

WHAT MAKES A BRAND &
HOW DO YOU LOOK AFTER
IT TO ENHANCE VALUE FOR
THE FUTURE.

THE ROLE OF MAKETING
COMMUNICATION IN BRAND
BUILDING.

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What is a Brand?

Definition.

Definitions from Bradmore and Kotler give a benchmark of what constitutes a brand.

Brand - a name, sign, symbol or design, or some combination of these, used to identify a product and to differentiate it from competitors' products. (Bradmore 2000)

A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one sellers or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors. (Kotler 2000)

A more stringent definition and test is offered by Davies to distinguish a brand from merely a generic label.

*(1) **Differentiation:** Does the supposed brand name differentiate the product/service positively from other; similar offers in the marketplace in the mind of customers/consumers?*

*(2) **Premium price:** Does the supposed brand command a higher price in the marketplace than a similar product/services, because of an image for quality and/or reliability?*

*(3) **Separate existence:** Can the supposed brand be valued, used, sold or licensed separately from the business owning the brand/name?*

*(4) **Psychic value:** Does the supposed brand offer benefits to the customer at a symbolic or sensory level? (Davies 1992)*

Davies maintains that unless you can answer yes to the above four questions then you do not have a brand but just a convenient label.

Wood proposes a further refinement of the definition of a brand:

.... A brand is a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers. The key change to the original definition are the words "any other feature" as this allows for intangibles, such as image, to be the point of differentiation. The particular value of this definition is that it focuses on a fundamental brand purpose, which is differentiation. (Wood 2000)

From this we can see that the definition of a brand is evolving to encompass more subjective terms that relate to brand image and how the consumer and marketer interrelate to and with the brand. Perhaps Ambler proposes the most subjective definition of a brand.

... the promise of the bundles of attributes that someone buys and provide satisfaction . . . The attributes that make up a brand may be real or illusory, rational or emotional, tangible or invisible. (Ambler 1992)

Looking After the Brand & the Role of Marketing Communication.

While these definitions give some insight into the what, they do not really address the why? Why is it necessary to differentiate ones product from ones competitors? It is in the why aspect where the maintenance of a brand becomes critical. This is where the notion of brand equity starts to take shape.

Producers wanted to both make their products easier for consumers to remember and to differentiate their products further from the competition. In the nineteenth century, a related purpose of branding emerged. A brand was used to enhance a product's perceived value through such associations. (Farquhar 1989)

This enhanced perceived value can be defined as brand equity. Altering perceived value relies on some form of cognitive evaluation process being undertaken by the potential consumer, hence the importance of the marketer having an understanding of consumer behaviour and being able to effectively communicate with the target audience. If you have an understanding of what can change a consumers perceived value of your brand then there is a possibility that you can change the price of the product or make it appealing to a wider audience. This of course is conditional on being able to communicate these values effectively.

Brand Essence.

Traditionally brands have been defined in terms of brand image and brand equity. These two terms try to encapsulate the brand personality and the brand value. There have been recent shifts in branding literature to brand identity as a measure of a brands potency. (Harris & de Chernatony)
One could roll all of these constructs into a general term called brand essence. Brand essence being a holistic approach to how a brand is perceived by the consumer. To understand brand essence it is therefore necessary to understand the components.

Brand Identity.

Brand Identity consists of six components.

- | | |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1. Vision | 4. Personality |
| 2. Culture. | 5. Relationships |
| 3. Positioning | 6. Presentation |

Brand vision and culture

It is argued that brand vision and culture are the very essence of the brand. They are the “raison d’etre” of the brand and come about not merely from clever positioning but from deeper within the corporation’s culture.

At the centre of brand identity are brand vision and culture. Vision encompasses the brand's core purpose - its reason for being - and its core

values, which provide a system of guiding principles (Collins and Porras, 1996). Each brand will have a unique set of values that are relevant to its target market, but we argue that it is the consistency of the perception of those values, as well as the nature of those values, that is an important characteristic of successful brands. (Harris & de Chenatony)

Maintaining consistency in perception of brand values has implications for the marketing communication process. The when, where, how and what to say to the target market, will all be influenced by the brands vision and culture.

