

## CORPORATE IMAGE: IDENTIFYING BUILDING UP STRATEGIES

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**Abstract:** *Business /corporate / organisation image is paramount when it comes to improve a company's desirability as a borrower, customer, employer, supplier, etc. The most important strategies to build up corporate image are creating a website, creating straightforward, easy-to-understand pricing, designing the business image, doing a referral exchange, encouraging personal recommendations, listing creatively and widely, maintaining a customer database, maintaining good employee relations, making a marketing plan, making the business look good, naming and branding, and using the press. The paper presents the most important features of these strategies.*

**Key words:** *corporate image, building up strategies*

### INTRODUCTION

Business dictionaries define business and organisation image as an picture in mind that appear up when a company name is mentioned [...] a psychological impression which constantly changing with the circumstances of the company, media coverage, and the performances. [4]

Companies use more advertising techniques to have a good image and to improve their performances. [11]

**Strategy** is defined by business dictionaries as the science of planning resources so that they can be used effectively and efficiently. [4]

**Corporate/organisational image** can be defined from two different perspectives [7]:

- As *perceptions of internal members*, a descriptive view referring to how insiders believe external audiences view their organization [9];
- As *perceptions of external members*, encompassing the "characteristics organizational characteristics elites want stakeholders to attribute to the company" (Gioia & Thomas, 1996, in [13] (see also [6]).

**Corporate image** needs developing and managing for the following reasons [1]:

- Satisfying employees by creating a good identity for them;
- Establishing loyal customers to the organization;
- Maintaining a good relationship with the people in the community in which the organization operates to avoid inconveniences;
- Maintaining and promoting a good relationship with various opinion leaders and the government;
- Influencing loyal customers to increase sales.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The material consisted in the literature on the marketing communications mix in agritourism published in the last quarter of a century.

The research method is a **descriptive** one trying to describe certain situations and more precisely in our case to describe the marketing mix [12].

### RESEARCH RESULTS

After studying the literature on the building up strategies for **business /corporate / organisation image**, ten strategies have come out repeatedly [18]:

## 1. Creating a Website

In the era of ICTs, a website is a must: if a business does not have a website, it does not exist for the business environment. A good website has a professional look and feel that suits the business.

There are several **advantages** of having a website for one's business:

- It allows advertising through Facebook ads, SEO (Search Engine Optimization) service provider, etc.;
- It can be attractive with a blog page to post fresh content;
- It can be extremely valuable due to its links;
- It can help build better relationships with the customers (the company sends messages to its customers, and the customers send feedback to the company);
- It can help ensure long-term customers;
- It can help generate more customers outside the business' city and worldwide;
- It can help increase sales by consistently updating and promoting its content;
- It gives the business the opportunity to prove its credibility;
- It is accessible 24/7;
- It is less expensive (sometimes even free of charge) than printed media, radio, TV, etc.;
- It is more convenient for your customers and leads;
- It provides information on what happens on it (number of visitors, messages, and e-mails; updates; website progress);

## 2. Creating Straightforward, Easy-To-Understand Pricing

**Price strategies** are impacted by **corporate image**, discounts, geography, price discrimination, price sensitivity. External corporate image affects its ability of adopting a specific price strategy (for instance, a mid-market supermarket chain would find it difficult to move up market in price; a low-cost automobiles producer would find it extremely difficult to move up to an image of luxury cars producer) [14]. **Pricing strategies** (such as bundle pricing, captive pricing, economy pricing, geographical pricing, price skimming, pricing at a premium, pricing for market penetration, promotional pricing, psychological pricing, and value pricing – cf. [15]) should take into account – besides account segments, competitors' actions, consumers' ability to pay, distribution costs, input costs, market conditions, production costs, trade margins, and variable costs [15] – *Internet* pricing disparity, manufacturers selling costs and trade allowances, price optimization modelling, and retail consolidation. On the other hand, pricing strategies have a considerable impact on consumer pressure groups, government agencies, regulatory authorities, shareholders, etc.

Many businesses try to fool their customers using complicated pricing structures. Or, service businesses, for example, should streamline and make clear their pricing (i.e. tell the customers exactly how much they should expect to pay for every particular service with the help of a pricing menu).

## 3. Designing the Business Image

Graphic design concerns a visual presentation of the company, i.e. [10]: the style of literature design used; number of logos; style of the colouring, illustrations, layout, photography, typeface, and type of logos. Among these visual identification elements, the logo is the most important: it can be changed over time to reflect the evolving, modernising

corporate identity (Figure 1). A company's visual presentation may not always appropriately communicate its identity.



