



Chapter 10

Marketing communications: strategies, tactics and planning

A marketing communications strategy refers to an organisation's overall positioning orientation and their preferred approach to communicating with customers and stakeholders. Marketing communications strategies are contingent on the business and marketing strategies the organisation is pursuing. Tactics are concerned with the communication mix developed to deliver the positioning strategy.

Marketing communication plans are concerned with programmes and campaigns designed to articulate an organisation's marketing communication tactics and strategy.

Aims and learning objectives

The aims of this chapter are to explore the nature of strategy and marketing communications strategies in particular. The goal is to enable readers to appreciate the elements and concepts associated with marketing communication strategy, tactics and planning, and to introduce the marketing communications planning framework.

The learning objectives of this chapter are to:

1. establish the differences between strategy, tactics and planning;
2. appreciate the essence of marketing communications strategy;
3. consider three main marketing communication strategies: pull, push and profile;
4. explain the notion of strategic balance;
5. explore different approaches to Internet-based communication strategies;
6. present a planning framework and consider the different elements involved in the development of marketing communication plans;
7. highlight the importance of the linkages and interaction between the different elements of the plan.

For an applied interpretation see Angela Hall's MiniCase entitled [Ski Rossendale](#) at the end of this chapter.

Introduction

In essence IMC represents a strategic approach to marketing communications.

This chapter follows on from the previous chapter that explored integrated marketing communications. In essence IMC represents a strategic approach to marketing communications, yet its application by many organisations is invariably more consistent with a tactical rather than strategic perspective. Various issues implicit in the previous discussion are relevant in this chapter and, although not developed further, should be considered by readers.

It is assumed by many that marketing communication strategy is simply the combination of tools of the communications mix. In other words, strategy is about the degree of direct marketing, personal selling, advertising, sales promotion and public relations that is incorporated within a planned sequence of communication activities.

This is important but this is tactical, and is not the essence of marketing communications strategy. From a strategic perspective, key decisions concern the overall direction of the programme and target audiences, the fit with marketing and corporate strategy, the key message and desired positioning the brand is to occupy in the market, the resources necessary to deliver the position and overall goals.

The chapter begins with a consideration of some fundamental ideas concerning the nature of strategy. From this a contextual and customer perspective is developed on which to build marketing communications strategy. This is used in preference to a production orientation, which is founded on the resource base. This customer orientation requires revisiting ideas concerning market segmentation and the characteristics and buying behaviour of the different target audiences. From here various dimensions of communications strategy are developed.

Understanding strategy

In order to appreciate the role and nature of communication strategy it is useful to appreciate the dimensions of the strategy concept. The management literature on strategy is extensive yet there seems to be little agreement or consensus about what it is, what it means or how it should be developed. A full discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this book but what follows is a brief overview of some of the more general views about management strategy.

The disparity of views about strategy is due to the multidimensional nature of the strategy concept.

Hambrick (1983) suggested that the disparity of views about strategy is due to the multidimensional nature of the strategy concept, that strategy is situational and that it varies according to industry and the environment in which it operates. In other words contextual issues determine the nature of strategy. This may be true but it does not help us understand what strategy is.

The one main area wherein most authors find agreement concerns the hierarchical nature of strategy within organisations (Kay, 1993; Johnson *et al.*, 2008; Mintzberg and Ghoshal, 2003). This refers to the notion that there are three main levels of organisational strategy; corporate, competitive and functional. Corporate strategy is considered to be directional and sets out the broad, overarching parameters and means through which the organisation operates in order to realise its objectives. Strategies at the functional level, for example, marketing, finance and production, should be integrated in such a way that they contribute to the satisfaction of the higher-level competitive strategies, which in turn should satisfy the overall corporate goals. Competitive-level strategies are important because not only do they set out the way in which the organisation will compete and use resources, but they should also provide clear messages about the way in which the organisation seeks to manage its environment.

Chaffee (1985) identifies several themes associated with the various strategic interpretations. The first is that strategy is used by organisations as a means of adjusting to changing environmental conditions and the second is that strategy is often referred to in terms of

decision making, actions and implementation. Apart from the hierarchical element mentioned previously, one of her other significant observations concerned the point that strategy could take various forms, most notably, deliberate, emergent and realised formats.

Two main strategy schools of thought can be identified, namely the planning and the emergent approaches. The planning school is the pre-eminent paradigm and is based on strategy development and implementation, which is explicit, rational and planned as a sequence of logical steps. Andrews (1987) comments that strategy is concerned with a company's objectives, purpose and policies and its plans to satisfy the goals using particular resources with respect to a range of internal and external stakeholders. The organisation interacts with and attempts to shape its environment in pursuit of its goals. This perspective of strategy was first formulated in the 1950s and 1960s when the operating environments of most organisations were simple, stable and thus predictable. However, these conditions rarely exist in the twenty-first century and the validity of the rational model of strategy has been questioned.

Two main strategy schools of thought can be identified, namely the planning and the emergent approaches.

The emergent school of thought considers strategy to develop incrementally, step-by-step, as organisations learn, sometimes through simple actions of trial and error. The core belief is that strategy is comprised of a stream of organisational activities that are continuously being formulated, implemented, tested, evaluated and updated. Chaffee suggests that strategy should be considered in terms of a linear, adaptive or interpretive approach, each one reflecting a progressively sophisticated perspective.

The emergent school of thought considers strategy to develop incrementally, step-by-step, as organisations learn, sometimes through simple actions of trial and error.

While the linear approach reflects the more traditional and deliberate approach to strategy (Ansoff, 1965; Andrews, 1987), the adaptive strategy is important because it reflects the view that organisations flex and adjust to changing environments while the interpretive or higher-order point of view considers strategy to be a reflection of the influence of social order on strategic decision making.

Two other strategic authors to be mentioned are Mintzberg (1994) and Whittington (1993). Mintzberg argues that strategy can be regarded as one or more of 5Ps of strategy. These are strategy as a Plan, Position, Perspective, Ploy and Pattern. Whittington (1993) offers four generic strategies: Classical, Evolutionary, Processual and Systemic (see Table 10.1).

Table 10.1 Views of strategy

Author	Type of Strategy	Explanation
Mintzberg	Plan	A predetermined, deliberate course of action, implementation and evaluation.
	Position	An attempt to locate an organisation within a market.
	Perspective	A collective view of the world, one that is ingrained within the organisation and its position within it.
	Ploy	A scheme or manoeuvre to sidestep or outwit competitors.
	Pattern	A stream of actions in which there are consistent patterns of behaviour.
Whittington	Classical	Planned, rational and deliberate.
	Evolutionary	Darwinian in outlook, this strategy perceives a manager's task as trying to survive by fitting as closely as possible to the prevailing environmental conditions.
	Processual	An essentially incremental perspective whereby strategy is concerned with learning from past actions and experience. Little emphasis is given to long-term planning and horizons.
	Systemic	Strategy is a reflection of the social systems in which strategists participate.

Sources: Whittington (1993); Mintzberg (1994).

There are a number of common points shared within these various views and perspectives of strategy. Chaffee, Mintzberg and Whittington all agree that strategy can be considered to be deliberate in nature as reflected in their respective linear, planned and classical approaches. They also agree that strategy can be emergent and can evolve from the actions of the organisation. This can be seen in their adaptive, pattern and processual approaches. They also develop views on the extent to which an organisation interacts with its environment or seeks to directly influence it. Chaffee refers to interpretive strategies, Mintzberg to strategy as a perspective and Whittington to systemic interpretations.

ViewPoint 10.1 Strategic Apples

According to Rumelt, an eminent US academic and strategy consultant, most corporate strategic plans are concerned with maintaining market share and rolling forward three- or five-year resource budgets. There is little strategy in the corporate strategies he sees.

For him, strategy is about exploiting change in the environment, change in terms of technological advances, resource prices, consumer tastes or competitive behaviour. Strategy is about how these changes are developed and the positions that firms adopt with regard to these changes. Rumelt refers to a discussion with Steve Jobs at Apple following his successful return to the company in 1998. Rumelt observed at the time that Apple, no matter how well they performed, were still operating in a small niche within the personal computer business. So, the question he posed was what was Jobs trying to achieve, what was the longer-term strategy? The unexpected answer was . . . 'I am going to wait for the next big thing'.

For Jobs, strategy is not about 'cutting costs and forming alliances', a disparaging phrase used by Rumelt when referring to common interpretations of corporate strategy. His role was to seize opportunities presented by the environment, evidenced through the subsequent success of Pixar, iPod and probably iPhone.

Source: Adapted from Lovallo and Mendonca (2007).

Question

How would you interpret Apple's approach to strategy – is it planning or emergent?

Task

Go to the web sites for Boeing and Airbus. What are their strategies?

Strategy is about the means, speed and methods by which organisations adapt to and influence their environments.

Views on strategy have evolved as our understanding has developed. Strategy is not just about a deliberate, planned approach to business development, although it can be at the functional and competitive levels. Strategy is about the means, speed and methods by which organisations adapt to and influence their environments in order that they achieve their goals. What is also clear is that the demarcation between an organisation and its environment is less clear than it used to be. An imaginary line was once used to refer to a border between an organisation and its environment. This line is no longer deemed valid as organisations are now viewed as boundary-free. The implications of this borderless concept for marketing communications are potentially enormous. Not only do contemporary views of strategy amplify the significance of the interaction between strategy and an organisation's environment but they also stress the importance for strategy, at whatever level, to be contextually oriented and determined.

