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BRAND WARFARE. TEN RULES FOR BUILDING A KILLER BRAND

In the 21st century the importance of branding can not be underestimated, and knowledge of what affects the brand value has a great importance for the marketers and stockholders. There are a lot of books, articles, and research about growing brand value, and one of such books is Brand warfare by D'Alessandro (2001).

Brand Warfare presents “ten rules for building a killer brand” – some of them are more important, others are less, but in total it is a good resource for checking the company: whether it works with its brand well or not. Here is a short summary of what each rule suggests.

“Rule 1: It's the Brand, Stupid” is about understanding of the brand importance itself. The author compares big companies with sumo wrestlers who used to push each other on mats, and says it is not the winning strategy just to think “people will buy our product because we are big”. The first the most important idea of the chapter is “it's no longer the biggest guy who wins, but the fastest, smartest guy with the best command of new technologies” (D'Alessandro, 2001, p.8). The next idea is that now price, service and product are not the only things that allow companies to increase their market share. Finally, the author states that people like to buy strong brands because they buy emotions and enjoyment, not only the basic good.

“Rule 2: Codependency Can Be Beautiful” is the rule where D'Alessandro explains why “consumers need good brands as much as good brands need them”. Actually, people need good and bad brands to orient themselves among a huge number of products due to three main factors. Firstly, “the best brand” usually means “the best product” for the customers, so there is no need to try all other brands, and it saves time. Then, “right brands” form “right opinion” about its consumers – they are like the reputation guarantees. Finally, good brands make people feel a part of something big and safe. So, according to the author, for the consumers big brands help save time, project the right message, and provide an identity.

“Rule 3: A Great Brand Message Is Like a Bucking Bronco—Once You're On, Don't Let Go” deals with establishing the right brand message, which is the shortest

way to consumers hearts. D'Alessandro provides several sub-rules here: the new brands should firstly tell consumers about what they do or what they are (become established), and then their ads can be “obscured”; the idea is not the most essential thing - execution means more; the brand message has to influence the potential consumers; a good brand requires self-knowledge, self-awareness, and discipline; finally, brand message should stay relevant and consistent. As the author has argued, “a strong brand message has a lot in common with a bucking bronco. It's not going to stand still for a second - it has to change constantly as the times and the competition do - but once you've managed to get on top of it, you do not want to let go”, so whether the business is on the top or falls down depends on how you manage the brand message.

“Rule 4: If You Want Great Advertising, Be Prepared to Fight for It” is devoted to how important it is to understand that the professionals should do their work and what mistakes can be made on that way – the author believes that the only source of ineffective advertising is poorly managed relationships between the agencies and corporate players. Here are the main ideas of the rule: beware of flatterers; it is not always a good ad that the client is after; the management hobbies and interest are not necessarily good ideas for the ads; it is not good to “make a big idea small”; no more than three people in the company need to “improve” the commercial; otherwise, it is impossible to create a clear message; finally, be memorable and do not change the successful advertising just because you are bored with it.

“Rule 5: When It Comes to Sponsorships, There's a Sucker Born Every 30 Seconds” is the chapter about what sponsorship is, how it should be realized, and what mistakes have to be avoided. Firstly, D'Alessandro suggests that companies understand the reasons for sponsorship; then understand the players and their motives and targets; and after that find “the balance of power”. The author mainly writes about expensive events with huge sponsorship coverage like the Olympic Games and provides the examples of what can be done and how it could be done better with less money and time waste.

“Rule 6: Do Not Confuse Sponsorship with a Spectator Sport” differentiates between these two concepts. The main difference is in the so called “halo effect” – if the brand reached the consumers’ minds and hearts or not. Sponsorship not necessarily deals with sport; there are a lot of directions for that. Anyway, to be successful the company should use sponsorship everyday and in everyway, set the right expectations, and make sure that the result can be measured.

“Rule 7: Do Not Allow Scandal to Destroy in 30 Days a Brand That Took 100 years to Build” the author has devoted to scandals. D'Alessandro states that to be able to survive after the scandal the company should work on the brand name and its reputation much more than before anything bad happened. Also, not competitors, but the company itself should define the brand. Besides, scandals should not be left without response – fight for the reputation, or, as the author says “when you're wrong, admit it and make amends. When you're not, prove it and move on.” (p.128).

