

DEVELOPMENT AND DEFENSE OF A PLACE BRAND IN ONLINE COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS

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ABSTRACT

The article considers the issue of methods for place brand providing and maintaining. The notion of place brand acquires more and more popularity in modern scientific and practice-oriented environment. First, place branding is extremely important in considering the issues of place development, conquering new markets and improving the quality of life.

Keywords: Place brand, practice-oriented environment, online communication platform, communication technologies, place positive imaging

1. INTRODUCTION

The notion of brand has many interpretations that largely depend on the used context. The issues of using a brand in general and a place brand in particular have been covered in the works of S. Anholt, G. Ashworth, K. Dinnie, F. Kotler, S. Andreev, I. Vazhenin, D. Vizganov, A. Kiryuhin, V. Malkov, T. Mescheryakov, V. Tishkov and some other scientists.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Brands have powerful influence, not only on customer engagement but also on the management of an enterprise. The pivot point of brand management is **trust**. Without trust, the brand promise is broken. Consumers generally believe that they can trust a brand to meet most of the elements of the brand promise. Once a brand is *established*, and consumers generally express brand affinity, the brand manufacturer can often accelerate the trust stage with new-to-the-brand consumers. Certainly, social media networking functions in this way.

Brands are logo design, colors and shapes, and lettering are all intended to get the consumers' attention and to convey the brand's personality. Naturally, associating a brand with celebrities, with certain melodies or music, and with catchphrases that function like sluglines in a movie can all influence customer affinity for a brand.

Can Anything Be a Brand? What Are the Types of Brand?

Product: A tangible product is the most common thing associated with a brand. For more than one product is included in a brand, a unifying attribute will be present. For example, classic Coke is a brand, but the various Coca-Cola beverages also constitute a brand. A **product range** can be one brand. An example of this would be the various models of a particular make of car, such as Ford.

Service: Services, rather than products, can be a brand in which intangible activities are conducted, such as the delivery of solutions to meet consumer needs for labor of some type. Where products are not variable, unless it is a marketing feature, service is highly variable. A service brand can be impacted negatively or positively by who provides the service, how the service is conducted, where the service is provided, and how individualized customers perceive the service provided to them. Each of these variables can add to service differentiation in the mind of consumers.

Individual Person: People can have their own brand based on personality, charisma, position, fame, and influence. A person's brand can be an expression of their natural personality or it can be an image that has been deliberately constructed. As media has burgeoned, the idea that people can be a brand has emerged. In the common vernacular, *brand* is substituted for *image*. But they are not synonymous. A person's image is not necessarily marketable, in the true sense of the word. However, a person's brand is marketable if the image that someone conveys has value to the brand of a service or product. Particularly in a business that provides services rather than products, the people who deliver the service are an important aspect of the brand. A politician is a good example of individual person brand in which the brand must project attractively to the politician's constituents and negative spin must be curtailed.

Organization: Enterprises that deliver services or provide products are brands. The qualities that people associate with a company constitute the building blocks of brand. Brand perceptions are dependent upon consumer experience. Consumer experience is vulnerable to the intentions that are revealed, whether purposefully or not, by the employees at all levels of the organization. A contemporary example, is the Goldman Sachs brand. There are many instances where an individual person brand is closely associated with an organization brand. For instance, Richard Branson represents the Virgin Airlines brand and Gary Kelly represents the Southwest Airlines brand. Both CEOs are sufficiently well-known that they are recognized as having their own distinctive individual person brands.

Event: Event brands are associated with customer experience that is derived largely from attending the event, or from a strong connection to the purpose an event is held. Whether large or small, event brands are inevitably tied to the fun, amazement, professional affiliation, or social cause that is the basis for the event. The Olympic Games is one of the most prominent event brands.

Brand management is a function of marketing that uses techniques to increase the perceived value of a product line or brand over time. Effective brand management enables the price of products to go up and builds loyal customers through positive brand associations and images or a strong awareness of the brand. Developing a strategic plan to maintain brand equity or gain brand value requires a comprehensive understanding of the brand, its target market and the company's overall vision. When implementing marketing plans, the core brand values are emphasized and it is important to be consistent in the ideas portrayed by the company, whether it is through internal or external branding. Understanding how your brand compares to the competition is also important. Profitability is one way brand managers measure the effectiveness of campaigns, but it could take decades to build and manage a brand.

Brand management begins with having a thorough knowledge of the term "brand". It includes developing a promise, making that promise and maintaining it. It means defining the brand, positioning the brand, and delivering the brand. Brand management is nothing but an art of creating and sustaining the brand. Branding makes customers committed to your business. A strong brand differentiates your products from the competitors. It gives a quality image to your business.

