Managing Brand for the long run : Brand Reinforcement and Revitalization

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Abstract:

A strong brand is a powerful driver of sales, profit and shareholder value. That's why market value of fortune companies is more in intangible assets. Even the most popular brands face the danger of getting lost unless they reflect the changing customer preferences. Managing brand over period of time is a big challenge for the marketers today. Brand Proliferation is the order of the day. Rigid brands can become irrelevant in the face of changing priorities and changes in competitive market. Marketing Environment is continuously changing. Change in consumer behavior, Competitive strategies, technological changes and other aspects of marketing environment is making work of brand managers challenging.

In this article, the author has tried to discuss tactics for brand reinforcement and revitalization to manage brand for the long run.

Keywords:

Brand, Reinforcement, Revitalization, Extension, Repositioning, Awareness.

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Brand Reinforcement:

Brands are generally reinforced by marketing programs that communicates meaning of the product constantly to

keep up awareness and image. In brand reinforcement we have discussed several ways of conveying brand image in terms of product management, benefits and differentiation of the product as well.

Maintaining Brand Consistency

Brand consistency is critical in maintaining the strength and favorability of brand association. Brand that receive insufficient support in terms of R&D, Product improvement and budgets for marketing programs become technologically obsolete and outdated or forgotten, irrelevant and ancient with time.

The secret of brands that have maintained market leadership for the last one or two decades can be attributed to consistency in spending resources and positioning. Coca cola, titan, Johnson & Johnson can be quoted as few examples who are consistent in their strategies. Titan has used the gift proposition for the last two decades but has always been contemporary with the period. Johnson & Johnson baby products are using same tagline for many years -Recommended by over 90% of Doctors- featuring care and affection of mother towards child. Fair & lovely is using same trial campaign for promotion for many years – Trial of 15 days to make skin fair with a promise of fairness. BPL televisions, leaders one time neither updated their TVs technologically nor invested resources in promotion as compared to its competitors.

Consistency but change

Brand consistency is critical in maintaining brand association but it does not mean that the brand becomes stagnant. With time organizations should change the way the product proposition is offered to the customers. For example Ponds beauty products were becoming stagnant as they taken granted for by the users and Ponds beauty talk started to decline in sales . HUL used concept of Ponds Beauty Institute which helps company to improve the products. This helped company to offer better 'perceived' product.

Fine tuning the supporting program

Titan's fast tract goggles are positioned towards stylish, urban and fun loving youth. Fast Track in both its categories, watches and goggles, is positioned as a brand for youth, reinforced through its co-branded watches, with the iconic MTV which is seen by young generation.

For fine tuning the supporting program following ways are used : Product Related Performance Association and Non Product related Imagery Association.

Product Related Performance Association:

For products whose core associations are product related performance attributes innovation in product design, manufacturing & merchandising is crucial to enhance brand equity.

Gillette spends heavy amount on product research, innovation in products. They have offered various products like Trac II, Atra, Sensor, Mach 3, Mach 3 Turbo (for high end Customers) Vector (for low end customers). Gillette is actually changing its product designs, not just face lift, because of which they enjoy market share of 40% in razor and blade market.

Whirlpool is regularly changing its product features and designs by offering product like Whirlpool Quick chill, 6th Sense technology. As Dalda vanspati lost its relevance because of increasing health consciousness among customers so they are offering ADE- Dalda Husbands choice offering oil with vitamin A, D, E. Onida tried to revive in market by introducing CD players which can play scratched CDs as well.

The timing of announcement of change in the product is critical. If the change is announced too soon, customer may start to purchase improved product version, neglecting the original product. If the change is communicated too late, competitors may reap the benefits of early market entry.

