

The Brand Identity: A Strategic Shift for Success

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The strong identity is a key condition for the real success of a brand strategy. The identity reflects the inner value of the brand and describes its potential success. In order to maximize this value a brand identity should include and develop all dimensions of its complex structure. The product, the organizational, the personality and the symbolic dimension of the brand identity could develop a great capability for many associations that could be made to the brand.

Apple is a brand that has a distinct and clear identity. All four dimensions of a good brand identity could be identified in the Apple case. This provides a high level of quality, performance and value that are able to win the customer's respect and loyalty.

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1. Introduction

The strong brand identity is a critical factor for the success of any brand strategy. The strategy is the direction and scope of an organization over a long term, which achieves advantages in a changing environment (Johnson, Scholes, Whittington, 2005, p. 9). In a similar way, the marketing strategy is considered to be the orientation for market operating over a long term, and the rules the firm is aiming to follow. Since the marketing strategy settles the

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principles and indicates the course of action thanks to that the firm hopes to create competitive advantages, attract consumers and deploy the actual resources, it is the function that links the objectives with the specific marketing solutions (Danciu, 2005, p. 21). A firm may have a general marketing strategy and some functional strategies for each element of the marketing mix. The branding is an important functional strategy. It refers to all activities of a firm that focuses on influencing the value of the firm performances to stakeholders (Mühlbacher, Leih, Dahringer, 2006, p. 338) among which the customers are in the center. All branding activities have the brand as object and are aiming to fulfill particular goals.

As main element of the brand marketing, the branding takes into consideration to distinguish the firm's offering and differentiate one particular product from competition to create identification and brand awareness, guarantee a certain level of quality and satisfaction and to help with promotion of the product (Hollensen, 2008, p. 470). The ultimate goal is to create new sales by attracting new customers and/or induce repeat sales by keeping customers loyal.

2. The brand identity, a complex architecture

The identity is the core element of the branding which provides direction, purpose and meaning for the brand. The brand identity is a set of brand associations which the firm aspires to create and maintain (Aaker, 2008, p.168). This associations represent what the brand aspires to stand for and imply a promise to customers. This is the intended identity which means what the people participating in the generation of the brand would like to be (Mühlbacher, Leih, Dahringer, 2006, p. 347).

In order to construct a good brand identity prioritizing the brand identity elements is necessary. The most important and potentially the most impactfull are the core identity elements. These elements are most critical to the success of the brands they are supporting and

should be focused on the brand investments. The extended identity is built up by the elements which help define the brand, make decisions as to what actions and programs are compatible with the brand and drive minor programs that will have lesser impact and take modest resources. The identity reflects the inner value of the brand and describes the brand potential success. A brand should be valuable, imperfectly imitable, rare and no strategically equivalent substitute (Haedrich, Tomczak, Kaetzke, 2003, p. 30). In this way the competitive advantages of the brand can be obtained. The structure of the brand identity has four dimensions as Kotler (1998), Haedrich, Tomczak, Kaetzke, (2003) and Aaker (2008) suggest.

The product dimension includes associations with the attributes and characteristics which are necessary for the product category, the product itself the consumption situation, market segment and land of origin. The premium quality is the product property for Häagen – Dasz while Swatch has the design as product dimension. The consumption situation and the market segment may have an important role in creating the brand identity. Mc Donald's has the young ones and the families with children as target segments and BMW or Ferrari are associated with the sportsmen.

The organizational dimension is linked to the ideas, representations the manufacturer and seller have about the product and to the brand geographic value. The brand identity is many times created through a firm or organization. The social responsibility, the innovative orientation or the premium quality of the product are associations what may be utilized for the designing of the brand identity. The associations with the firms which can have an impact on the brand set-up are placed on two levels. At the first level is placed the market and it is defined by the capability of the firm for product development. The social level is the second one where one finds the public perception of the social responsibility. The geographic value of the brand is important for the brand because a well known brand as a global one has an important advantage on the local one.

The personality dimension is aiming at the associations with the brand personality and at the emotional bonds between brand and its customers. There are many answers to the question “what is the meaning of the brand personality”. Aaker (2008, p. 272) understands the brand personality as a set of human characteristics which are associated with the particular brand and as human being, a brand with personality tends to be more memorable and better liked than one that is bland. More, like people, brands can have a variety of personalities such as being professional, competent, sophisticated, trustworthy, genuine, exciting and daring or active and tough.