Market segmentation

The planned and deliberate perspective of strategy has had a long-term impact on marketing management. The process of market analysis and evaluation leading to planned strategies

designed to meet prescribed and measurable goals is well established. It is argued that this approach enables finite resources to be used more efficiently as they can be directed towards markets that hold, potentially, greater value than other markets. Market segmentation is a part of this approach and is both a functional and competitive-level strategy. More importantly, the process of market segmentation is the means by which organisations define the broad context within which their strategic business units (SBUs) and products are offered.

Market segmentation is the division of a mass market into identifiable and distinct groups or segments, each of which has common characteristics, needs and display similar responses to marketing actions. Through this process specific target segments can be selected and marketing plans developed to satisfy the individual needs of the potential buyers in these chosen segments. The development, or rather identification, of segments can be perceived as opportunities, and, as Beane and Ennis (1987) suggest, 'a company with limited resources needs to pick only the best opportunities to pursue'. The most common bases upon which markets can be segmented are set out in Table 10.2.

This process of segmentation is necessary because a single product is unlikely to meet the needs of all customers in a mass market. If it were, then a single type of toothpaste, chocolate bar or car would meet all of our needs. This is not so, and there are a host of products and brands seeking to satisfy particular buyer needs. For example, ask yourself the question, 'Why do I use toothpaste?' The answer, most probably, is one of the following:

Segmentation is necessary because a single product is unlikely to meet the needs of all customers in a mass market.

- You want dental hygiene.
- You like fresh breath and you do not want to offend others.

Table 10.2 Bases for segmenting markets

Segmentation base	Explanation
Demographic	Key variables concern age, sex, occupation, level of education, religion, social class and income characteristics, many of which determine, to a large extent, a potential buyer's ability to enter into an exchange relationship or transaction.
Geographic	In many situations the needs of potential customers in one geographic area are different from those in another area. For example, it is often said that Scottish beer drinkers prefer heavy bitters, Northerners in England prefer mild, drinkers in the West prefer cider, and in the South lager is the preferred drink.
Geodemographic	This type of segmentation is based on the assumption that there is a relationship between the type of housing people live in and their purchasing behaviours. At the root of this approach is the ability to use postcodes to send similar messages to similar groups of households, on the basis that where we live determines how we live. The most well-known commercial applications are Acorn (a classification of residential neighbourhoods), Mosaic and Pinpoint.
Psychographic	Through an analysis of consumers' activities, interests and opinions (AIO) it is possible to determine lifestyles or patterns of behaviour. These are a synthesis of the motivations, personality and core values held by individuals. These AIO patterns are reflected in the buying behaviour and decision-making processes of individuals. By identifying and clustering common lifestyles, a correlation with a consumer's product and/or media usage patterns becomes possible.
Behaviouristic	Usage and lifestage segments are derived from analysing markets on the basis of customer behaviour. Usage of soft drinks can be considered in terms of purchase patterns (two bottles per week), usage situations (parties, picnics or as an alcohol substitute) or purchase location (supermarket, convenience store or wine merchant). Lifestage analysis is based on the principle that people have varying amounts of disposable income and different needs at different stages in their lives. Their priorities for spending change at different trigger points and these points or lifestages do not occur at the same time.

Table 10.3 Benefit segments for the toothpaste market

Segment name	The sensory segment	The sociables	The worriers	The independents
Principal benefit sought	Flavour, product appearance	Brightness of teeth	Decay prevention	Price
Demographic strengths	Children	Teens, young people	Large families	Men
Special behavioural characteristics	Users of spearmint-flavoured toothpaste	Smokers	Heavy users	Heavy users
Brands disproportionately favoured	Colgate, Stripe	Macleans, Plus White, Ultra Brite	Crest, Sensodyne	Brands on sale
Personality characteristics	High self-involvement	High sociability	High hypochondriasis	High autonomy
Lifestyle characteristics	Hedonistic	Active	Conservative	Value oriented

Source: Haley (1968). Used with kind permission of the American Marketing Association.

- You want white, shining teeth to appear attractive and approachable.
- You like the fresh oral sensation.
- Other products (e.g. water, soap) are not so effective and do not taste very nice.

Whatever the reason, it is unlikely that given a choice everyone would all choose the same product. In what is now regarded as a classic study, Russell Haley (1968) undertook some pioneering research in this field and from it established four distinct types of customer. Even after over 35 years have elapsed this typology remains a potent practical example of market segmentation: those who bought toothpaste for white teeth (sociables); those who wished to prevent decay (worriers); those who liked the taste and refreshment properties (sensors); and finally those who bought on a price basis (independents). Each of these groups has particular demographic, behavioural and psychographic characteristics that can be seen in Table 10.3.

It is not surprising that a range of toothpaste products has been developed that attempts to satisfy the needs of different buyers, for example, Macleans for fresh breath, Crest for dental hygiene, Sensodyne for those sensitive to hot and cold drinks and numerous others promoted on special offers for those independent buyers looking for a low price. There are others who are not very interested in the product and have continued using a brand that others in their current or past households are comfortable with.

ViewPoint 10.2 Ethically Segmented

As the move towards ethical and environmental awareness grows, a study by Henley Centre reveals the extent to which the United Kingdom is becoming green. The report identifies five segments:

- **Onlookers** Moderately concerned but have no intention of making small changes or living ethically, 26 per cent of the population.
- **Conveniently conscious** Fairly concerned about the environment, think brands should act responsibly and they make easy lifestyle changes, 35 per cent of the population.
- **Positive choosers** Highly aware, very concerned and try hard to live ethically, 31 per cent of the population.

- **Principled pioneers** The most committed group, happy to install alternative energy sources and calculate their carbon footprint, just 4 per cent of the population.
- **Vocal activists** Very similar to the positive choosers but they vocalise their concerns about unethical brands, 4 per cent of the population.

This suggests there are opportunities for brands to develop strategies to appeal to these segments. In doing so, such ethical positioning appears to lead consumers to perceive brands to be of higher quality.

Source: Tiltman (2007).

Question

How might this information affect an electronics manufacturer and a management consultancy?

Task

Using a search engine, locate a solar energy equipment supplier and see how they might segment their markets.

Therefore, target segments constitute the environment and the context for the marketing communications strategy and activities. It is the characteristics of the target segment and their perception that should shape an audience-centred marketing communication strategy.

Marketing communications strategy

Many organisations do not develop and implement a communication strategy. They may develop brand strategies, advertising strategies and indeed some form of integrated marketing communication strategies but there is little evidence of organisations developing corporate-led communication strategies. Steyn (2003) believes that this might be because practitioners do not fully understand the word *strategy*, while Moss and Warnaby (1998) suggest that academics have neglected the role of corporate communication in the strategy process. Holm (2006) reported that the programmes at two leading Swedish communication schools contained 90 per cent communication-related material and just 10 per cent on leadership matters. In contrast, the programme at Sweden's leading management school designed to deliver strategic education, devotes just 3 per cent of the time to communication issues. The general conclusion Holm draws is that those responsible for organisation, strategic leadership and decision making appear to lack insight, awareness and the skills regarding communication. Undoubtedly ideas concerning communication and strategy have not always been well articulated or taught together, are often tactical and there is certainly little agreement on what constitutes corporate communication and marketing communication strategies.

Marketing communications strategy is concerned with two key dynamics. The first dynamic is concerned with who, in broad terms, is the target audience? End-user customers need to derive particular benefits based on perceived value, from the exchange process. These benefits are very different from those that intermediaries expect to derive, or indeed any other stakeholder who does not consume the product or service. The second dynamic concerns the way in which an audience understands the offering they are experiencing either through use or through communications. The way in which people interpret messages and frame objects in their mind is concerned with positioning.

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Marketing communications strategy therefore, is concerned with audiences and positioning.

Audiences

The prevailing approach to marketing communications (advertising) strategy has traditionally been founded upon the configuration of the 'promotional' mix. Strategy was an interpretation of the mix and hence the resources an organisation deployed. This represents a production rather than market orientation to marketing communications and is intrinsically misplaced. This inside-out form of strategy is essentially resource-driven. However, a market orientation to strategy requires a consideration of the needs of the audience first and then a determination of the various messages, media and disciplines to accomplish the strategy, an outside-in approach.

Consumer purchase decisions are characterised (very generally and see Chapter 6) by a single-person buying centre whereas organisational buying decisions can involve a large number of different people, fulfilling different roles and all requiring different marketing communication messages. It follows from this that the approach to communicating with these two very different target sectors should be radically different, especially in terms of what, where, when and how a message is communicated. Once communication objectives have been established, it is necessary to formulate appropriate strategies.

Communication objectives that are focused on consumer markets require a different strategy from those formulated to satisfy the objectives that are focused on organisational customers. In addition, there are circumstances and reasons to focus communications on the development of the organisation with a corporate brand and range of other stakeholders. Often, these corporate brands need to work closely with the development of product brands.

Positioning

Positioning is the key strategic framework for an organisation's brand-based communications.

As noted in the earlier discussion about strategy, positioning is an integral concept, and for some the essence of strategy. Wind (1990) stated quite clearly that positioning is the key strategic framework for an organisation's brand-based communications, as cited by Jewell (2007).

