



HFDA Academy: New View

Brand Building During The Time Of A Pandemic

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The pandemic has brought along many highly visible changes in business: it has changed plans and rewritten priorities. Tasks that previously were not necessarily emphasized by fashion and design businesses have come to the fore - and are now considered as the key to their competitiveness.

Proactive behaviour from reactive behaviour

In the life of any brand, it is essential for it to be differentiated from its competitors, to make its operation easily identifiable, which can be done in a myriad of ways and expressed through a logo, brand name, communication style and appearance. After this process is complete, a brand can be viewed as a visual and conceptual identity that can support a company in reaching its short- and long-term goals. In the pre-pandemic period, all brands were characterized by reactivity - there were many tasks that although were time-consuming to complete, did not pay off in the short term. The loosening of passivity led to new rules in the changed economic situation, including the appreciation of certain tasks that had not previously been treated as a priority. Simultaneously, economic actors have moved in the direction of proactivity: processes have started in brand building that will help brands become prepared for the upcoming period. This includes market research, steps needed to be taken to coordinate different platforms, and online community building.

The growth of appreciation for market research

Market analysis provides an opportunity for brands to discover the values that make them unique in the market, in addition to evaluating the position of their competitors. To determine this, firstly they need to identify the core brand elements that characterize them the best. For example, the special features of the Corset fashion brand, which is characterized by minimalist style features, operates with affordable prices, represents high-street fashion, and has corresponding Instagram followers. A prerequisite for successful market research is to look for competitors whose characteristics can be easily incorporated into the categories developed when describing our own brand. Online multi-brand stores that feature hundreds of different brands can be a good starting point to help you do this. These platforms can serve as a good database, as they make it easy to discover brands with similar qualities. Once competitors have been mapped out, it's worthwhile as a brand, to come up with a strategy and to think about what distinctive features the brand has, and in what areas they are able to offer more than their competitors. In order to

ensure continuity and quick reflection on market changes, this question should be asked again from time to time as it provides a good basis for the long-term positioning of brands.

Coordinating platforms

A brand can be described as a summary of many, many signs. Basically, we are talking about a code system built around a basic message. All business interfaces need to be in line with this core message - be it a website, social media, newsletters or appearances at fashion and design events, packaging, or the employees of our business.

This period provides an excellent opportunity for businesses to think about what exactly the essence of their brand is, what values they represent, and further, what qualities they have that makes them special. All of the above can be supported by various visual features, the design of which also requires psychological target group analysis. This need requires companies to think of brands as if they were living people, and by doing so, to lay down how they would communicate, and what their real personality traits and qualities would be if we were identified as a person.

The renaissance of community building

The third step in proactive brand building is the element of community building in social media, where it is important for brands to clarify what they expect from different interfaces and to also answer the question of what they can do for their consumers on these platforms. In my opinion, it is primarily the task of communicating on Instagram causes difficulties for fashion and design businesses. Consumers are reluctant to engage with posts featuring the topic of selling a product, therefore these elements can't play a role in brand communication online. Instead of focusing on the element of sales, Instagram is much more about what we can give our followers as a brand - how we can inspire them with our world we've created online, and what we can do to find value in everyday life.

In accordance with this viewpoint, it's worthwhile to produce content with which we can serve the interests of consumers - be it home decor, cooking or other hobbies and pastimes. This period is particularly beneficial for collaborations taking place within social media through which brands can visualize their own world and philosophy. Such content includes, for example, a live tarot reading for spiritual brands. Also included in this category are for example online cooking courses which reflect the personalities of the brands through the thoughts and values of the given chef, and even live concerts can be an excellent tool for communicating for fashion and design brands as long as the singer and the brand share common traits. These types of content services to implement a long-term strategy, as in addition to reinforcing the company's values, they develop sympathy in consumers, which manifests itself in the form of purchases at a later point in time. Up until now, brands have thought of their followers as individuals who have operated independently of each other on digital platforms - today this perception is an outdated point of view. One of the main goals of branding now is to connect people and form a real community. As a result, one of the most important questions is how brands define their community, and this already goes beyond the concept

of a customer camp. They need to create such a community, a group of followers, which is made up of people with similar worldviews who share common passions. Successful brands can become a focus of such communities. Some features of Instagram specifically support the development of such connections.

Thanks to the co-watching feature, participants can browse posts together, which replaces the interaction of when we actually show something to another person on our phone. Co-watching allows followers to immerse themselves in the world of brands together, and by doing so, undergoing the experiences of brands together. Online community building requires the use of analytical methods, which raises many questions for brands: What do we want the community to say about us? What should be our main message? What do we as a brand believe in, what is important to the brand? What's in the brand's communication that is of value to consumers? How do they portray the essence of the brand with their content? What kind of imprint do they want to leave on the world? What values do they give to the individual and what is provided to members of the group? What brands do we follow? What impresses us? Brands need to answer these questions to begin a successful community building.

Smaller brands don't have an easy task if they want to bring a product to the market that only supports the needs of a small community, layer of people. In such cases, regarding online communication, it's worthwhile to join existing supply chains in order to cooperate with the market players with which they share similar features in terms of product and style. By sharing follower bases, this practice allows the collaborating parties to reach target groups and communities that they have not yet had access to before. The communication initiative between Louis Vuitton and Supreme is a perfect example of the benefits of such associations. Louis Vuitton was able to enter into a younger, hip-hop orientated group through the Supreme, while the Supreme gained a status it had not previously characterized.

It's all about the details

The essence of brand building lies in the fact that the small details need to fit one by one into the big picture, in other words, into the macro-level conditions of the company. Even the smallest elements can be an important factor in how consumers interpret the message of a brand. An inconsistently selected influencer to represent the brand, a specific text, or video can also have a detrimental effect on the perception of our brand, despite the fact that they can result in high views or profile visits. In addition, communication with customers also contributes to the overall picture of a brand. In this period, industry players have experienced numerous disruptions in supply chains, which also leaves a mark on customer experience. In this situation, it is now even more important to remain empathetic with our customers, even though they are experiencing service problems that are out of our hands. It's worthwhile thinking about what and how we can express our sincere regret at such times, as this is an excellent opportunity for brands to cultivate long-term relationships with committed customers.