The symbolic dimension may be established thanks to brand names, logos, slogans and imagistic metaphors. It is important to design and select such elements what have a communicational importance in order to emphasize the symbolism or the brand to customers.

3. The impact of the brand name on the architecture of the brand identity

The brand name has a particular significance to the marketing effort for designing and developing the brand identity. There is a strong connection between the brand personality and symbolic dimension on the one hand and the brand identity on the other hand. A brand name has to be good for the brand holder and for the customer. A good name shows that the firm knows what it is doing and is firmly focused on what it intends to offer to the market.

In order to achieve the common goal of every product strategy, the name has to be intrinsically included in the product model. A brand name is good when it correspond to a multitude of requirements, as Rivkin and Sutherland (2009, pp. 92-107) suggest a good name includes an idea, a concept and advantage; it is immediately attractive, easy to understand and simple to use; it communicates something real and particular about a firm, product or service; it offers oneness to a firm or a product and clearly differentiate it among the competitors; it

is short, animated and brief, nice to hear, irrespective of the language; it creates associations and suggests many things; it is based on the strength and weaknesses; it is integrated in a family and takes into consideration the past and the future. In order to create and select a good brand name, one may chose among descriptive, allusive (suggestive) and imagined (invented) names (Rivkin, Sutherland, 2009, pp. 39-47).

The descriptive names are of two types. In the first category one may find the names that show the cause source or origin. They identify the person which has established or hold a firm or the product it sells or in the case where a product can be found or what market segment it covers as Diesel, Mercedes, Octavia, Felicia and Fabia models of Skoda. There also are names that can have a geographic meaning as in the case of American Airlines, Silicon Valley, Dacia. The second category includes names that emphasize one of the qualities or characteristics of the product throughout a direct language and special words. These names underline a characteristic, ingredient, goal, function or the way the product appears. Caterpillar, Coca Cola, Beetle are among such descriptive brand names.

The allusive names operate throughout connotations and allusions working on the receptor's mind by means of metaphors, comparisons or cultural references. They give leads about the good, service or firm or about its principal benefits. The success allusive names are metaphors which enable positive associations. They may suggest speed (Sprint), wisdom (Oracle), robustness (Viking), luck (Casino Royal), aspirations (Explorer, Highlander, Pathfinder), perfection (Apple). Some names suggest the emotional qualities of a color (blue, green, red, golden, white), other are allusive names as in the case of Corint Publishing House, while the saints' names are a special subcategory more often associated with hospitals (Saint Pantelimon, Saint Mary).

The imaginative names have as an unique characteristic the fact that they are all invented, no matter they may seem descriptive, allusive or

arbitrary. Many imaginative names are neologisms as Tylenol, Teflon, Exxon and Pepsi. There are four different levels of complexity in the case of imaginative names. At first level, one can find the hybrids or two or more words easy to recognize as Citigroup, Aquafresh and Playboy. The names at the second level may be names which are modified as in the case of Compaq or Google. The third level includes the foreign or classic Greek or Latin names easy to recognize as Volare, Cielo and Nike. At the fourth level one may find the invented names which have not obvious links or origins. This is the case of Pentium, Pepsi etc.

4. The role of brand identity

The development of a distinct and strong brand identity is the strategic mission of the brand management. It asks for creativity, continuity and flexibility in order to develop a solid brand identity which has some explicit roles to play.

One role is to drive and guide strategic initiatives throughout the firm. These initiatives have to be strengthened by problems that advance the brand identity. A second role is to differentiate the firm's offering and create a competitive advantage. This goal asks for a proactive attitude and action. Arbitrarily insisting that a brand identity should apply to all products, market segments or markets can be self defeating. A consideration should be given to adapting it to each context. One approach is to augment the brand identity to make it appropriate to a specific context as in the case of Honda. The brand is associated with youth and racing in Japan while being more family oriented in the United States, but both positions share a focus on quality. Another approach is to define one of the brand identity elements differently in disparate contexts. A third role of the strategic brand identity is to drive the communication program that must be strongly oriented toward a course of action that resonates with customers and truly differentiates the product. This approach will

provide not only punch and effectiveness to external communication, but consistency of a time of its long term perspective. A fourth role is to support the firm's values and culture not only to customers but to employees and business partners. A fifth role of the brand identity is to support an easier protection of the brand. A good protection is important to prevent possible conflict and damage, in other words is a strong support for the fulfillment of the market objectives of the strategies and programs of the firm.