All products and all organisations have a position in the minds of audiences. The task, therefore, is to actively manage the way in which audiences perceive brands. This means that marketing communications strategy should be concerned with achieving effective and viable positions so that the target audience understands what the brand does, what it means (to them) and can ascribe value to it. This is particularly important in markets that are very competitive and where mobility barriers (ease of entry into and exit from a market, e.g. plant and production costs) are relatively low.

Positioning is about visibility and recognition of what a product/service/organisation represents to a buyer. In markets where the intensity of rivalry and competition are increasing and buyers have greater choice, identification and understanding of a product's intrinsic values become critical. Channel members have limited capacities, whether this is the level or range of stock they can carry or for retailers, the amount of available shelf space that can be allocated. An offering with a clear identity and orientation to a particular target segment's needs will not only be stocked and purchased, but can warrant a larger margin through increased added value.

Marketing communications strategy is essentially about positioning.

It is generally accepted that positioning is the natural conclusion to the sequence of activities that constitute a core part of the marketing strategy. Market segmentation and target marketing are prerequisites to successful positioning. It has also been established that marketing communications should be an audience-centred rather than product-centred activity. From this it can be concluded that marketing communications strategy is essentially about positioning. For new products and services, marketing communications needs to engage target audiences so that they can understand what the brand means, how it differs from similar offerings and as a result position it in their minds. For the vast majority of products and services that are already established, marketing communications strategy should be concerned with either maintaining a strong position or repositioning it in

the minds of the target audiences. Chapter 11 provides more information about the positioning concept and the different strategies used by organisations to position their brands.

The 3Ps of marketing communications strategy

As a result of understanding the broad nature of the target audience and the way we want them to position the offering in their minds, it is possible to identify three main marketing communication strategies:

- Pull-positioning strategies – these are intended to influence end-user customers (consumers and b2b);
- Push-positioning strategies – these are intended to influence marketing (trade) channel buyers;
- Profile-positioning strategies – these are intended to influence a wide range of stakeholders, not just customers and intermediaries.

These are referred to as the 3Ps of marketing communications strategy. Push and pull relate to the direction of the communication to the marketing channel: pushing communications down through the marketing channel or pulling consumers/buyers into the channel via retailers, as a result of receiving the communications. They do not relate to the intensity of communication and only refer to the overall approach. Profile refers to the presentation of the organisation as a whole and therefore the identity is said to be ‘profiled’ to various other target stakeholder audiences, which may well include consumers, trade buyers business-to-business customers and a range of other influential stakeholders. Normally, profile strategies do not contain or make reference to specific products or services that the organisation offers (see Table 10.4).

This may be blurred where the name of a company is the name of its primary (only) product, as is often the case with many retail brands. For example, messages about B&Q are very often designed to convey meaning about the quality and prices of its consumer products and services, however, they often reflect on the organisation itself, especially when its advertising shows members of staff in workwear, doing their work (see Exhibit 10.1).

All three of these strategies are intended to position the offering, in particular ways, in the minds of the target audience. Within each of these overall strategies, individual approaches should be formulated to reflect the needs of each particular case. So, for example, the launch of a new shampoo product will involve a push-positioning strategy to get the product on the shelves of the appropriate retailers. The strategy would be to gain retailer acceptance of the new brand and to position

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Table 10.4 Marketing communications strategy options

Strategy	Target audience	Message focus	Communication goal
Pull	Consumers	Product/service	Purchase
	End-user b2b customers	Product/service	Purchase
Push	Channel intermediaries	Product/service	Developing relationships and distribution network
Profile	All relevant stakeholders	The organisation	Building reputation



Exhibit 10.1

B&Q use their staff in advertising campaigns as brand ambassadors. This serves to communicate brand values and to recognise the value of staff to the marketing programme
Courtesy of B&Q.

it as a profitable new brand to gain consumer interest. Personal selling supported by trade sales promotions will be the main marketing communications tools. A pull-positioning strategy to develop awareness about the brand will need to be created, accompanied by appropriate public relations work. The next step will be to create particular brand associations and thereby position the brand in the minds of the target audience. Messages may be primarily functional or expressive but they will endeavour to convey a brand promise. This may be accompanied or followed by the use of incentives to encourage consumers to trial the product. To support the brand, care lines and a web site will need to be put in place to provide credibility as well as a buyer reference point and an opportunity to interact with the brand.

The degree to which these plans are developed varies.

In order that these strategies are implemented, it is normal procedure to develop a marketing communications plan. The degree to which these plans are developed varies across organisations and some rely on their agencies to undertake this work for them. However, there can be major benefits as a result of developing these plans in-house, for example, by involving and discussing issues internally and developing a sense of ownership.

As noted earlier, planning is not necessarily the same as strategy, although the two are often used interchangeably. Strategy is about the direction, positioning and implementation of an organisation's desired marketing communications (in this case) in order that it positions the brand in the minds of particular target audiences. Tactics are concerned with detail associated with campaigns to deliver the position. Planning, on the other hand, is usually about the formalisation of the strategy, tactics and ideas into a manageable sequence of activities that are linked, coherent and capable of being implemented in the light of the available resources. Marketing communications strategy is about the way an organisation positions its products and services in the minds of its customers and stakeholders. It must do this in the light of its business and marketing strategies and the prevailing contextual conditions, in order to encourage a degree of interaction and dialogue with selected stakeholders.

A marketing communications plan is concerned with the development and managerial processes involved in the articulation of an organisation's marketing communication strategy. This will be considered later in this chapter.

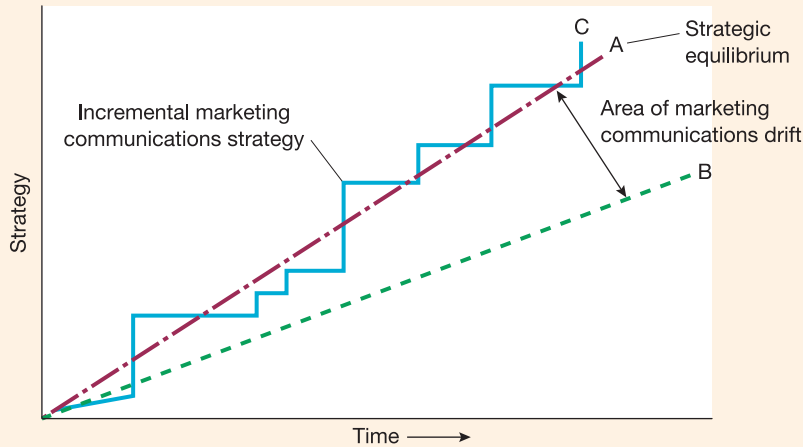


Figure 10.1 Drift in marketing communications strategy

There is little doubt that planning, tactics and strategy are interlinked but it is useful to consider strategy as something that needs to be attended to on a regular basis. With so many variables and an external environment that is subject to tremendous change, marketing communications strategy can be seen to drift, to move away from the original promises that framed its central message and lose the strength of the position gained. The only way to correct drift is to change the marketing communications strategy by at least an amount according to the degree to which messages have drifted. This might be best observed in Figure 10.1.

Planning, tactics and strategy are interlinked.

Line B suggests that if current marketing communications remain as they are, then the size of the gap with the central theme of marketing communications will widen and any attempt to get back will be large and expensive. Line C depicts a brand that has adapted its marketing communications and positioning on a more frequent basis (than B) and as a result follows an emergent strategy, one that results in a more consistent message. This concept might be interpreted in terms of positioning and repositioning brands and the changing of agencies in order to revitalise and change the direction of the communications strategy currently being pursued.

A pull-positioning strategy

If messages designed to position a brand are to be directed at targeted, end-user customers, then the intention is invariably to generate increased levels of awareness, change and/or reinforce attitudes, reduce risk, encourage involvement and ultimately provoke a motivation within the target group. This motivation is to stimulate action so that the target audience expects the offering to be available to them when they decide to enquire, experiment or make a repeat purchase. This approach is a *pull-(positioning)* strategy and is aimed at encouraging customers to 'pull' products through the channel network (see Figure 10.2). This usually means that consumers go into retail outlets (shops) to enquire about a particular product and/or buy it, or to enter a similar transaction direct with the manufacturer or intermediary through direct mail or the Internet. B2b customers are encouraged to buy from dealers and distributors while both groups of consumers and b2b customers have opportunities to buy through direct marketing channels where there is no intermediary.

A *pull-(positioning)* strategy is aimed at encouraging customers to 'pull' products through the channel network.