Figure 1. Starbucks logo over time

#### 4. Doing a Referral Exchange

Two related business may refer clients to each other. In this case, they should set up an exchange by:

- Placing brochures / cards at the second business's office / store;
- Displaying the other business's marketing materials in the first business's place of business.

#### 5. Encouraging Personal Recommendations

**Encouraging personal recommendations** (referring a friend may get the business points, a 50% cut for a haircut, etc.) can be a way to attract customers. Business referral may be done by:

- Amplifying the business product giveaways with social media;
- Building up the excitement;
- Establishing the business's authority with free webinars;
- Giving away awesome stuff;
- Helping an NGO do something good;
- Offering a taste with free premium access;
- Paying referrers for each referral;
- Rewarding referrers in credits;
- Rewarding referrers with the business's best stuff;
- Showing love with gift cards.

#### 6. Listing Creatively and Widely

Listing a business:

- Is a way to attract people to the business;
- Is usually low-cost / free.

Listing should be done:

- In not-so-obvious places;
- In obvious places (Chamber of Commerce, Yellow Pages).

#### 7. Maintaining a Customer Database

If a customer who tried to use the business liked it, there is the possibility to use it again. It is less expensive to direct mail or e-mail promotions to customers in a customer database than to acquire a new customer. A complete customer's contact information

should include: customer name, company name, work function, address, telephone, e-mail address, compiled address, estimated sale, last contact, lead status, lead source, product, and price per product unit [5].

## **8. Maintaining Good Employee Relations**

Employees who love their jobs and believe in the business they work for (because they are treated right): display / use / wear the business's merchandise or services and recommend the business to their families / friends. According to [10], "[...] employees should be trained and motivated to project a positive image of the organisation", particularly in the case of service organisations (because, in this case, personal interactions are the key to customer satisfaction).

Improving a business's employee relations involves [17]:

- Stimulating employees to reach targets within a certain time frame;
- Encouraging communication between employees
- Involving the team members;
- Organising morning meetings;
- Organizing various parties at work
- Praising the individuals if they have done something exceptionally well;
- Rewarding the individuals if they have done something exceptionally well suitably;

## **9. Making a Marketing Plan**

A marketing plan should:

- Track the business's progress;
- Determine how and when specific performance goals will be met;
- Include an analysis of the business's competitors;
- Include an analysis of the business's market;
- Include marketing ideas (on business marketing, press releases, referral program, website);
- Include marketing objectives;
- Outline the business's marketing budget;
- Outline the business's mission;
- Set specific performance goals.

## **10. Making the Business Look Good**

Making the business credible and inviting customers in may benefit, depending on the type of business, from a brochure, an office, a store front, a veterinary's practice, or a website. Depending on the cultural environment of a business, the interior layout of offices may suggest different things: in the case of a large open room with desks in full sight of each other – openness; a series of closed offices – lack of openness [10]

## **11. Naming and Branding**

The names used to identify an organisation, its divisions and its products are extremely important. They can be changed over time to reflect the evolving, modernising corporate identity, just like the logos [10]. In another order of ideas, organisations may operate under different names if they have a portfolio of unrelated businesses, or if their subsidiaries have distinct / better-known names than the parent organisation.

## 12. Using the Press

In large corporations, media relations are managed by a PR department, while, in smeer companies, they are typically handled informally by senior management [10]. In public relations, the publics are competitors, consumers, courts, financial institutions, general, government, interest groups, media, public employees, scientific community, shareholders, suppliers, etc. [16]. A simple press release on a newsworthy angle on the business (e.g., a business grand opening, a business story, why the business's offer is different) sent to local publications may be inexpensive, but it is effective, particularly in case of unfavorable rumors and stories [2]. Other appropriate communication channels are open days, press conferences (weekly, monthly, quarterly, bi-annual), Short Messages Service (SMS) number, etc. [3]. Public relations are particularly important for corporate image in crisis situations [8].

In my opinion, all these strategies aim at building a positive image of the organization by projecting its personality, character and identity on the market. By communicating, means building a strong image of an organization. The communication mission has a well-known path, a mission meant to position the organization, to give it a personality recognized by the public and an identity different from that of its competition.

## CONCLUSIONS

Of all corporate image building-up strategies – creating a website, creating straightforward, easy-to-understand pricing, designing the business image, doing a referral exchange, encouraging personal recommendations, listing creatively and widely, maintaining a customer database, maintaining good employee relations, making a marketing plan, making the business look good, naming and branding, and using the press – the most important seem to be the strategies involving people directly: **encouraging personal recommendations, maintaining good employee relations and using the press.**

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