s always Day 1...An established company might harvest Day 2 for decades, but the final result would still come. The outside world can push you into Day 2 if you won’t or can’t embrace powerful trends quickly. If you fight them, you’re probably fighting the future. Embrace them and you have a tailwind.”

### Your Flight Plan

The overarching goal of the Apollo Method for Market Dominance is to help you build a platform as the Go-To brand. It will help you achieve sustainable differentiation in your crowded market.

Even today, almost sixty years after its inception, the successful Apollo Space Program remains one of the most powerful examples of human achievement in the face of competition and radical change. By applying valuable lessons from the efficacy of the Apollo Space Program as a focused, unified effort aimed at a specific and tangible outcome, any of us can win a business space race. Apollo serves as a dramatic role model, encouraging companies to take a focused, methodical approach.

May this book inspire you to declare your own moonshot by aiming to be the Go-To in your market, giving you the tools for a swift, relatively safe journey to the top. May you win your own space race.



Theresa M. Lina has over twenty years of experience as a recognized Silicon Valley thought leader and strategist. She is the CEO of Lina Group, Inc., which specializes in market dominance strategy, and has been involved at Stanford University since 2006. She has served as chief strategy and marketing officer for several technology startups, has advised hundreds of companies, and began her career at Accenture, where she helped found, lead, and grow the firm’s communications industry group, now a multibillion-dollar business unit. Theresa is a frequent speaker and workshop leader on strategy, market leadership, innovation, and technology topics.

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