Positioning

Part of a brands purpose is to provide instant credibility. It must therefore be positioned to act as a conduit between the product and the target segment of the market. This positioning must be congruent both with the products physical and emotional attributes and the self-image of the target segment.

... A brand's positioning sets out what the brand is, whom it is for and what it offers (Rositer and Percy, 1996). Following means-end theory (Gutman, 1982), a set of functionally distinct capabilities that differentiate a brand should be derived from the brand's core values. The brand's positioning will be affected by artefacts, akin to Kapferer's (1997) "physique", which provide cues about the brand's performance characteristics. (Harris & de Chenatony)

Further, psychological proximity is also important in affecting store brand choice. This variable reflects the matching of the brand profile with consumer self-perception. The consumer prefers brands perceived to be suitable for "people like me."(Baltas 1997)

Implicit in brand vision and culture and positioning is the concept of "promise". Is the brand living up to it's promise to the customer? An example of implicit promise can be seen in Levi's jeans. The implicit promise is "hard wearing no nonsense trousers." The product and the positioning must live up to the promise. A trusted brand can be thought of as a promise of future satisfaction. Effectiveness, believability and integrity of the promise will be heavily influenced by the manner in which it is communicated to the target market.

Personality

As part of brand differentiation marketers try and imbue brands with a personality that is congruent with that of the target segment. A brand's personality is not fixed; it should be fluid and be able to change so that it keeps up with shifting consumer self images and expressions.

The brand's emotional characteristics are represented by the metaphor of personality, which, amongst other sources, evolves from the brand's core values. Personality traits are further developed through associations with the "typical user" imagery, endorsers and consumers' contacts with the company's employees (Aaker, 1997). Managers therefore need to ensure that a brand's personality is conveyed consistently by both its employees and external communications. Another influential source for a brand's personality is its positioning and an integrated approach to branding can help reinforce the synergy between these. (Harris & de Chenatony)

Effective marketing communication programs result in synergies between positioning and personality. This is evident in the pictures we build in our “minds eye” merely at the mention of successfully communicated brands such as Coca Cola, Rolls Royce, Rolex or even Dove soap. The values and personality that we imbue upon these products is a direct result of their marketing communication programs.

Relationships

Relationships can be viewed as the culmination of the successful positioning of the brand in terms of its personality, vision and culture. Relationships will only result if all of the components of the brand essence make sense and are perceived by the target as an entity with which they would want to interact.

Having nurtured a brand's personality, a relationship between the brand and its consumers evolves, which is characterised by the values inherent in the brand's personality (Harris & de Chenatony)

Presentation

Presentation of a brands final credentials must also be consistent with it's description and how and where the target segment would reasonably expect to see the brand presented. It is unlikely that we will ever see Chivas Regal sponsoring speedway racing. This presentation would not be consistent with either the brand or the target segment.

The final component of brand identity involves the identification of presentation styles to present the brand's identity so as to reflect consumers' aspirations (cf. Kapferer's (1997) "reflections") and self-images (Belk, 1988; Hogg and Mitchell, 1996). People respond more favourably to brands and companies they perceive as being consistent with their self-concepts (Dowling, 1994). Brands' symbolic meanings also help consumers understand and express aspects of their selves to others (McCracken, 1993). Both advertising and employees' interactions with consumers contribute to the symbolic meaning of a brand. (Harris & de Chenatony)

Building a strong and successful brand is dependant on reducing the gap between a brands identity and it's reputation and presenting a coherent brand description to all stakeholders in the brand.

Conclusion

Using a metaphor, marketing communications can be viewed as a river within which the brand essence flows. Not only does the river hold the concepts of identity, vision, culture, positioning and personality relative to each other but it also delivers these to the ultimate destination, the target market.

The successful establishment, building and maintenance of a brand will all be determined by the effectiveness of the marketing communications program. A brand cannot live without a marketing communications program. Without it the brand will wither and die.

To continue our metaphor if the river delivers our brand to fertile plains (our target market) much growth will ensue, however if the river concludes in a desert salt pan all will die. Such is the importance of ensuring that our communications are aimed in the correct direction, because no matter how important or how impressive our messages are, if they are not relevant to the destination they are doomed to fail.

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