Brand Revitalizing:

Changes in customer preferences, new competitors , new technology or changes in the marketing environment, can affect profits from brand. That's why brands which were respected, have fallen in sustaining their position or have disappeared from the market. Xerox Machines, Shell Oil, BPL TV can be quoted as examples. To regain the lost sources of brand equity (Back to Basics) or gain the new sources brand equity (brand reinvention) is required. Sometimes positioning is relevant but marketing program should be changed or reposition the product completely be changing the meaning of the brand fundamentally.

Expanding Brand Awareness:

For mature brands recall (Depth) is not a problem but consumers start to think it in a narrower way thinking that it is applicable only in some situations. So breadth of brand awareness is the problem. So this part of paper deals with strategies to increase usage of a brand (quantity or frequency) or to find new ways to use the product.

Identifying supplementary usage opportunities:

When perceived usage is less or different than reality, there is opportunity to increase the frequency of usage. For some products if the perceived length of productive usage is short, consumers fail to replace the product regularly. The strategy may be to present better information to consumers.

The easiest way to convince customers about increased usage is when the usage is less than its potential or recommended usage.

The brand appears appropriate in some situations or at places or events. This is obvious when brand association is very strong with respect to events, situations. For identifying additional usage opportunities of the same product sometimes special marketing program should be undertaken. The marketing program should be successful in communicating to customer benefits of additional usage or future barriers brands can resolve or disadvantages if product is used less. For Example: Parle Monaco was promoted as tasty and salty as well. But they extended the use of Monaco as toppings for various food items and later on it was promoted as an ingredient for different recipes. For that they designed special recipe books and web pages. This innovative practice was followed by their competitors to supplement the consumption.

Identifying New or Different ways to use the brand:

The other way of increasing frequency of purchase of a brand is to introduce new ways of usage of products.

For example: Dabur Honey was initially projected as good for health i.e. on health proposition but later on well planned advertisement campaign was launched to project honey as an ideal ingredient for variety of preparations like sandwiches , fruit salads, sweetening agent in milk instead of sugar which not only upgraded the product but product category itself.

Cadbury was initially promoted as routine sweets and confectionery for children and adults as well. As a part of demographic adaption and a way to increase frequency of consumption, they started to promote it as an ideal gift for Diwali, Raksha bandhan to replace the traditional Indian sweets.

Improving Brand image

Repositioning the Brand: Repositioning may require just to remind customers of the worth or qualities of a brand which are getting forgotten with time. Repositioning can be viewed as changing the perception associated with a brand either because of meaning of a brand has to be made relevant to the changing environment or consumers who were using the product are its 'loyalty'.

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Maruti repositioned its Maruti 800 (No frill economy car) as a dream car for middle class consumers. Nestle is positioning its perk brand from leisure time to energy by introducing Perk Glucose. Red Label has tried to reposition itself on product attributes like adding vitamins, Red Label Aurvedik.

Customer may suspect credibility of brand if the product is not positioned clearly. Just like when Vicco introduced multipurpose ayurvedic cream for shaving cream, antiseptic lotion, facial cream, it failed to attract the segments, because these functions have specially targeted by offering special product offerings.

Changing Brand Elements:

Often change in brand elements like brand name itself, logo, characters, Packaging, jingles, celebrities can be modified and update over a period of time to revitalize brand.

To change brand name is very difficult as it is the most important part of brand element.

Back in early 2000s, a host of Indian companies went in for a name change. Tata Engineering became Tata Motors to signal its ambition to be seen as a global car company, not just an Indian truck maker. Around the same time Vam Organics changed into Jubilant Organosys to better reflect its focus away from bulk to specialty chemicals. It recently changed to Jubilant Life Sciences, again to reflect the changed business focus. Red label is advertising change in its brand name process through involvement of people which is helping it in increasing its brand awareness.

Onida is one example which changed its brand elements and promotion plans regularly without much analysis. Now as a brand losing its relevance with present customers, even tried and tested promotion of devil is not working for them.