Brand management includes managing the tangible and intangible characteristics of brand. In case of product brands, the tangibles include the product itself, price, packaging, etc. While in case of service brands, the tangibles include the customers' experience. The intangibles include emotional connections with the product / service.

Branding is assembling of various marketing mix medium into a whole so as to give you an identity. It is nothing but capturing your customers mind with your brand name. It gives an image of an experienced, huge and reliable business.

It is all about capturing the niche market for your product / service and about creating a confidence in the current and prospective customers' minds that you are the unique solution to their problem.

The aim of branding is to convey brand message vividly, create customer loyalty, persuade the buyer for the product, and establish an emotional connectivity with the customers. Branding forms customer perceptions about the product. It should raise customer expectations about the product. The primary aim of branding is to create differentiation.

Strong brands reduce customers' perceived monetary, social and safety risks in buying goods/services. The customers can better imagine the intangible goods with the help of brand name. Strong brand organizations have a high market share. The brand should be given good support so that it can sustain itself in long run. It is essential to manage all brands and build brand equity over a period of time. Here comes importance and usefulness of brand management. Brand management helps in building a corporate image. A brand manager has to oversee overall brand performance. A successful brand can only be created if the brand management system is competent.

S. Anholt is one of the main developers of the notion of place brand and a complex diversified approach to place branding. His works provide a theoretical basis for studying this notion. The concept of S. Anholt identifies six elements of a modern place brand: tourism, export brands, politics, business and investments, culture, people [1]. In F. Kotler's opinion, the place brand is "unique qualities and everlasting human values that reflect originality of a place and community and their unparalleled original consumer properties, which enjoy popularity, public acceptance and sustainable demand among the consumers of this place" [2]. In turn, T. Mescheryakov assumes that the place brand is a "symbolic, virtual psycho-emotional-social construction perceived by the consumers of the place, which reflects geopolitical, eco-socio-cultural, historic, economic and other properties of the place that shape their ideas of the attractiveness of the place and its benefits compared to other places" [3]. D. Vizgalov notices that the place brand is a broad and system notion, which involves, among other things, a "unique emotionally-positive image created by natural, historic, industrial, socio-cultural, and other peculiarities of the place, which are well known to the public" [4]. The brand helps to concentrate on the individuality of the place.

3. CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF A PLACE BRAND

3.1 PLACE BRANDS AND THEIR REPUTATION MAINTENANCE

A good brand is a guarantee of its popularity and, therefore, its development. Here we can give the examples of the most powerful modern brands of the cities:

- Paris – a city of sights and art;
- London – a city for business and education;
- Madrid – a city of rich ancient culture.

In our opinion, the main goal of creating the place brand involves two components: on the one hand, the development of its positive and attractive image and, on the other hand, the striving to spread this image in the environment as widely as possible to achieve maximum benefit for the residents of this place. This goal can be achieved by various means. Modern PR-technologies enable to do it quite efficiently. In our opinion, we should still pay attention to quite an interesting aspect linked to the development and defense of the place brand in online communication platforms.

The development of communication technologies and more convenient Internet access exponentially increases the size of Internet audience. Forums, blogs, and social networks increasingly push

traditional mass media out of information space and become both broadcasters and initiators of information. Compare: it took radio 38 years to gather a 50 million audience, television - 13 years and Internet - 4 years. Thus, the Facebook, the largest and the most rapidly growing platform for Internet communication, has more than 500 million active accounts. It is the third most populated "country" in the world after China and India. Nowadays, the Facebook has about 1.5 billion of users. Besides, Facebook has more than 2 million of branded pages.

Internet created many opportunities to manage the brand of a particular person and any individual in the modern world. Its tools are modern, operative, interactive, and absorbing. We assume that each particular place should not be lost in this matrix of information space. Nowadays, in the period of strong competition in almost every sphere, any place (city, region, country) have all the opportunities for developing, promoting and defending its brand. Internet can play a key role in this process. This role will be positive if the brand is promoted and defended, otherwise negative scenarios related to big reputational risks for each brand are possible.

Therefore, nowadays, we evidently need a complex of mechanisms to develop positive image of the place as a basis for perceiving its brand in online communication platforms (forums, blogs, review websites, social networks), where users permanently communicate. Thus, the overwhelming majority of large Russian and foreign trade and industrial brands use online communication platforms to both promote their production and, naturally, enforce the image of a modern, sustainable, and dynamically developing enterprise that is keeping in touch with the latest trends.

