



EFFECTIVE BRAND BUILDING

K. RAVICHANDRAN
Chairperson
School of Business Studies
Madurai Kamaraj University
Madurai, Tamil Nadu. **INDIA**

P. NIRANJANA DEVI
Assistant Professor
Dept. of Business Administration
SVN College Madurai.
Tamil Nadu. **INDIA**

ABSTRACT

Branding is the use of words, designs and symbols to give a product a distinct identity and differentiate it from competitive products. The main aim of branding is to make the customers of that product learn to associate with the value created by a particular product. This in turn simplifies their decision making process since they begin to routinely buy the brand rather than stop to evaluate every alternative while shopping.

INTRODUCTION

Building successful brands is not a one-size that fits all activities. Brand building is both art and science, and the method of creating brand strategy is never the same for every brand.

Brand strategy is an obsessive and often the most misunderstood discipline in marketing. It's of critical importance to know beforehand what will be the most effective strategy for building your brand. Brand owners and managers who desire brand innovation often end up with brand imitation. In a world predisposed to sameness, there's nothing worse than clawing your way to the middle with a brand strategy that doesn't fit the realities of your business strategy.

Brand management is the analysis and planning on how that brand is perceived in the market. Developing a good relationship with the target market is essential for brand management. Tangible elements of brand management include the product itself; look, price, the packaging, etc. The intangible elements are the experience that the consumer has had with the brand, and also the relationship that they have with that brand.

Brand orientation refers to "the degree to which the anorganization values brands and its practices are oriented towards building brand capabilities". A product's superiority is in itself no longer sufficient to guarantee its success. The fast pace of technological development and the increased speed with which imitations turn up on the market have dramatically shortened product lifecycles. The consequence is that product-related competitive advantages soon risk

being transformed into competitive prerequisites. For this reason, increasing numbers of companies are looking for other, more enduring, competitive tools – such as brands.

It's extremely difficult to build a brand that breaks through the slush pile of images and messages consumers are drowning in today. Not only must brand strategy differentiate your proposition from others, but more importantly, this differentiation must also be highly valued. Most contemporary brand managers would agree – we're way past the traditional thinking and point of view that brand building is an activity that endows a product or service with a catchy name, snappy slogan, pretty logo, compelling packaging and advertising. Brand strategy is like creating mythology — stories people care about and remember. People don't buy products, they buy personalities and meanings associated with the story of those products. People will only find meanings in brands with personality.

BRAND STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

A brand strategy worth investing money in over the long haul has to tap into the emotions and feelings of the target segment in ways that transcend the functional and rational benefits associated with using the product. Depending on the nature and culture of an organization, and the reason a brand exists in the first place, there are four different methods for brand strategy development considered useful to strategic and creative thinking:

Branding By Thinking

In this method, brand strategy is approached in a rigorous, centralized and formal business planning process. Typically this approach is used by companies with large and diverse product portfolios that are defined as a “house of brands”. Each brand within the portfolio has its own management team, customer segment, product life cycle, supply chain, performance metrics, market share, and profit contribution mandated by centralized planning and tons of data.

Companies like Proctor & Gamble, Coca Cola, Kraft Foods, Nestle, Gillette and GM favor centralized planning as the cornerstone of their brand strategy.

Branding By Imagery

This method is usually driven by advertising agencies in a leading brand development role and linked to creative execution of various ad campaigns. Marketers and their agencies closely link the brand to imagery driven by the latest trends and fads in the culture, and expressed through art directors, photographers and commercial directors. Brand strategy is approached in a more functional manner driven by the cultural associations customers have that are surrounding the brand image.

Image conscious brands like Abercrombie & Fitch, Calvin Klein, BMW, Absolut, TagHeuer are brilliant at this type of strategy.

Branding By User Experience

In this method, the target customer segment perceives product quality, functional benefits and brand image as a given. What these customers seek is an experience that dazzles the senses, touches the heart and stimulates the mind. In this method the customer is the most important component of the brand. Brand managers focus on service design and usability, which are at the very core of these experiences, to drive brand strategy.

Brands built on user experience include Starbucks, Southwest Airlines, Disney, IKEA, Costco, Tiffany.

