Comprehensive Brand Presentation: Ensuring Consistent Brand Image

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Abstract

This paper introduces the concept of Comprehensive Brand Presentation (CBP), a formalized approach to aligning manufacturing and communications functions in the business firm. The lynch pins of the CBP are Total Quality Management (TQM) principles and integration of marketing communications. The CBP enhances success through synergistic execution of the manufacturing and marketing processes via increased focus on measuring customer response to both manufactured product and promotional effort supporting that product. CBP defines the TQM principle of "out of control" as the variance between target product image and actual product image seen by the target customer. CBP's operational objective is to minimize that variance, and, thereby, maximizing the expected probability of product acceptance and subsequent target market brand loyally.

Introduction

Many companies have implemented manufacturing systems designed to make products which enhance their brand image by providing satisfying customer experiences. (For this paper, the term "product" will be used to represent both products and services.) These companies have developed Total Quality Management (TQM) program to ensure that they deliver the best quality products to their customers. The companies recognize the need to manufacture a product which will deliver on its intended performance.." They have established a marketing planning system to develop messages which communicate a strong brand image. These companies create Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) campaigns to align a variety of media, both broadcast and targeted, in order to deliver their marketing message. These companies understand that the environment of a message (which includes the form which the message takes as well as the surrounding messages and programming) has an effect on customers' impressions as does the message itself. Many companies practice specific TQM methods, such as developing research studies which monitor their performance relative to established promotional goals. The most notable research is the awareness, trial and usage (ATU) study. Its goal is to measure the effectiveness of advertising in improving customer awareness of the product, of promotional offers in order to increase trial, and of manufacturing in improving customer recognition of product quality, with the desired result of maintaining continuous usage. The collection of information in an ATU study implies that there is a relationship among these three measures in the company's operating culture. This paper will introduce a formalized approach to this philosophy of aligned manufacturing and communications, called Comprehensive Brand Presentation (CBP), which encompasses both these processes of product brand image management. Companies which practice CBP have a very clear vision of the brand/product image attributes which they wish their manufacturing and advertising to achieve. This vision is established through research to identify what the customer expects from the company's product. With CBP, every exposure the customer has with that product, either through actual experience or messages received, reinforces the brand or product image which the company intends to achieve. The benefits of the product are

reinforced to promote awareness, trial and repeated use.

Eficiency/Effectiveness Measures

TQM systems (Deming 1980) are driven by 1) benchmarking, 2) development of products to customer specification throughout design and engineering, and 3) manufacturing to specification by keeping the process "in control" for attaining specific, measurable outcomes related to product specifications. As the foundation of a model, customer specification expectations are set at a level identified as *e.* A company will target its own brand image, *t,* to meet or exceed the customers' expectations and exceed the performance of a competitive brand, c. Simply stated, the company's goal is that $t = e$ and $t > c$. By measuring actual performance, as shown in Figure 1(omitted), the company can determine how customers rate the product relative to competition as well as to their own expectations. One could even assess a multiplier, *d,* to the effect which the distributor will have on the final product which reaches the customer, with the ideal of $d = 1$ where product quality is maintained. Theoretically, one might believe that the product image could exceed customer expectations, either through unanticipated benefits or enhanced through delivery attributes such as speed or convenience. But over time, consumer expectations will rise to meet the level of quality delivered and once again the natural state will be $t = e$ and $d = 1$.

The Marketing Process and Integrated Marketing Communications

The cycle of Integrated Marketing Communications is an expansion of the basic communication model. The company is sending a message to the consumer and looking for feedback in the form of a purchase. In reality though, the company is sending a series of messages, surrounded by many other messages from other senders. The company's goal is that its intended message is received clearly and motivates the receiver to respond in a favorable manner (i.e., buy the product). Marketing also must follow the same robust TQM design as manufacturing to ensure that it also produces favorable responses to the image it portrays of the product. Target product attributes in the message (t_p) are measured against competition with statistical measures to determine if the message conveys the product image as advantaged, at parity or disadvantaged versus that of the competitive product (c_p). The snake plot of p_m (Figure 1A) is the target attribute profile benchmarked to the competitive profile. In addition to competitive measures, the product attributes must be measured against customer expectations *(e)* to determine if the company's product compares favorably or unfavorably against customers' expectations of a non-specific version of the product. In Figure 2B(omitted), the attribute ratings for the test message, t_p, are compared to the minimum and maximum expectations of customers (or lower and upper control limits in TQM terms), referred to as e_{min} and e_{max}. The goal is for t_p to be positioned in between e_{min} and e_{max}, so that the product fits within customer specifications (with a rating greater than e_{max} perceived as overpromising). The variation between t_p and e_{max} is identified by $[_p$.