5. Apple - from a strong brand identity to a great success

An extra chance for success in a more and more competitive environment is creating and holding a strong brand. One of the most powerful rivalries is in the IT&C industry. Apple is a good example of brand strategy that supports the unique position of the company and its products in the global market.

Apple Computers, Inc. has been established on April 1 1976 as the seller of Apple 1 PC. The whole history of the company shows that innovation and quality that support the brand are benchmarks of the success of Apple. This vision is to be found in the ambitious objectives of Apple computers and in the steadfast way of action. The company considers that its products can change the way people work and live.

As a corporate and product brand, in the case of Apple one can find the four dimensions of the identity brand structure. *The product dimension* puts products in the category of high quality using innovative technologies and great creativity, imagination and distinct design. An important element of product dimension is the quality and excellence. The brand provides a high level of quality, performance and value that are able to win the customer's respect and loyalty. The distinct and powerful innovation and vision are to be found in the permanent innovative effort in the computer industry and the risk taken by considering people as change creators. In this way, Apple is testing

products that potential to become benchmark products in the industry. The empathy for customers is a characteristic value of Apple and the company is truly interested in solving their problems. The company offers high quality products which satisfy the customers' real needs and have a long term value.

The organizational dimension of Apple is emphasized by the value the company has. These values are the qualities, standards and principles that support it to succeed and that as a whole identify Apple as a unique brand. A principle that forces every Apple employee to prove his commitment and performances is the individual results. Since the employees prove the Apple characteristic and force, they have to be the main support for the company and its product differentiation. The individual reward is an important value of the company that recognizes everyone's contribution to the success of Apple. Therefore, every employee is rewarded according to his own performance and receives a share of the financial outcome. The rewards are financial and psychological too. For that reason a nice environment in which every individual could share the adventure and enthusiasm to work with Apple is created. Since the team work is essential for the success of the company, the team spirit is characteristic for Apple identity. A principle that can be found in Apple high standards is social contribution. By the help of its products, Apple intends to help people realize more they could achieve alone and make the world a better place. The company wants to be a valuable economic, intellectual and social asset in the communities where Apple works. The management of high quality has the responsibility for creating a good working environment in which the values of Apple could flourish. *The personality dimension* of the identity of Apple lies in the fact that the company sells not only products but also the brand; in other words it sells a mix of hopes, dreams and aspirations. The people are attracted by brands they could identify themselves. The customers want to feel as part of the brand and this could happen if a bond is established between the brand and its buyers as a human relationship beyond the

business one. Apple suggests to the customers that buying one of its products may help them to “Think Different”. This message is aiming at individuals with a distinct vision and who are thinking differently. The focus on emotional rather than functional values is the characteristic of Apple that explains to a great extent its success. Even Apple launches strong and innovative products as i Mac, i Pod and i Pad the secret of the brand lies in urging the customers to establish a long term emotional bond with it. At *the symbolic level*, Apple has a brand name used to recognize and remember. As one of the well known allusive names, Apple is meant to be perfect. The brand has been successful by remaining fresh and simple as a fruit. This way of action has allowed Apple to differentiate itself from the competitors. At the same time, the name has allowed to establish a theme for next products (Rivkin, Sutherland, 2009, p. 70). The sign of the company is a bitten apple which refers to Genesis when Adam and Eve bit the forbidden fruit and thus offering them the opportunity of knowledge. The apple is also synonymous with revolt and Apple is a rebellious brand, different in other words.

6. Conclusions

The strong brand identity is a critical success factor of a good brand strategy. If the elements of the structure identity are theoretically and practically well substantiated, the role of the brand identity can be entirely fulfilled. The Apple identity is part of a good brand strategy that supports the unique position of the company and its products in the global market. The above characteristics can be found in products as McIntosh, i Pod, i Mac and i Pad.

As an allusive brand name, Apple is associated with products of high quality, using innovative technologies based on creativity and imagination. The high quality, excellence and performance give value to the customers.

The principles, standards and values of Apple computers identify the company as a unique one. The employees must have good individual results and are rewarded accordingly. They receive financial and psychological rewards. At the same time, the team spirit is a characteristic of Apple organizational identity. The company wants to be a valuable economic, intellectual and social asset for its employees and the communities where Apple works. The innovation, creativity and reputation of the offer of Apple have convinced the customers to become fans of its products.

The focus on emotional values explains to a great extent the success of the brand. As a well known brand, Apple is meant to be perfect, a source and way to knowledge and be rebellious. All these are targeting the individuals which “Think Different”.

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