Branding By Self Expression

In this method, marketers place the role of brand building as a collaboration with their customers. Marketers innovate new meanings rather than products. Customers are actively participating in creating the meanings associated with the brand that are a reflection or a symbolic representation of their own personal identity or inner self. Here the strategy is centered on “brand as a badge”.

Brand examples that are built on self expression include Swatch, Apple, VW Beetle, Mini, Louis Vuitton and Herman Miller.

IMPLEMENTING A BRAND BUILDING STRATEGY

Implementing a Brand Building Strategy often confuses brand managers and owners. A brand strategy has several multidimensional rules and needs to be aligned to get along with the business strategy. Implementing a brand strategy generally consists of a Creating or enhancing the Public Prominence, Brand Associations and Managing Consumer Relationships.

Public Prominence

Public Prominence can also be considered as Visibility, but we prefer the former to be more suitable in brand building tasks. The power of public prominence often goes ignored by brand managers. A brand with adequate public prominence will not only stimulate considerations in consumers mind while purchasing goods in the same category but also affect the perception of the brand. Brands like Coca Cola, Intel and Visa have managed to build a strong public prominence.

Building Strong Associations

This is arguably the most important factor in the brand building task. The key to a strong brand is a differentiation factor. Southwest Airlines is one such brand. It differentiates itself with a low cost airline and recognises its competition in road transport rather than other airlines. Harley Davidson could be another example to building strong associations.

Developing Relationships

Developing a deep relationship with a segment of customers is usually much more important than sheer numbers. It is important to understand that loyal consumers influence others and moreover contribute to stable sales base. Not all companies can manage to build a strong group of committed consumers. In India, Nestles' Maggi brand managed to get together a strong relationship with their consumers.

Following the above three strategies with a well planned dedicated effort will significantly strengthen a Brand.

EFFECTIVE BRANDING

What makes a Brand meaningful? What inspires loyalty in a customer? The details vary from one transaction to another, but the unifying thread is always the same: a sense of personal connection and confidence. It's not a company's logo, tagline, or mission statement. "It's what people say about you when you leave the room," says Carlos Martinez Onaindia, Global Brand senior manager at Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, "It's about perception; it's about reputation. Why are you different from your competition?"

Making A Brand Meaningful

A clear brand strategy is built from a clear business strategy. At the heart of any successful brand is that idea of consistency in communications and consistency of experience. A brand, in other words, tells customers what they can count on from its products, services, and people. It's a commitment to taking care of their needs and giving them a consistently positive experience with the company. A business focused on the quality of those experiences does more to build brand than it can accomplish by using worn-out phrases like "premier provider" or "world-class service". What can a Brand say to stand out? Direct interaction with customers gives an edge in responding to their needs and that's the core of a strong small business brand.

Knowing the Needs of the Market



“When people are trying to establish a brand, the very first thing they do is take what they perceive as the most important attribute to their core customer base and argue that they have it,”

says Wharton professor Barbara E. Kahn. The better strategy is to show customers that the company understands the challenges customers face and the benefits they’ll get from doing business with the company. Instead of selling products or services, offer people solutions that seem custom-designed to their needs. Brand strategy isn’t the exclusive domain of big enterprises alone. In fact, small companies’ personal relationships with their customers can create a branding advantage. The Brand of the company is established in how it responds to client emergencies, how it handles product complaints and even in the way the employees greet customers when the boss is not there. This collective experience is happening whether a company controls it or not.

Keeping the Conversation Going

A company cannot control customer expectations completely, but can help by listening and responding to customer needs. That means engaging customers in person, by phone, in writing, or virtually, in accordance with their preferences for receiving information. Social media platforms gives organizations the unprecedented access to information about where it succeeds in wowing customers, where the efforts are falling flat or backfiring, and where opportunities are emerging to strengthen ties to the community the business serves. These platforms can be used to solicit input, which is a great way not only to solidify relationships, but to convert the most committed customers into “brand evangelists”- people who help spread the message across what Martinez Onaindia calls “the brandscape.”

Making the Position Clear

Feedback offers a fresh perspective on the strengths of a company and shows how the company can build on them to be the preferred provider of products or services. Organizations need to think about how they can add value in a way that makes customers more reliant on and more loyal to the business brand. Branding needs to be taken beyond price as someone can undercut a company’s price anytime. Likewise, brands should not only be based on having the fastest service, latest innovation, or most creative solution as again, someone may be right on the heels. Focus should also be on how to help customers solve their challenges and meet their goals

“In the end, differentiation is not about differentiation from your competition,” Martinez Onaindia says. *“It’s about how you engage your people and your stakeholders so they feel in their minds that you are different.”*



The more an organization interacts with its customers, the better informed the organization will be about their needs, their priorities, and their perception of the company's value to them.