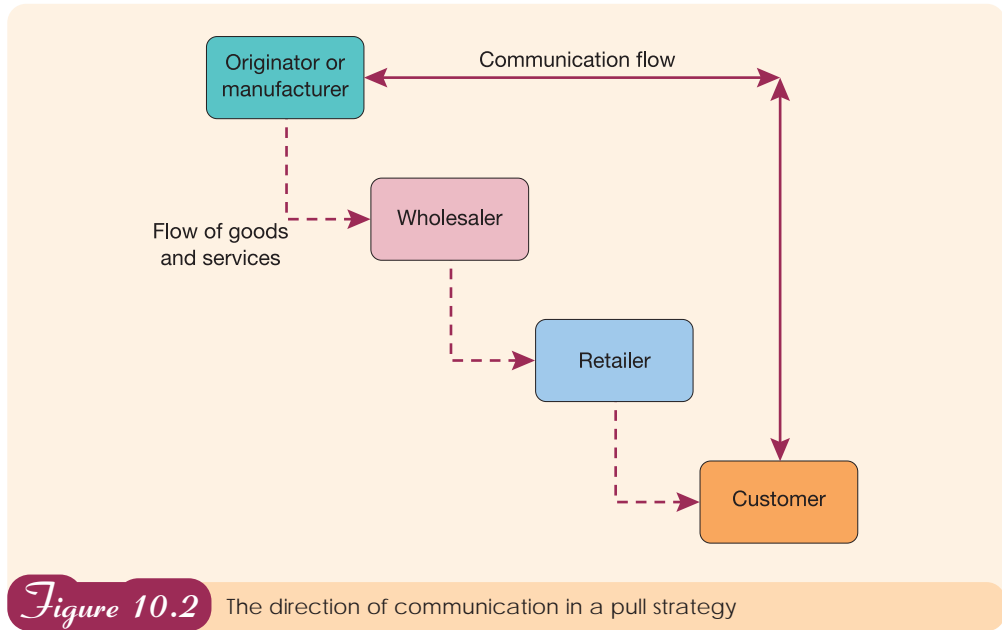


Figure 10.2 The direction of communication in a pull strategy

To accomplish and deliver a pull-positioning strategy, the traditional approach has been to deliver mass media advertising supported by below-the-line communications, most notably sales promotions. There has been greater use of direct marketing in non-fast-moving consumer goods sectors and use of the Internet presents opportunities to reach audiences in new ways, thereby reducing any reliance on the old formulaic approach to pull-based strategies. The decision to use a pull strategy has to be supported by a core message proposition. This will vary according to the outcomes of the context analysis and the needs of the target audience. However, it is probable that the core message will seek to differentiate (position), remind or reassure, inform or persuade the audience to think, feel or behave in a particular way. Agencies and clients have their own approach to this labelling activity.

ViewPoint 10.3 Probably the best pull strategy in the world

Carlsberg, just like many other consumer brands, are competing in a Western European market that is characterised by a proliferation of channels, media and customer segments. They use a wide communication mix, incorporating a full range of tools and media. For example, their consumer advertising uses television, outdoor, in-store, digital and print media. In addition, they use public relations, sponsorship and product placement, and they support local events and festivals to gain visibility.

As 10 per cent of their brands drive 80 per cent of their profits (that is one power brand in each of the ten European markets), so they have started to focus more of their resources on a reduced number of brands.

Pull strategies are configured around developing relationships with customers and Carlsberg refer to this development process as a 'funnel'. When building awareness they use sponsorship, festivals and events. When building on the awareness to generate increased loyalty they use media such as television as they believe they can communicate their messages more effectively this way. The final stage in the funnel process is to provide visibility in pubs and restaurants, and to activate brands in-store. This seemingly simple process can be complex because of the timing, costs and effectiveness associated with the move from one stage to another.

Source: Adapted from Riiber Knudsen (2007).

Question

How do Carlsberg position their brand?

Task

Find three drinks brands in the same category (e.g. alcohol, juice, water or carbonated) and determine how they want to be perceived.



Exhibit 10.2

This still from a Carlsberg ad uses humour to convey the message that if Carlsberg ran a football team it would probably provide the best goal celebration in the world. Courtesy of Saatchi & Saatchi, London and Carlsberg UK. Director: Daniel Kleinman.

ASDA has developed a strong market share in the United Kingdom based mainly on price competition or on what is referred to as everyday low pricing (pull/price). Tesco runs everyday low pricing but uses sales promotions as a form of complementary positioning (pull/price/promotions). In their wake, Sainsbury's and Morrisons have used differing pull strategies to try and regain share, increase profitability and stave off takeover threats.

Although Sainsbury's uses EDLP (everyday low pricing) on 1,000 selected lines, it has adopted a classic branding campaign, based around the celebrity chef Jamie Oliver. Making heavy use of television, the brand is positioned around a quality proposition emphasised by the personality and the associated redesign of major stores.

The level and degree of involvement, explored at some depth in Chapter 5, has some implications for pull strategies. Marketing communication messages can be considered to be a stimulus that in some situations will have a strong impact on the level of involvement enjoyed by the target audience. A strategic response to this would be to adapt marketing communication messages so that they are effective at different levels of involvement, a form of differentiation.

Another approach would be to turn low-involvement decisions into high-involvement ones that, through communications, encourage members of the target audience to reconsider their perception of a brand or of the competition. Again, this represents a form of differentiation. A third approach is to segment the market in terms of the level of involvement experienced by each group and according to situational or personality factors, and then shape the marketing communication messages to suit each group.

A pull strategy therefore, refers to marketing communications (the use of tools, media and messages) designed to position an offering in the minds of particular end-user customer audience(s). This positioning can be achieved in many ways, and Chapter 11 considers a range of positioning techniques and opportunities.

A push-positioning strategy

A second group or type of target audience can be identified, based first on their contribution to the marketing channel, and second because these organisations do not consume the products and services they buy, but add value before selling the product on to others in the demand chain. The previous strategy was targeted at customers who make purchase decisions related largely to their personal (or organisational) consumption of products and services. This second group buys products and services, performs some added-value activity and moves the product through the marketing channel network. This group is a part of the b2b sector, and the characteristics and issues associated with trade channel marketing communications are explored in greater detail in Chapter 29.

The role of marketing communications is to develop and support the relationships that exist.

Trade channel organisations, and indeed all b2b organisations, are actively involved in the development and maintenance of interorganisational relationships. The degree of cooperation between organisations will vary and part of the role of marketing communications is to develop and support the relationships that exist.

The 'trade' channel has received increased attention in recent years as the strategic value of intermediaries has become both more visible and questioned in the light of the Internet. As the channel networks have developed, so has their complexity, which impacts upon the marketing

ViewPoint 10.4

Makita use below-the-line branding

Black & Decker discovered that they were losing sales in the trade sector because their products were perceived to be more suitable for consumers and the do-it-yourself market. Their response was to develop a separate brand for this particular trade sector. They used a new name 'Makita', identified the product range through the colour, marine blue and made it available through different trade channels. The promotional materials and support documentation needed a different 'tone of voice' to reflect a more rugged and stronger position. The messages were integrated in order to reinforce the desired positioning and targeted at trade customers through intermediaries, such as ScrewFix and Toolsdirect that served to reinforce the new positioning.

Question

To what extent does this type of repositioning require the use of advertising?

Task

Find a competitor to Makita. How do they use marketing communications?

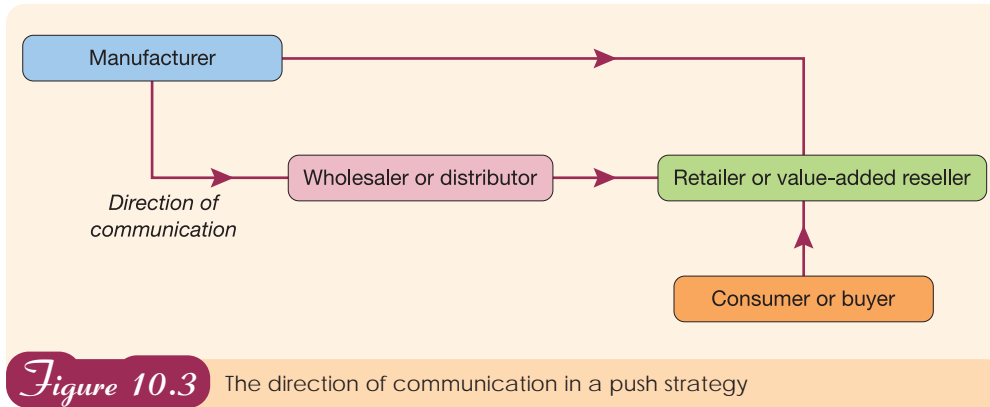


Figure 10.3 The direction of communication in a push strategy

communications strategies and tools used to help reach marketing goals. The expectations of buyers in these networks have risen in parallel with the significance attached to them by manufacturers. The power of multiple retailers, such as Tesco, Sainsbury's, Morrisons, Waitrose and Asda, is such that they are able to dictate terms (including the marketing communications) to many manufacturers of branded goods.

A *push-positioning* communication strategy involves the presentation of information in order to influence other trade channel organisations and, as a result, encourage them to take stock, to allocate resources (e.g. shelf space) and to help them to become fully aware of the key attributes and benefits associated with each product with a view to adding value prior to further channel transactions.

This strategy is designed to encourage resale to other members of the network and contribute to the achievement of their own objectives. This approach is known as a *push* strategy, as it is aimed at pushing the product down through the channel towards the end-users for consumption (see Figure 10.3).

The channel network consists of those organisations with whom others must cooperate directly to achieve their own objectives. By accepting that there is interdependence, usually dispersed unequally throughout the network, it is possible to identify organisations that have a stronger/weaker position within a network. Communication must travel not only between the different levels of dependence and role ('up and down' in a channel context) and so represent bidirectional flows, but also across similar levels of dependence and role, that is horizontal flows. For example, these may be from retailer to retailer or wholesaler to wholesaler.