“Rule 8: Make Your Distributors Slaves to Your Brand” describes the

relationships between the brand and its distributors. The main idea is that not the distributors should dictate their conditions, but the company. For that the good brands should not frustrate their consumers, should face up to the limitations and make people want exactly that brand. If the brand is strong and works on the communications with the customers, the distributors force will lessen.

“Rule 9: Use Your Brand to Lead Your People to the Promised Land” enables to see the brand as an equity that influences not only the external clients, but also the internal workers. Actually, it helps rise the brand value so that really the best professionals want to work for the best companies; strong brands make difficult decisions easier, and a strong brand inspires the workers.

“Rule 10: Ultimately, the Brand Is the CEO's Responsibility—and Everyone Else's Too” means that all people who work for the company influence the brand value and should understand it. CEO has to think about the brand (do not leave it for the marketing directors or somebody else) and inculcate in the personnel’s mind the philosophy of brand importance, decision consequences, and system thinking. The author believes “a good brand can command a premium price for both its products and its stock,” so, every worker is interested in brand value growth.

A certain issue is to determine which rules are more important, and which are less important. There can be different approaches to that: the importance and real need for the companies of all sizes, or only big ones; the investments needed to make; the estimated effect from the use, etc. Below, the three most important and least important rules for IKEA are presented from the point of view of what should be mostly paid attention to.

This part is focused on IKEA. IKEA is one of the world's largest furniture retailer with Swedish roots. As of October 2010, the chain has 316 stores in 37 countries, most of them in Europe, North America, Asia and Australia. It has a strong brand and was named “The best company to work for” several times (Wikipedia, 2010). The least important “killer brand” rules for IKEA are those that are already well implemented in the company. The most important – those that can improve some aspects in IKEA work.

The least important for IKEA rules are “It's the Brand, Stupid”, “A Great Brand Message Is Like a Bucking Bronco—Once You're On, Don't Let Go”, and “If You Want Great Advertising, Be Prepared to Fight for It”. At the moment, the company demonstrates its understanding of brand importance – it is consistent, clear, contemporary, etc; it works on the brand message the right way – it influences the customers and helps them make a decision; it produces memorable advertising and has clear marketing strategy. Actually, these are the basic rules and IKEA deals with them well.

The rules to pay more attention to, and so the most important for IKEA, are “Do Not Allow Scandal to Destroy in 30 Days a Brand That Took 100 Years to Build”, “Use Your Brand to Lead Your People to the Promised Land”, “Ultimately, the Brand Is the CEO's Responsibility—and Everyone Else's Too”. Below are the criteria due to which the choice of these rules was made.

Scandals are a very important area for any company to work with as scandals

can kill a brand in a very short time. IKEA is not a “pure from criticism” brand, and not to lose its positions it has to eliminate the scandals (both - big and small). Now IKEA has quite a strong and stable position, and it has to work with scandals to save it.

A strong brand has a lot of advantages from the raising worker productivity point of view. So, IKEA can attract the best people to work for it – best designers, engineers, management, etc. Also, it can be easier for such company as IKEA to make tough decisions easier – if it affects the brand positively, it is good; so the brand itself becomes the indicator for decision making. Finally, a strong brand motivates people to make things that they thought are impossible. This rule is very important as it does not have the maximum level – always something can be done more and better in this direction.

The third chosen rule is a kind of the previous rule continuation – it also deals with the personnel and their attitude to the brand. The better CEO and staff understand how much depends on their behavior, actions, speech, decisions, etc, the more prosperous and successful IKEA will be. The present results show that even though the company follows this rule now, but, again, there is always space for improvement.

The conclusion is that such books as *Brand Warfare* by D’Alessandro present the information in a clear way with lots of examples, and help monitor how serious the company’s attitude to its brand is. For each specific company the most important and the least important rules can change, however, the book is useful reading for everybody – from linear workers to CEOs as brand value ultimately concerns everyone.

References

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2. IKEA (2010, October 24). Wikipedia. Retrieved October 24, 2010, from - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ikea>