Branding as a Team Sport

To attain the goals of authenticity and consistency, the brand must be demonstrated by every member of the team. Every member of the organization has a role in shaping the brand. Brand awareness is now becoming an universal job requirement. Companies need to recruit for it, and let employees know that it's one of the criteria for awarding raises, promotions, and bonuses. Also, it should be ensured that the employees contribute to the brand and the team articulates the company's branding message consistently across all media.

Living the Brand

Aligning the company's products, services, and conduct with a common message is the key to maintaining customers' trust, loyalty, and business. Everything a company does should reinforce the brand message.

Keeping the Brand Alive and Evolving

The Brand should be able to portray why a company does what it does and why that should matter to the people it wants to serve. In the process, the brand will be able to make a lasting impression and retain its vitality and relevance even as the market changes and customer needs evolve.

Good Brands Make Good Neighbors

Many small business owners enjoy a branding advantage as an outgrowth of their close interaction with customers. When they listen to their customers, many small business owners discover that their brand is the little touches, the little things that they do to make customers happy. This is one of the best ways to capture the essence of what a company stands for. Most of us want to feel valued as customers, and most of us prefer to do business with people with whom we share values, priorities, and a sense of personal connection. When customer relationships are handled consistently and in a manner that rings true, the brand will capture the essence of the business and inspire loyalty.

CORPORATE BRANDING

The recent trend is branding which emerged in the mid-nineties is the shift in focus of organizations from product brands to corporate branding. Corporate brands are leading to the

development of a new branch of marketing known as “corporate- levelmarketing” A corporate brand is a brand that represents an organization and reflects its heritage, values, culture, people, and strategy. Corporate branding congruent with the strategic brand vision dwells on developing brands at an organizational level which requires managing interactions with multiple stakeholders. A corporate brand is defined primarily by organizational associations and thus can develop and leverage organizational characteristics, as well as product and service attributes.

A corporate brand must reflect organizational values. The core values of the organization must be the guiding light of the brand building process, both internally and externally. They must be built into the product, expressed in behavior, and reflected in communication. Corporate and product brands are different in terms of their composition, constituencies, maintenance, management, and disciplinary roots.

Knox and Bickerton identified six “conventions ” of corporate brand building. They are:

- Brand context: understanding where the brand stands
- Brand construction: how the brand is positioned in accordance to customer and stakeholder value
- Brand confirmation: the way the brand is articulated to the rest of the organization and all of its audiences
- Brand consistency: delivering clarity to all stakeholders through its communication channels
- Brand continuity: the alignment of business processes with the corporate brand
- Brand conditioning: the ability to monitor and manage the brand on a continual basis

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

COCO COLA

Coca-Cola is the third largest global brand in the world. Just by reading the name, anybody can picture a red Coca-Cola can with their signature font printed up the side which has become an iconic symbol. When working with an established brand, building an audience isn't an issue. The challenge comes from understanding how each of the social channels work in concert with one another, and the way the fans interact with different content on different networks. Coca-Cola has over 86 million followers and Fans across their main brand channels, complimenting them with local pages for different regions and countries, or brand pages for subsidiary products like Diet Coke that fall under the Coca-Cola umbrella. So how does the massive beverage brand market to its audience? It uses different tactics on each of channel, but maintains a cohesive brand message.

Coca-Cola on Twitter

On Twitter, Coca-Cola has 2.4 million followers worldwide, and they're paying close attention.

- **Crowd-Sourced Content**

Coca-Cola runs campaigns to engage its audience and generate content that they can share. This, not only engages the current audience and makes them a very real part of the brand experience, but it creates a collection of advocates. Every single person who posts their video will retweet/share/mention this video to their audience, who may not follow Coca-Cola yet.

- **Direct Engagement**

One of the biggest challenges for any large brand is keeping up with the volume of mentions. 83% of Coca-Cola's Tweets in the last month were direct @Replies. This tactic is employed both as a customer-service method, and to show some love for fans that show love to the brand. With an audience the size of Coca-Cola's, this attention to detail is a big responsibility, and one of the reasons for its success on Twitter.