Marketing communications targeted at people involved in organisational buying decisions are characterised by an emphasis on personal selling. Trade advertising, trade sales promotions and public relations all have an important yet secondary role to play. Direct marketing has become increasingly important and the development of the Internet has had a profound impact on b2b communications and interorganisational relationships. However, personal selling has traditionally been the most significant part of the communication mix where a push strategy has been instigated.

Finally, just as it was suggested that the essence of a pull strategy could be articulated in brief format, a push strategy could be treated in a similar way. The need to consider the core message is paramount, as it conveys information about the essence of the strategy. Push/inform, push/position or push/key accounts/discount might be examples of possible terminology. Whether or not this form of expression is used, it is important that marketing communication strategy be referred to more than just push; what is to be achieved also needs to be understood.

Push-positioning communication strategy involves the presentation of information in order to influence other trade channel organisations.

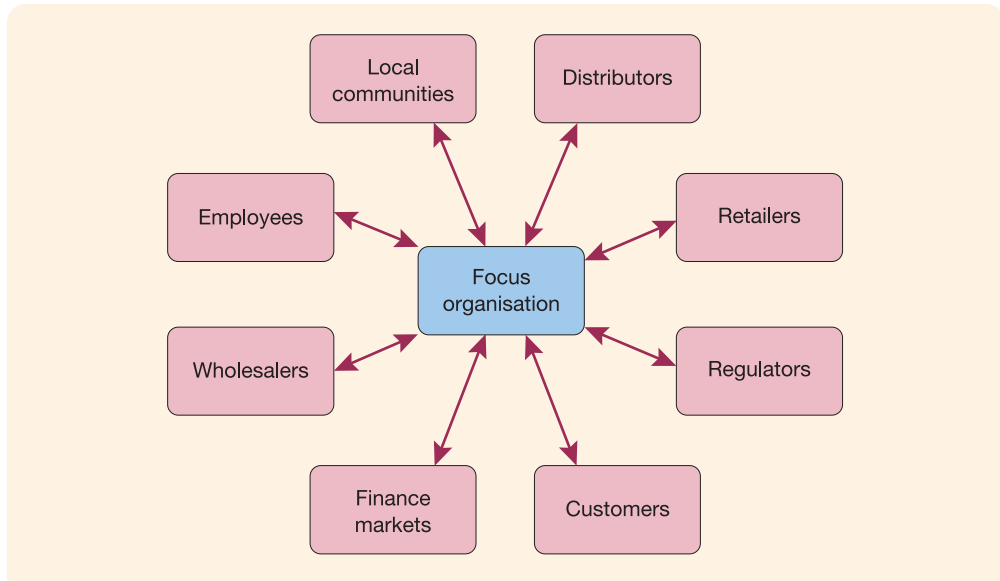


Figure 10.4 The direction of communication in a profile strategy

A profile-positioning strategy

The strategies considered so far concern the need for dialogue with customers (pull) and trade channel intermediaries (push). However, there is a whole range of other stakeholders, many of whom need to know about and understand the organisation rather than actually purchase its products and services (see Figure 10.4). This group of stakeholders may include financial analysts, trade unions, government bodies, employees or the local community. It should be easy to understand that these different stakeholder groups can influence the organisation in different ways and, in doing so, need to receive (and respond to) different types of messages. Thus, the financial analysts need to know about financial and trading performance and expectations, and the local community may be interested in employment and the impact of the organisation on the local environment, whereas the government may be interested in the way the organisation applies health and safety regulations and pays corporation, VAT and other taxes. It should also be remembered that consumers and business-to-business customers may also be more interested in the organisation itself and so help initiate an umbrella branding strategy, which is considered in Chapters 13 and 16.

Traditionally these organisational-oriented activities have been referred to as corporate communications, as they deal more or less exclusively with the corporate entity or organisation. Products, services and other offerings are not normally the focus of these communications. It is the organisation and its role in the context of the particular stakeholders' activities that is important. However, it should be noted that as more corporate brands appear, the distinction between corporate and marketing communications begins to become much less clear. Indeed, when considered in the light of the development and interest in internal marketing (and communications), it may be of greater advantage to consider corporate communications as an organisation's umbrella communications approach, with marketing communications activities a subpart of corporate communications (see Chapter 13 and van Riel, 1995).

As more corporate brands appear, the distinction between corporate and marketing communications begins to become much less clear.

Communications used to satisfy this array of stakeholder needs and the organisation's corporate promotional goals are developed through what is referred to as a profile strategy, a major element of which is corporate branding, the subject of Chapter 13.

The awareness, perception and attitudes held by stakeholders towards an organisation need to be understood, shaped and acted upon. This can be accomplished through continual dialogue, which will normally lead to the development of trust and commitment and enable relationships to grow. This is necessary in order that stakeholders act favourably towards an organisation and enable strategies to flourish and objectives be achieved.

ViewPoint 10.5

So, who are we?

Organisations need to raise their profile for different reasons and at different times. These might reflect changing market conditions, trading circumstances, poor trading results, threat of takeover or a general repositioning.

G4S had to raise its profile because of a series of takeovers and mergers, which required the company to restructure, rebrand and reposition itself. Group 4 merged with Danish Falck in 2000, merged with Securicor in 2004, and then rebranded as G4S in 2006.

The first part of the rebranding incorporated staff. Through the use of a relaunch event day, 15,000 contracted staff were given information about the new company name, structure, board composition, new uniforms and livery. In addition, internal staff received information through desk drops, magazines, new letters and question-answer sessions.

Externally oriented communications revolved around the new logo. Fresh, clean and a break from the previous visual identity.

Source: Anon. (2008).

Question

What do you believe are the main differences between rebranding and raising profile?

Task

Make a list of all the reasons an organisation might choose to deliberately raise its profile.

To build corporate brands, organisations must develop modern integrated communication programmes with all of their key stakeholder groups. Audiences demand transparency and accountability and instant on-line access to news, developments, research and networks means that inconsistent or misleading information must be avoided. As if to reinforce this, a survey reported by Gray (2000) found that CEOs rated the reputation of their organisations as more important than that of their products. However, the leading contributor to the strength of the corporate brand is seen to be their products and services, followed by a strong management team, internal communications, PR, social accountability, change management and the personal reputation of the CEO.

Stakeholder analysis is used in the development of strategic plans, so if an organisation wants its communications to support the overall plan, it makes sense to communicate effectively with the appropriate stakeholders. Rowe *et al.* (1994) point out that, because of the mutual interdependence of stakeholders and the focus organisation, 'each stakeholder is in effect an advocate of any strategy that furthers its goals'. It follows, therefore, that it is important to provide all stakeholders with information that enables them to perceive and position the organisation, so as to generate the desired corporate image. This requires a communication strategy that addresses these particular requirements, even though there may not be any immediately recognisable shift in performance.

It is important to provide all stakeholders with information that enables them to perceive and position the organisation.

However, it would be incorrect to perceive corporate communications as just a means of shaping or influencing the attitudes and behaviour of other stakeholders. Organisations exist within a variety of networks, which provide a context for the roles and actions of member organisations (Chapter 7). Bidirectional communication flows exist and organisations adapt themselves to the actions and behaviour of others in the network. Therefore, corporate communications provides a mechanism by which it can learn about the context(s) in which it exists and is itself shaped and influenced by the other stakeholders with whom it shares communications. Reference is made to the work of Grunig and Hunt (1984), considered in Chapter 19.

A *profile-positioning* strategy focuses an organisation's communications upon the development of stakeholder relationships, corporate image and reputation, whether that be just internally, just externally or both. To accomplish and deliver a profile strategy, public relations, including sponsorship and corporate advertising, become the pivotal tools of the marketing communications mix. Personal selling may remain a vital element delivering both product/service and corporate messages.

A *profile-positioning* strategy focuses an organisation's communications upon the development of stakeholder relationships, corporate image and reputation.

Strategic balance

While the pull, push and profile strategies are important, it should be remembered that they are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, in most organisations it is possible to identify an element of each strategy at any one time. In reality, most organisations are structured in such a way that those responsible for communications with each of these three main audiences do so without reference to, or coordination with, each other. This is an example of how integrated marketing communications, which is examined in Chapter 9, needs to have one senior person responsible for all the organisational communications. Only through a single point of reference is it realistically possible to develop and communicate a set of brand values that are consistent and credible.

Recognising these limitations that organisations often place on themselves, the 3Ps should be considered as part of a total communication approach. Figure 10.5 depicts how the emphasis of a total communication strategy can shift according to changing contextual elements, for example, the needs of the various target audiences, resources and wider elements such as the environment and the competition. The marketing communications eclipse provides a visual interpretation of the balance between the three strategic dimensions. The more that is revealed

The marketing communications eclipse provides a visual interpretation of the balance between the three strategic dimensions.