In FMCG sector, especially detergents change their packet colour to emphasize more powerful or increased efficiency. The country's largest Telco, Bharti Airtel, now fifth largest in the world, after its takeover of Zain in Africa earlier this year has gone in for rebranding, its third since inception in mid-1990s, complete with a new logo, new brand tune and all. It's using the occasion of rolling out its airtel brand into its newly acquired markets to indicate its new global company status.

Bajaj Automobiles also changed its logo and jingles when it changed its brand image from family scooter highlighting family bonds to powerful bike for young generation underlining power, Speed, technology. Mahindra & Mahindra is going to change all brand elements like colour, tagline except logo which will be changed in couple of years.

The story of change of Logo Shell petroleum is very famous. But such kind of changes should be slow and evolutionary in nature. The customers should feel change in product and should not feel that product is entirely new.

Adding new customers

In case of mature products as the customer has already tried and tested the products, the aim of the marketers is to retain the present customers, building brand loyalty and at the same time develop plans for attracting new customers. The new customers should feel that the brand is relevant to them and their needs.

Brand Extensions & Sub brands:

To attract new customers and to keep the brand updated with time, one can introduce line extensions or sub brands. The extended brand or sub brand can include new technology, features or other features to satisfy new customers or changing needs of existing customers.

A critical factor in the success of brand extension is the elasticity of the parent brand. Some brands can be stretched to other categories more easily while some brands cannot. If brand is associated with particular functionality or

use of product, it is less elastic. For example, Burnol was promoted keeping in mind specific use after burn. Because of firm association with functional attributes other brand extensions did not succeed.

Consider the case of 'Colgate' with its variants- Colgate total, Cibaka Top, Colgate Whitening, salt, fresh energy gel, Herbal, Kids tooth paste not only offered lot of extensions but also tried to grab major shelf space. Fair & Lovely has introduced sub brands like multi vitamin, antimarks, Ayurvedik Balance, winter fairness creams. Each of the brand extension is either targeted for existing customers by offering something more than the present product offering or targeted to different customers.

Horlicks is offering the energy drink for children and project mother and child bond in their promotion. Horlicks Mothers' Special is extension is developed keeping mothers in mind with different kind of packaging and pricing level. Generally extensions fail because of over confidence in the parent brand that parent brand will support the sale of extension. So these extensions do not get enough attention and advertising support as compared to parent brand.

Multiple marketing Communication Programs:

A separate advertising campaign for separate segments is a way to attract new segment of market. The increased effectiveness of targeted media makes multiple target segments more feasible.

For example, Blackberry: projects itself as a handset providing solutions to the needs of working professionals. It now also targets college going students saying "We are black berry boys."

Michelob bear target youngsters and working professionals. For working professional it says "Add a weekend in your weekdays" and for youngsters the tag line is "Its time for a blast. Let's rock." But shortcoming of this approach is the cost involved in advertising may be very high and if media is not selected properly may positioning may get hampered.

New Distribution Channels:

Attracting new customers can be done by making the product more available to the group. By using different distribution models reach of the product can be increased. For example, HUL used project Shakti to reach the customers in the rural market where present distribution channel cannot reach.

VIP has worked aggressively on brand building through advertising and exclusive stores like VIP Lounge over the past three-four years. The company has spent ` 50 crore over the past two years on advertisement and brand marketing to enhance the brand image and recall.

Cipla had initially only one division to cater cardio vascular segment, but they divided the segments into three divisions – for Oral, inject able, inter venous drugs. So three different sales representatives will pitch doctor three times instead of one to create and grab space in the minds of doctors. As companies seek opportunities to interact directly with customers, there has a boom in the use of sale of products through promotional events, field marketing, events and shows.

Entering New Market*:*

Redefining categories opens the playground for brands which are ready for bigger share but different competitors. Successful brands aim to define and 'own' the category. They are focused on creating awareness and generating trials for the brand.

For example: Kingfisher Airline is having one division targeting low cost segment. But with increasing competition in low cost segment, kingfisher is targeting premium customers also without losing the present customer.

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