

ABOUT SMEs' BRAND AND IMAGE

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Abstract: paper presents some aspects regarding management of a SME's brand and image.

1. INTRODUCTION

Everyone has their own shadow. Everyone has something extremely specific, something that makes him or her unique.

In some way, every company has such a specific element. This one is unique and the company wears it as a mark. That "something", known or unknown, especially or spontaneously developed, seductive or hideous etc. summarizes in a glance or in few words all that remains in people's mind about a company.

Therefore the mark is the distinguishing sign, its briefly representing, its identity and fame, company style and reputation etc. The specific "smell" of a company, the public's confidence, the rank on the market etc., all of these depend by the mark.

2. COMPANY'S BRAND AND IMAGE

The position on the market of any company depends on its image, or brand. Any client chooses one firm or another according to personal tastes, but also influenced by the image of the company. Thus, having an image, a brand, became a „must” for any company.

The brand that the firm chooses to display comes from the projects, the strategy, the style and the vision of the owner. It is also influenced by the opinion the every day client has upon the activity or the service that the company provides.

Especially in case of SMEs, the conscious involvement of the entrepreneur in the image of his company represents a better attitude than a passive (some kind of „let it happen”) approach.

Any element that „reaches the public” represents an important element when trying to impose a brand onto the market. A lot of small things like tidiness, the places where you have your ads displayed, the way you treat your client, the colors and decorations of the public areas, the ways of how the new and last products are presented, make your image and brand. These things and a lot of others must be taken into consideration and can work extremely profitable in your advantage, with very low expenses or almost free of charge.

Any SME can impose a positive image onto the market by creating the fame of a company that has a clean location and works well and organized.

Newspaper or leaflet advertisements should present themselves on very good quality paper, with a good choice of graphic and colors combination and an elaborate printing technique. Also, it is very important to have a discourse organized, short as it is necessary but with strong impact of the message and, of course, with no spelling mistakes.

Personality of the owner is another crucial component in imposing a brand on the market. In most cases of a SME, where the entrepreneur has direct, face-to-face relations with both his team and his clients, his personality represents a brand in itself. The person who wears the image of the company has to have the very same qualities that he wants for the company – qualities that „sell” on the market.

For a company, the brand represents a long-term investment and it's usually kind of costly, not especially expensive.

Changing the image, the brand of a company that is already „selling” is like changing the rules of a game while still playing. Not only that it can be very costly, but it can also vaporize the clients.

However, if the present image or brand is not what it should be and gets to the point where the business is jeopardized or the turnover is lowered, it should definitely be changed. This must not be a sudden move, but a slow, progressive process that would not puzzle, but positively modify the clients' perception into a better one.

Anything that is somehow connected with the evolution of a company or what that company stands for must not be changed unless necessary. The advertisement with all its components (the slogans, the motto, the graphic line with its specific fonts and colors), the way the invoices or the packaging look like, all these make an identity to the company and sells, even for a SME.

3. STRONG POINTS AND OPORTUNITIES

It is good to know that the image of a company helps not only to being located by its clients, but also to tracking the differences between one company and another. Due to these factors, a brand similar to one of a competitor is not welcomed.

Most of the times, the difference among SMEs is given by the personality of the owner, but product or services standardization represent a viable option too.

In order to keep clients close when deal with competing brands, a company should bet on what it has unique and different.

However, on the way to distinguish a company to others, is it a very bad idea to copy the opponent, especially if it's a stronger one. Strong companies take advantage from insufficient differentiation of brands on the market, because people will always look for and follow the best. SMEs that want to impose by trying to „look like” big and strong companies do nothing but commit suicide, because this will be interpreted as a sign of weaknesses. If the opponent companies try to copy yours, you have to start to invest in what is the most expensive to be copied. If they still continue, comfort yourself with the thought that you were the first to bring it on the market, the „pioneer” and the clients, for a while, will continue to link that strong point with your company. However, what started as an advantage like this fades in time. The company should look for another strong point.

Actually, it's always better to have at least one or two „aces in the sleeve”. Strong points can come and go, but a strong brand is untouchable along time.

Something else that really matters is to find a strong point to your company's offer – sometimes this is more important even than the advertisement itself.

4. WHAT WE OFFER?

The structure of the offer: usual, attractive and profitable products?

The image of the firm is strongly influenced by the structure of the offer and its value. Any improvement in the offer should not lead to bad changes of the brand and image that the company promotes on the market.

The most predictable, classical and standard offer of any company has three dimensions: 1) highly appealing products and services; 2) common products and services and 3) very profitable products and services.

Highly appealing products are those that ”sell” or, at least, get new categories of clients. A product or a service that is highly-appealing is not necessarily very cheap; on the contrary: it may be more expensive than many others from the same category just because it suits certain specific occasions, it's easier to use or just because it's something else. A good business man will always look for new clients based on highly appealing products, but taking care not to produce sudden changes in the image of the company. There are cases

when just the appearance of a new product, very different from the usual ones, damages the image, the brand and the newly acquired category of clients may frighten the already existing ones.

The products or the services that are currently purchased by the usual customers are called „common”. It’s worth mentioning that, due to the high competition on the market, the price for such products or services is rather low, but also that they make most of the profit. It is very important, when dealing with this kind of products, not to let your possible problems with the stock to chase your loyal customers - operating stocks on the computer might help.

Profitable products or services are those that allow a maximum trade margin. They are different from the first two types of products because the former don’t „sell” as much as the latter. Profitable products can really help to improve the financial situation of a firm because they allow a fast recovery of the funds from the stock.

The structure of the offer for common products and services definitely influences the offer for both highly-appealing and the profitable products, the former getting most of the clients. Clients for special or very profitable products will always be there, but what is really important is to keep close to the clients that buy from you the “common” products that can be bought from anywhere else.

Setting up a good offer and a target client represents, for a SME, a strategic move that takes into consideration the market absorption capability, the opponents’ offer and even the owner’s personality and tastes.

If a SME wants to compete with a big store, taking advantage of its location and the facilities around it (parking lots, means of transport etc.) success is granted to the one that offers something original for that same kind of product. Moreover, it would be a plus to give a discount to some highly-appealing products, thus reaching to those who are willing to pay much for these kind of products.

5. CONCLUSIONS

For SMEs, the rank on the market is essentially conditioned by its brand and image.

Usually, a SME create its own brand and image according to projects, strategy, style and vision of its owner. Personality of the owner is a crucial component in imposing a brand on the market. The owner involvement in brand and image building is usually profitable for a SME. It is also welcome to model the company brand and image, not only to the owner’s “image and likeness” but after the usually customers’ needs and preferences too.

Companies’ brand and image are some kind of living organisms - are in continuous development and changing. Changes of company’s image must be made but gradually and delicate.

For a company, the brand represents a long-term investment. It’s usually kind of costly but not necessarily expensive. Money has no value without profitable ideas.

Any element that „reaches the public” represents an important element when trying to impose a brand onto the market.

Something that really matters is to find a strong point to your company’s offer. The offer structure and components can become a very strong point in a SME development. It is also necessary to take care to advertising.

Especially for SMEs, it is also extremely profitable to permanently promote unique or different elements or characteristics. Elements like attitude in relations with customers, the look of public areas, new and / or special products e.a. can really help an entrepreneur and it’s SME.

Last but not least, the usual customers are extremely important to keep them close to the company. They and the “common” products that they buy represent and bring the most

important part of incomes for a regular SME.

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