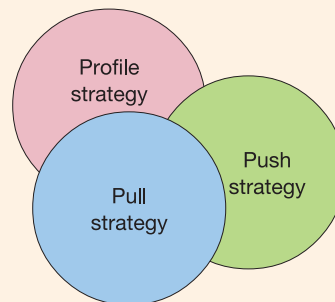


Figure 10.5 Marketing communication strategic eclipse

Table 10.5 Issues to be considered when developing marketing communications

Element	Issue
Target audiences	Which type of audience do we need to reach and why?
Channel strategies	How do we make our products/services available – direct or indirect?
Objectives	What do we need to achieve – what are our goals?
Positioning	How do we want to be perceived and understood?
Branding	How strong is our brand and what values and associations do stakeholders make with it?
Integration	How consistent are our communications, internally and externally?
Competitors	How do our communications compare with those of our key competitors?
Resources	What resources do we have and which do we need to secure?

of any one single strategy, the greater its role in any single campaign. Conversely, the less that is revealed, the smaller the contribution. In any one campaign, one or two of the three strategies might be used in preference to another and will often reflect branding approaches. For example, a brand manager's use of a profile strategy at Procter & Gamble or Mars will be virtually zero and will almost certainly be entirely pulled in order to support the marketing channel or trade customers.

The role of each element of the marketing communications mix is important in communication strategy. Each tool has different strengths and should be used accordingly. For example, direct marketing and sales promotion are more likely to be effective in persuading consumer audiences, while personal selling is likely to be more effective in b2b situations. A profile strategy designed to change perception and understanding of the organisation is more likely to utilise public relations and corporate advertising.

Marketing communication strategy, regardless of the overall focus, is normally composed of a number of different elements. When considering strategy there are a number of key issues that need to be considered. These are shown in Table 10.5.

Strategy needs to be understood in terms of the answers given in response to several critical questions. First, how are the communication goals that have been set going to be achieved? Second, how they are going to be accomplished in terms of complementing the business and marketing strategies? Third, can current resources and opportunities support the strategy and do they encourage target audiences to respond to the communications?

Answers to these questions are not always easy to find and very often there will be conflicting proposals from different coalitions of internal stakeholders. In other words, there is a political element that needs to be considered and there may also be a strong overriding culture that directs the communication strategy and that may hinder innovation or the development of alternative methods of communication. Everyone who is involved with the development of marketing communications campaigns (internally and externally) should agree and prioritise necessary activities. The development of a marketing communications plan facilitates this process and enables the strategy to be articulated in such a way that the goals are achieved in a timely, efficient and effective manner.

Internet strategies

The development of Internet-based facilities is now quite commonplace for organisations and consumers. The function and speed of development of Internet facilities within organisations

is a function of many factors, such as the size and core skills of the organisation. For example, it is normally easier for an IST organisation than a transport organisation to develop e-commerce facilities. Other factors include the nature of the product offering and the market and competitor conditions. It cannot, therefore, be concluded that there is a fixed pathway for the development and incorporation of the Internet within an organisation, nor should there be one, as the flexibility and adaptability to meet individual organisational requirements needs to be retained.

The Internet can become an integral part of the way an organisation operates, the way it sees its future and the way others see it.

However, it is useful to understand the basic types of online facilities in order to appreciate the strategic thinking that needs to be undertaken. The Internet can become an integral part of the way an organisation operates, the way it sees its future and the way others see it, and not just be used to supplement the organisation's promotional programme. Having said that, it is this technology factor, more than any other, that has done so much to

accelerate moves towards integrated marketing communications and to encourage managers to consider the totality of their activities rather than focus on an individual aspect.

The different Internet-related phases through which an organisation usually passes needs to be considered alongside the technological platform that the organisation wishes to operate. Essentially the Internet provides web site access for everyone. An extranet platform enables an organisation to restrict access to a number of selected organisations/people. For example, end-user customers, intermediaries and suppliers all might use an extranet to provide benefits that all can share and through which the host might develop competitive advantage. An intranet platform enables the use of the same browser-based technology but access is restricted to the employees of an organisation.

The strategic choice of platform requires consideration of the different stakeholders and communities with which the organisation wishes to interact. The management of these groups is then necessary in order to ensure optimum usage and the development of suitable relationships. Management need to encourage stakeholder communities to grow and to interact with one another and this requires that users be empowered, encouraged to innovate and be reviewed on a regular basis.

While the ability to reach customers directly, avoiding channel intermediaries and reducing transaction costs is attractive, strategies must be decided upon for attracting customers to a web site (or TV-based 'shop'). Reliance on online communications alone is too limiting and unlikely to be successful, so a combination of off-line and on-line communications is necessary to attract sufficient traffic.

Many online brands use television and outdoor advertising to promote not only the web site but, more importantly for them, the brand name to drive shareholder interest.

The variety of offline communications used by organisations varies according to their budgets and their overall strategy. Many online brands use television and outdoor advertising to promote not only the web site but, more importantly for them, the brand name to drive shareholder interest as these new entities seek stock market listings. As a result of this activity, outdoor advertising spend has grown substantially. Sponsorship is also used to promote web site addresses as well as a host of corporate literature such as company reports, brochures, calling cards and letterheads. Online communications vary from banner ads and pop-ups to viral marketing and public relations. However, research indicates that the most important factor driving first-time visits is word-of-mouth and recommendations by significant others. In other words, people are more disposed to having their web site behaviour directed by those they trust rather than risk time and effort seeking information based on communications that lack inherent credibility.

However, research indicates that the most important factor driving first-time visits is word-of-mouth and recommendations by significant others. In other words, people are more disposed to having their web site behaviour directed by those they trust rather than risk time and effort seeking information based on communications that lack inherent credibility.

The balance between offline and online generated traffic will also vary depending upon the nature of the brand itself. If a brand is being developed by a bricks-and-mortar company as an additional distribution and communications channel, but there is to be no visible tie to the parent company (e.g. Egg and Citibank), then the offline branding development will need to

be considerable. However, if the brand is to be tied in closely to the current channels (e.g. Argos), the initial branding can be constrained to converting current customers to the new product and to stimulating word-of-mouth recommendations, a much lower communications investment.

However, whatever the reason or branding strategy used to generate traffic, thought should be given to capitalising on the facilities to personalise the experience through the use of underlying data capture, storage, retrieval and processing abilities of integrated technologies. The ability to start with some knowledge of a customer's preferences, previous purchases, their already secure financial details and delivery address, for example, should be a major source of advantage. In addition, the interactive communications strategy needs to be thought through all points of customer interaction. Many companies have addressed the need to capture customers and even extract critical personal information but have failed to think through the total process and consider how the behaviour of the company communicates attitudes and degree of care. The use of email to confirm receipt and despatch details of a customer's order goes a long way to developing trust and positive customer attitudes, but unless the whole fulfilment exercise is compatible (and fulfilling), the whole of the investment in the front end of the exercise will be wasted.

Weltevreden *et al.* (2005) have determined a typology of Internet strategies used by retailers. In particular, they identify nine strategies employed by retailers with active web sites. These are shown at Table 10.6.

Four of these are 'information-only-strategies' where there are varying levels of product information available or services designed to assist customer relationships. The remaining five are referred to as 'online-sales-strategies' each tied in various ways to the organisation's physical outlets, or in one case not at all.

Weltevreden and Boschma (2008) conclude from a study of Danish retailers that adopting an Internet strategy invariably has positive effects on performance in terms of more customers, improved customer relationships, increased competitiveness and overall sales growth. They also found that adopting an Internet sales strategy was more beneficial for

Adopting an Internet strategy invariably has positive effects on performance.

Table 10.6 Internet strategies used by retailers

Strategy	Explanation	Product information	Online sales
Billboard	Web site used to make customers aware of their existence	None	No
Brochure	Limited product information and services	Limited	No
Catalogue	Web site provides detailed product information but limited services	Extensive	No
Service	Web site used to provide additional services to improve relationships (e.g. help desks)	Limited/extensive	No
Export	Web site used to expand into new areas without affecting their physical outlets	Extensive	Yes
Mirror	Web site used as an additional virtual outlet but few linkages with physical outlets and no additional services	Extensive	Yes
Synergy	Customer interaction between web site physical outlets encouraged through cross-promotions, ordering/pickup, full availability	Extensive	Yes
Anti-mirror	Web site the dominant channel and the role of the physical outlets is to support the web site	Extensive	Yes
Virtual	Web site is the only organisational presence	Extensive	Yes

Source: Adapted from Weltevreden and Boschma (2008).

independent retailers than it was for multiple retailers. The researchers speculate that this may be due to the independents being able to reach a wider market than previously, whereas multiples already serve a wide market.

Developing a marketing communications plan

The intended positioning can be missed if the marketing communication is not entirely effective.

The context in which a communication event is to occur shapes not only what and how messages are developed and conveyed, but also influences the interpretation and meaning ascribed to the communication. In other words the intended positioning can be missed if the marketing communication is not entirely

effective. The development of marketing communication plans helps to minimise errors and provide for efficiency and effectiveness.

There are a number of contexts that influence or shape marketing communications. All marketing managers (and others) need to understand these contextual elements and appreciate how they contribute and influence the development of marketing communication programmes. In addition, there are a number of other elements and activities that need to be built into a programme in order that it can be implemented. These elements concern the goals, the resources, the communication tools to be used and measures of control and evaluation. Just like the cogs in a clock, these elements need to be linked together if the plan is to work. The marketing communications planning framework (MCPF) aims to bring together the various elements that constitute marketing communications into a logical sequence of activities. The rationale for promotional decisions is built on information generated at previous levels in the framework. It also provides a checklist of activities that need to be considered.