3.2 INTERNET AND PLACE BRANDS

Forums, blogs, and social networks are the components of the interactive platform, where the most active part of the society (mainly, the youth) communicates. It is the youth that sets the tone, creates opinion on some social institutes and events and acts as a main object of modern information policy.

The statistics say that if one has no reliable information about a thing he/she is interested in, he is looking for reviews in 60-70 % cases. People would rather trust the reviews than the description of a thing in the mass media. It is found that the reviews of friends are the most trusted (the level of trust can reach 90%). However, the opinion of unacquainted people is important too (the level of trust reaches 70%). The place brand gives less opportunity to imagine a thing as it cannot be touched. In this case, a user searches for the reviews of people linked to this place and collects information about it in the Internet. Sometimes, a user who has a negative opinion on some territory publishes a negative review, which is not quite just. Therefore, it is extremely important to give a quick response to a negative review (in the forum or review website), explain the situation and report in time about taken measures. It means that any place should develop and defend its positive image and enforce its perception as a promising region in online communication platforms – the most rapidly growing information segment. Otherwise, the audience of online communication platforms can significantly damage the reputation of the place by uncontrolled distributing of negative (probably, false) information. At the same time, system interaction with an adequate part of Internet community, explanation, and legal justification of one's position and creation of positive image contents enable the place to function and develop successfully, to enter new markets and create positive pool of users within Internet audience.

4. METHODOLOGY

We assume that the development of a positive image of the place (as a basis for the place brand) in online communication platforms implies the following steps:

1. To monitor forums, blogs, review websites and social networks and to reveal the sources of information creating the online reputation of the place.

2. To participate constantly in the discussions devoted to the activities of the place in online communication platforms and direct the discussions in a positive way.

3. To create positive image text contents in online communication platforms. Let us demonstrate it through the branding of some abstract X city:

- "X is a city for people". Here we can stress a convenient location of the city, benefits of its infrastructure, quantity of educational, medical and cultural establishments, their achievements and status.

- "X is a city without corruption and anarchy". In this case, it is better to present people's opinion on the work of authorities from various social groups, to reflect facts of fighting against corruption and show positive developments in this area.

- "X is a city of innovative ideas". Here we need to show new breakthrough ideas to improve life quality in a variety of spheres. It is better to focus on implementation and reflect the ideas that have already been working and bringing a result.

- "X is a city of good deeds". In developing this content, we should focus on various charitable initiatives, show that the authorities care for residents and present the people's reviews on the particular good deeds.

- "X is a city of professionals". Here we should make an emphasis on those people who live in this place and have achieved the most outstanding results in their work. There can be various spheres of activity (education, medicine, industry, agriculture etc.) We need a sustainable pool of professionals to be an umbrella "face of the place".

- "X is a creative city". In this case, we need to show creative achievements of residents that embody fundamentally new ideas. We should also stress that the authorities pay much attention to the problems of residents, the deficit or contradiction of knowledge in various spheres, and mention possible actions to detect these problems and search for their solutions.

- "X is a leading Russian city". This is the final text content based on previous contents, which, in turn, enable to make this conclusion. Here we should reflect general positive characteristics of the city, its umbrella achievements, and successes in various spheres.

4. To reveal positive image of the place using creative potential of its residents (pictures, books, articles etc.).

It is also important to defend the place brand in the online communication platforms. This process is very complicated and time-taking. Besides, it requires some knowledge in various spheres (management, jurisprudence, psychology, PR) as well as administrative, financial, and expert support. The defense of the place brand should involve an entire complex of measures:

1. to develop a pool of Internet lawyers of the place brand and finance their work;
2. to identify and evaluate negative information about the place in online communication platforms and to define a line of defending its positive image in a particular situation;
3. to defend positive image of the place using legal or other arguments in forums, blogs, review websites and social networks;
4. to organize administrative support to explain an official position of the place on emerging issues;
5. to organize independent expert support to enforce the official position of the territory in arguable situations.

5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The development and defense of the place brand create conditions for developing the potential of the region and increasing its competitiveness. The process of place branding in online communication platforms should aim at achieving a positive information effect for the place. This is what it is meant for. We need to show the place in the best way possible, to reveal all its positive features, and develop an efficient defense of its image.

Development and defense of the place brand in online communication platforms should have the following results:

- The development and maintenance of active interest in the place from the Internet community;
- The arrangement of favorable information background for the development of the place (for

example, the implementation of social, economic, spiritual and political tasks);

- The perception of the place as modern, convenient, effective and actively developing environment in online communication platforms.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

These results will enable, among other things, to develop the economy of the place, to attract external investments and qualified staff from other regions, to develop science, business, culture, and education as well as to create effective mechanisms to identify current problems and resolve them.

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