- **Embracing Video**

Coca-Cola has embraced video more than most brands on Instagram. Four of its last 15 posts have been videos, and it's working. These four videos have averaged 5.5K likes and 90 comments each.

Coca-Cola on Facebook

Coca-Cola's biggest fanbase is on Facebook, 82 Million fans like the brand's page. Coca-Cola uses this space to promote the same brand initiatives and campaigns as it does on other channels. For large brands, Facebook's ability to generate huge audiences makes it the perfect "hub" for content from across the board, and Coca-Cola is doing a great job of capitalizing on this.

Coco Cola's Success Strategy

- **Focusing on Consumer Sophistication**

Coco Cola's branding strategies focus on the changing market realities and consumer sophistication that requires different approach and brand redesigning. In the early years, the

company focused on making the brand affordable, available and acceptable in the aim of establishing a brand that would be instantly recognizable and highly appreciated in consumers' minds. Over the years, and in an effort to adjust its branding strategies to the new consumer demands, Coca-Cola focused on building brand identity by offering value for price, differentiation to meet consumer preferences, and pervasive penetration. Today, by testing at least 20 different brands on a monthly basis on a sample of 4,000 consumers, Coca-Cola is a corporation with strong brand identity and brand image.

- **Evaluating Consumer Response**

The company constantly assesses consumer response to its brands in order to evaluate consumer perception and find out what consumers believe about its products. Consumers relate particular brands with particular symbols and promises that need to be met. Similarly, Coca-Cola is related to a particular level of customer satisfaction that is determined by the collective memory of its target audience.

- **Achieving Strategic Consensus**

Another important aspect of Coca-Cola's branding strategies is the fact that strong brands make great sales and increase their revenues. However, Coca-Cola has taken the extra mile by building a brand that has managed to increase sustainable sales by attracting and retaining the best human capital and investing in employee relations and customer relation management. This has enabled the corporation not only to achieve strategic consensus and alignment at all organizational levels, but also to trigger positive feelings in consumers' minds.

- **Building Brand Loyalty**

Finally, strong brand image is related to brand loyalty. The more consumer demands are satisfied, the more consumers are attached to a brand and retained by default. Also, Coca-Cola's brand image entails the purchase frequency that is boosted by effective advertising campaigns and marketing strategies. In doing so, the corporation expands its customer base and enhances customer loyalty by meeting customer needs and raising customer satisfaction

MICROMAX

Micromax is one of the leading consumer electronics companies in India and the tenth largest mobile phone player in the world. It is currently the second largest smartphone company in India.

Micromax began as an IT software company in the year 2000. It later entered the mobile segment and by 2010 went on to become the largest domestic mobile handsets company. The company stood apart from the competition – a) in terms of its contemporary designs and b) in offering the same specifications as the foreign rivals but at a much lower cost.

As per International Data Corp., in 2013 Micromax had 22 percent share of the mobile handset market in India, a close second to Samsung which was at 26 percent. In 2014, if a Counterpoint Research study is to be believed, Micromax is now the leading mobile handset provider.

Micromax’s Success Strategy

Micromax understood the sentiments of the common people. It developed phones with features and functions that matched rival brands but came at very low costs. In this manner, it managed to attract many first-time buyers. The first time buyers wanted to upgrade their phones and Micromax came as an apt option – an option that allowed them to enjoy all the features that the rivals offered, yet it did not cost them a bomb. It also targeted the semi-urban and rural areas, where the consumers were ready to own high end mobile phones, if they came with lot of features and at lower costs.

Micromax has also been advertising heavily. They maintained continued presence on the television, the print and outdoor areas. They created their advertisements, especially the TV commercials to match up to global standards. It is also believed that word of mouth publicity worked very well for it, where people vouched for the product and prompted others to buy too.

CONCLUSION

All over the world, humans are drowning in data and information. As information and our collective intelligence becomes more automated in the goo of the internet, human beings will value more of what cannot be automated- emotion, imagination, connection and engagement. Brands will live and die on the ability of their stories and meanings to deliver what is highly valued by the marketplace. Regardless of the method used to drive brand strategy, the question remains “what does your brand stand for, that matters to people and makes a difference”. Brands that lead markets know the answer and build accordingly.



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