To help students and managers comprehend the linkages between the elements and to understand how these different components complement each other, the rest of this chapter deals with the development of marketing communication plans. To that extent it will be of direct benefit to managers seeking to build plans for the first time or for those familiar with the activity to reconsider current practices. Second, the material should also be of direct benefit to students who are required to understand and perhaps prepare such plans as part fulfilment of an assessment or examination in this subject area.

The MCPF represents a way of bringing together the different components in the communication process.

The MCPF represents a way of bringing together the different components in the communication process, of appreciating the way in which they relate to one another and is a means of writing coherent marketing communications plans for work or for examinations, such as those offered by the Chartered Institute of Marketing.

The marketing communications planning framework

It has been established (Chapter 1) that the principal tasks facing marketing communications managers are to decide:

1. Who should receive the messages.
2. What the messages should say.
3. What image of the organisation/brand receivers are expected to retain.
4. How much is to be spent establishing this new image.

5. How the messages are to be delivered.
6. What actions the receivers should take.
7. How to control the whole process once implemented.
8. What was achieved.

Note that more than one message is transmitted and that there is more than one target audience. This is important, as recognition of the need to communicate with multiple audiences and their different information requirements, often simultaneously, lies at the heart of marketing communications. The aim is to generate and transmit messages which present the organisation and their offerings to their various target audiences, encouraging them to enter into a dialogue. These messages must be presented consistently and they must address the points stated above. It is the skill and responsibility of the marketing communications planner to blend the communication tools and to create a mix that satisfies these elements.

A framework for integrated marketing communications plans

To enable managers and students to bring together the various promotional elements into a cohesive plan, which can be communicated to others, an overall framework is required.

The MCPF (Figure 10.6) seeks to achieve this by bringing together the various elements into a logical sequence of activities where the rationale for marketing communications decisions is built upon information generated at a previous level in the framework. Another advantage of using the MCPF is that it provides a suitable checklist of activities that need to be considered.

The MCPF represents a sequence of decisions that marketing managers undertake when preparing, implementing and evaluating communication strategies and plans. It does not mean that this sequence reflects reality; indeed, many marketing decisions are made outside any recognisable framework. However, as a means of understanding the different components, appreciating the way in which they relate to one another and bringing together various aspects for work or for answering examination questions such as those offered by the Chartered Institute of Marketing, this approach has many advantages and has been used by a number of local, national and international organisations.

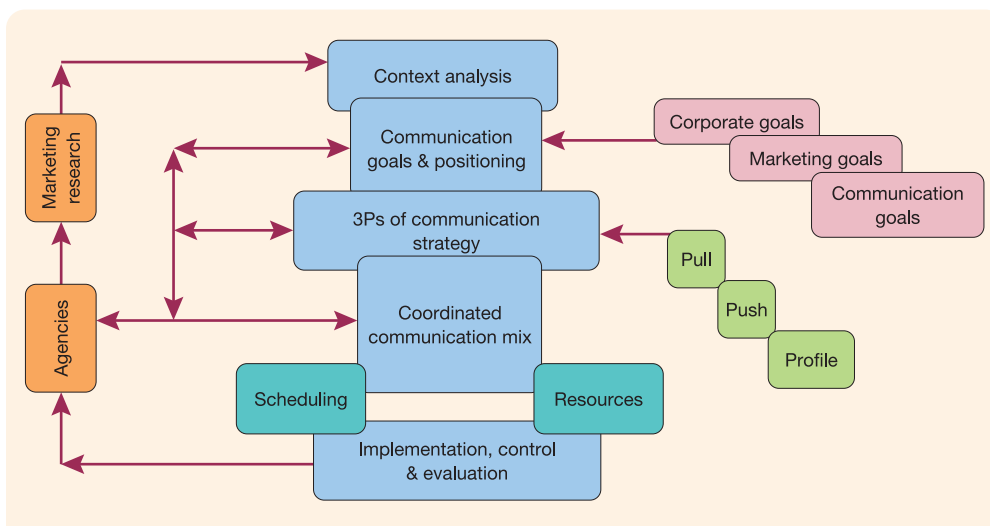


Figure 10.6 The marketing communications planning framework

Marketing communications requires the satisfaction of communication objectives.

Marketing communications requires the satisfaction of communication objectives through the explicit and deliberate development of communication strategy. The MCPF will be used to show first, the key elements, second, some of the linkages and third, the integrated approach that is required.

This framework reflects the deliberate or planned approach to strategy marketing communications. The process of marketing communications, however, is not linear, as depicted in this framework, but integrative and interdependent. To that extent, this approach is a recognition of the value of stakeholder theory and of the requirement to build partnerships with buyers and other organisations networked with the organisation.

Other 'decision sequences' have been advanced, in particular one by Rothschild (1987) and another by Engel *et al.* (1994). One of the difficulties associated with their frameworks is that they fail to bring strategy into the development of the promotional mix. Their frameworks rely on the objective and task approach, whereby plans are developed for each of the individual promotional tools, and then aggregated to form strategy.

Another more recent framework is the SOSTAC (situation, objectives, strategy, tactics, action, control) approach. This is essentially a sound system and moves closer than most of the others to achieving suitable marketing communication plans. However, as the framework is multipurpose and is intended for application to a variety of planning situations, there is a strong danger that the communication focus is lost at the situation analysis phase. This can lead to a reiteration of a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) and/or a general marketing plan, with subsequent problems further down the line in terms of the justification and understanding of the communications strategy and promotional mixes that need to be deployed. In addition, the SOSTAC model does not give sufficient emphasis to the need to identify and understand the characteristics of the target audience, which is so important for the development of a coherent marketing communications plan.

The MCPF approach presented here is not intended to solve all the problems associated with the formulation of such plans, but it is robust enough to meet the needs of employers and examiners, and is recommended.

Elements of the plan

Marketing communications plans consist of the following elements. These elements will now be considered in turn.

- Context analysis
- Communication objectives
- Marketing communications strategy
- Coordinated promotional mix (methods, tools and media)
- Resources (human and financial)
- Scheduling and implementation
- Evaluation and control
- Feedback

Context analysis

Analysing the context in which marketing communication episodes occur is a necessary, indeed vital, first step in the planning process. The purpose is to understand the key market and communication drivers that are likely to influence (or already are influencing) a brand (or organisation) and either help or hinder its progress towards meeting its long-term objectives. This is different from a situation analysis, because the situation analysis considers a range of wider organisational factors, most of which

The purpose is to understand the key market and communication drivers that are likely to influence a brand.

Table 10.7 The main elements of the context analysis

Context element	Dimensions
The customer context	Segment characteristics Levels of awareness, perception and attitudes towards the brand/organisation Level of involvement Types of perceived risk DMU characteristics and issues
The business context	Corporate and marketing strategy and plans Brand/organisation analysis Competitor analysis
The internal context	Financial constraints Organisation identity Culture, values and beliefs Marketing expertise Agency availability and suitability
The external context	Who are the key stakeholders and why are they important? What are their communication needs? Social, political, economic and technological restraints and opportunities.

are normally considered in the development of marketing plans (while the communication focus is lost). Duplication is to be avoided, as it is both inefficient and confusing.

The compilation of a context analysis (CA) is very important, as it presents information and clues about what the promotional plan needs to achieve. Information and market research data about target audiences (their needs, perception, motivation, attitudes and decision-making characteristics), the media and the people they use for information about offerings, the marketing objectives and time-scales, the overall level of financial and other resources that are available, the quality and suitability of agency and other outsourced activities, and the environment in terms of societal, technological, political and economic conditions, both now and at some point in the future, all need to be considered.

At the root of the CA is the marketing plan. This will already have been prepared and contains important information about the target segment, the business and marketing goals, competitors and the time-scales in which the goals are to be achieved. The rest of the CA seeks to elaborate and build upon this information so as to provide the detail in order that the plan can be developed and justified.

The CA provides the rationale for the plan. It is from the CA that the marketing objectives (from the marketing plan) and the marketing communications objectives are derived. The type, form and style of the message are rooted in the characteristics of the target audience, and the media selected to convey messages will be based on the nature of the tasks, the media habits of the audience and the resources available. The main components of the context analysis are set out in Table 10.7.

Communication objectives

The role of promotional objectives in the planning process is important for a number of reasons. First, they provide a balance to the plan and take away the sole emphasis on sales that inevitably arises. Second, they indicate positioning issues, third, they highlight the required balance of the promotional mix, fourth, they

Promotional objectives provide a balance to the plan and take away the sole emphasis on sales that inevitably arises.

provide time parameters for campaigns, and finally, they provide a crucial means by which particular marketing communication activities are evaluated.

Ideally, communication objectives should consist of three main elements:

Corporate objectives

These are derived from the business or marketing plan. They refer to the mission and the business area that the organisation believes it should be in.

Marketing objectives

These are derived from the marketing plan and are output-oriented. Normally these can be considered as sales-related objectives, such as market share, sales revenues, volumes, ROI and profitability indicators.

Marketing communication objectives

These are derived from an understanding of the current context in which a brand exists and the future context in the form of where the brand is expected to be at some point in the future. These will be presented as awareness levels, perception, comprehension/knowledge, attitudes towards and overall degree of preference for the brand. The choice of communication goal depends on the tasks that need to be accomplished. In addition, most brands need either to maintain their current brand position or reposition themselves in the light of changing contextual conditions.