In the case of marketing, the communication cycle is rarely as simple as the basic communication model. Experts, advertising agencies, are brought into the process to produce the message (in a similar role as the company employees who produce the actual product) in a manner that will capture the receiver's attention and motivate him/her to respond with a purchase. Furthermore, it is rare that either the company or the agency directly deliver the message to the receiver, the customer. Some form of media, typically either print or electronic,

takes responsibility for the delivery (d_p). Because of that, the marketing process model, as shown in Figure 2, looks very much like the Deming manufacturing model. In fact, the process of producing the appropriate messages for promoting a product and distributing it to customers ($t_m * d_m$) can be viewed in a manner which parallels the manufacturing process of the product itself ($t_p * d_p$). There are two shortcomings to producing integrated marketing communications without the corresponding quality production. First, customer expectations are set without the guarantee that the actual product can live up to them (i.e., the control boundaries, e_{min} and e_{max} in Figure 1B, are not identified nor is the relative position of the product, t_p), risking trial followed by cognitive dissidence with no repeat purchasing. Second, the management of external messages (i.e., ensuring an optimized marketing process so that the message attributes are in control) can be greatly enhanced by linkage to internal communications (i.e., ensuring an optimized manufacturing process so that the product attributes are in control). On the communications side, promotional advertising goals are defined as delivering target levels of awareness, interest, desire and purchase. ADVO Inc., the largest direct mail company in the United States, has formalized a process to understand its clients' marketing objectives(e.g., in IMC terms, set an 80% awareness specification). The goal of that process is to identify the best target customers for a client's advertising message and the best message (against competitive benchmarks and customer specifications) to maximize response from those customers. Even though clients typically have advertising agencies representing them, ADVO typically meets directly with the companies, either with or without their agencies, to confirm goals for their advertising (e.g., awareness levels). Sales associates receive substantial training, as well as marketing support to assist in developing strategic plans for clients. In many instances, ADVO works with its clients to enhance the clients' marketing strategy as well as to support the execution of that strategy.

Comprehensive Brand Presentation

Comprehensive Brand Presentation is defined as the management of both the manufacturing and marketing process chains to ensure that the customer perception of a company's product (actual brand image, *e*) is identical to the brand image which the company has chosen to portray (target brand image, *t*). In essence, the company establishes an image for its product which is as close as possible to what the customer sees and hears about it from the messages (t_m), as well in what he/she actually experiences with the product (t_p) with minimized variation ($[_m$and $[_p$, respectively). Figure 3(omitted) links the two process chains along their common elements: the customer, who sets the specifications of the product and the message; research, which identifies the targets of the attributes and measures performance; and company, which designs the processes and strategies which will produce the target brand image, whether they are for the product or the message.

Efficiency/Effectiveness Expectations

In CBP, there is an identifiable, measurable, quantifiable condition of being "out of control", as signaled by t^{1} *e.* But there are specific components which must be analyzed to identify the manner in which to take corrective action. For example, the standard goal of a typical promotion is to maximize the probability of purchase, defined as P_{TM}. The Marketing AIDA Model (Kotler 1996; Johnson and Chvala 1997) relates P_{TM}, functionally to the target market percent awareness (defined as P_{AWARE}, percent interested (P_I) and percent with desire (P_D).

A reasonable representation of this functional relationship is:

(1) P_{TM}, = [P_{AWARE} (P_I * P_D)]

That is, the probability of purchase (P_{TM}) over the sum of interested (I) customers over n target markets is driven centrally by awareness (P_{AWARE}). P_{AWARE} is a function of $[_m$ (the variation in message attributes from customer expectations). As the profile of $[_m$ increases beyond the in-control boundary, P_{AWARE} declines and iteratively P_{TM} declines, dragging P_{TM} below target. CBP, through IMC measurements, has the ability to detect out of control $[_m$ and constrain P_{TM} to a number within control limits, consistent with attribute targets t_m.

A similar model can be applied to the product attributes as a diagnostic tool. Consider the goal of a successful product design as product repurchase, defined as P_{TP}. The components which would influence repurchase would be the percentage of the population who had tried the product (P_{TRIAL}), the percentage who were satisfied with its performance (P_S), and the percentage who found reason for further use (P_R). Applying the same formula, we would find that:

(2) P_{TP} = [P_{TRIAL} (P_S * P_R)]

In this case, repurchase is primarily driven by trial and P_{TRIAL} is a function of $[_P$ (the variation in product attributes from customer expectations).

Consider the two options when a message is not aligned with its product. If the message does not succeed in portraying the products' benefits to customers (i.e., $t_m < e$), they will not buy it. If the message overpromises ($t_m > e$) and/or the product does not deliver ($t_p < e$), then the customer will not buy it a second time.

Advertising Agencies New Role

Advertising agencies, as the creators of a client company's internal and external communications, must become more involved in the setting of its client's brand image. They need to understand the company's target message profile (t_m), the product's role in fulfilling the company's goal (t_p), and how the customer perceives the product and its benefits (e). This ensures that there is the right level of expectations being set. In order to achieve this level of understanding, an agency must be willing to be more in touch with consumer behavior through research on purchasing activity and knowing the minimum and maximum expectations (e_{min} and e_{max}). It is also the agencies' responsibility to ensure that the media companies understand the company's mission and their role in delivering the message (d_m) within the proper environment to reach the right customers. With that focus, media companies as the messenger must understand the context of the message, how it relates to their programming/delivery method and what might be done to maximize both the reception of the customer (P_{AWARE}) and the motivation to buy (P_{AWARE}). customer profiles which describe a customer need.

Conclusion

An application of Comprehensive Brand Presentation principles can enhance a company's success through the synergistic execution of its manufacturing and marketing process chains. With increased focus on the measurement of customer response to its communication and manufacturing efforts, variation from customer specifications will be minimized and customer satisfaction will increase. This effort can only succeed by involving all of the parties in the quality process; establishing long-term partnerships with consultants and suppliers to ensure quality inputs; keeping in mind the end customer, not only understanding their product use, but the purchase decision-making process as well; and creating an environment that supports the fulfillment of customer expectations, both in the message and the product.

References

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