These three elements constitute the promotional objectives and they all need to be set out in SMART terminology (see Chapter 11). What also emerges is a refinement to the positioning that managers see as important for success. Obviously, not all plans require express attention to positioning (e.g. government information campaigns) but most commercial and brand-oriented communication programmes need to communicate a clear position in their market. Thus, at this point the positioning intentions are developed and these will be related to the market, the customers or some other dimension. The justification for this will arise from the CA.

Marketing communications strategy

It is imperative that the strategy be geared to the communication needs of the target audience.

The communication strategy should be customer- not method/ media-oriented. Therefore, the strategy depends on whether the target audience is a consumer segment, a distributor or dealer network or whether other stakeholders need to be reached. In addition, it is imperative that the strategy be geared to the communication needs of the target audience that is revealed during the customer and business context analyses. This will show what the task is that marketing communications needs to fulfil. Having established who the audience is, push-, pull- or profile-dominated strategies can be identified. The next step is to determine the task that needs to be accomplished. This will have been articulated previously in the marketing communications objectives, but the approach at this stage is less quantitative and softer.

The DRIP tasks of marketing communications can be used to suggest the strategy being pursued. For example, if a new brand is being launched, the first task will be to inform and differentiate the brand for members of the trade before using a pull strategy to inform and differentiate the brand for the target, end-user customers. An organisation wishing to signal a change of strategy and/or a change of name following a merger or acquisition may choose to use a profile strategy and the primary task will be to inform of the name change. An organisation experiencing declining sales may choose to remind customers of a need or it may choose to improve sales through persuasion.

Coordinated communication mix

Having formulated, stated and justified the required position, the next step is to present the basic form and style of the key message that is to be conveyed. Is there to be a lot of copy or just a little? Is there to be a rational or emotional approach or some weighting between the two? What should be the tone of the visual messages? Is there to be a media blitz (e.g. a Microsoft-type day, as used for the launch of Windows 95, or Cable & Wireless yellow saturation)? It is at this point that those responsible for the development of these plans can be imaginative and try some new ideas. Trying to tie in the message to the strategic orientation is the important part, as the advertising agency will refine and redefine the message and the positioning.

From this the promotional mixes need to be considered *for each* of the strategies proposed, that is, a mix for the consumer strategy, a mix for the trade strategy and a distinct mix for the communications to reach the wider array of stakeholders.

The choice of promotional methods should clearly state the methods and the media to be used. A short paragraph justifying the selection is very important, as the use of media in particular is to a large extent dependent upon the nature of the goals, the target audience and the resources. The key is to provide message consistency and a measure of integration.

Resources

This is a vitally important part of the plan, one that is often avoided or forgotten about. The resources necessary to support the plan need to be determined and these refer not only to the financial issues but to the quality of available marketing expertise and the time that is available to achieve the required outcomes.

Gantt charts and other project planning aids are best used to support this part of the plan. The cost of the media and methods can either be allocated in a right-hand column of the chart, or a new chart can be prepared. Preferably, actual costs should be assigned, although percentages can be allocated if examination time is at a premium. What is important is the relative weighting of the costs and a recognition and understanding of the general costs associated with the proposed individual activities.

It must be understood that a television campaign cannot be run for less than £1.5 million and that the overall cost of the strategy should be in proportion to the size of the client organisation, its (probable) level of profitability and the size and dynamics of the market in which it operates.

Scheduling and implementation

The next step is to schedule the deployment of the methods and the media. This is best achieved by the production of a Gantt chart.

Events should be scheduled according to the goals and the strategic thrust. So, if it is necessary to communicate with the trade prior to a public launch, those activities tied into the push strategy should be scheduled prior to those calculated to support the pull strategy.

Similarly, if awareness is a goal then, if funds permit, it may be best to use television and posters first before sales promotions (unless sampling is used), direct marketing, point of purchase and personal selling.

Evaluation and control

Unless there is some form of evaluation, there will be no dialogue and no true marketing communications. There are numerous methods to evaluate the individual performance of the tools and the media used, and for examination purposes these should be stated. In addition, and perhaps more meaningfully, the most important measures are the communication objectives set in the first place. The success of a promotional strategy and the associated plan is the degree to which the objectives set are achieved.

Feedback

The planning process is completed when feedback is provided. Not only should information regarding the overall outcome of a campaign be considered but so should individual aspects of the activity. For example, the performance of the individual tools used within the campaign, whether sufficient resources were invested, the appropriateness of the strategy in the first place, any problems encountered during implementation and the relative ease with which the objectives were accomplished are all aspects that need to be fed back to all internal and external parties associated with the planning process.

Feedback is vitally important because it provides information for the context analysis that anchors the next campaign.

This feedback is vitally important because it provides information for the context analysis that anchors the next campaign. Information fed back in a formal and systematic manner constitutes an opportunity for organisations to learn from their previous campaign activities, a point often overlooked and neglected.

Links and essential points

It was mentioned earlier that there are a number of linkages associated with different parts of the marketing communications plan. It is important to understand the nature of these links as they represent the interconnections between different parts of the plan and the rationale for undertaking the contextual analysis in particular. The contextual analysis (CA) feeds the items shown in Table 10.8. For example, research undertaken by Interbrand for Intercontinental Hotels to find out what influenced the brand experience of hotel guests, discovered that one of the key factors was the hotel concierge. As a result the role of the concierge became a central character in the communication strategy, influencing the campaign goals, positioning and message strategy (Gustafson, 2007). The promotional objectives derived from the CA feed decisions concerning strategy, tools and media, scheduling and evaluation.

The marketing communications strategy is derived from an overall appreciation of the needs of the target audience (and stakeholders) regarding the brand and its competitive position in the market. The communication mix is influenced by the previous elements and the budget that follows. However, the nature of the tools and the capacity and characteristics of the media influence scheduling, implementation and evaluation activities.

To help explain the MCPF and the linkage, a mini case study follows the chapter summary and review questions. You are required to prepare a marketing communications plan. It is

Table 10.8 Linkages within the MCPF

Objectives	From the marketing plan, from the customer, stakeholder network and competitor analysis and from an internal marketing review
Strategic balance between push, pull and profile	From an understanding of the brand, the needs of the target audiences, including employees and all other stakeholders, and the marketing goals
Brand positioning	From users' and non-users' perceptions, motivations, attitudes and understanding about the brand and its direct and indirect competitors
Message content and style	From an understanding about the level of involvement, perceived risk, DMU analysis, information-processing styles and the positioning intentions
Promotional tools and media	From the target audience analysis of media habits, involvement and preferences, from knowledge about product suitability and media compatibility, from a competitor analysis and from the resource analysis

suggested that you prepare one using the material in this chapter as a guide. An answer is available at the web site www.booknets/fillc that you can use to compare with your own response. The prepared answer is not the only possible answer – there are other plans that could be of equal significance and use.

Summary

In order to help consolidate your understanding of marketing communications strategy, here are the key points summarised against each of the learning objectives:

1. Establish the differences between strategy, tactics and planning.

Two main strategy schools of thought can be identified, namely the planning and the emergent approaches. The planning school is the pre-eminent paradigm and is based on strategy development and implementation, which is explicit, rational and planned as a sequence of logical steps.

The emergent school of thought considers strategy to develop incrementally, step-by-step, as organisations learn, sometimes through simple actions of trial and error. The core belief is that strategy is comprised of a stream of organisational activities that are continuously being formulated, implemented, tested, evaluated and updated.

Strategy should be considered to be about the means, speed and methods by which organisations adapt to and influence their environments in order to achieve their goals.

2. Appreciate the essence of marketing communications strategy.

Marketing communications strategy is concerned with two key dynamics. The first dynamic is concerns who, in broad terms, is the target audience? End-user customers need to derive particular benefits based on perceived value from the exchange process. These benefits are very different from those that intermediaries expect to derive, or indeed any other stakeholder who does not consume the product or service. The second dynamic concerns the way in which an audience understands the offering they are experiencing either through use or through communications. The way in which people interpret messages and frame objects in their mind is concerned with positioning.

Marketing communications strategy is concerned with audiences and positioning.

3. Consider three main marketing communication strategies: pull, push and profile.

The 3Ps of marketing communications strategy are:

- Pull-positioning strategies – these are intended to influence end-user customers (consumers and b2b);
- Push-positioning strategies – these are intended to influence marketing (trade) channel buyers;
- Profile-positioning strategies – these are intended to influence a wide range of stakeholders, not just customers and intermediaries.

Push, pull and profile strategies can be combined in different ways to meet the needs of different communication tasks. In addition to the broad target, it is important to express strategy in terms of the differentiation (positioning), reminding/reassuring, informing and persuading of audiences.

4. Explain the notion of strategic balance.

The 3Ps are a part of a total communication approach. The pull, push and profile strategies are not mutually exclusive and it is possible to identify an element of each strategy operating at any one time.

The marketing communications eclipse provides a visual interpretation of the balance between the three strategic dimensions. The more that is revealed of any single strategy, the greater its role in any single campaign. Conversely, the less that is revealed, the smaller the contribution.

5. Explore different approaches to Internet-based communication strategies.

Internet communication strategies need to be developed on a variety of factors. These include the marketing strategy; whether the operation is a bricks extension or a pure play operation; the relationship to be held with any parent brand; the relationships with intermediaries; the methods to be used to drive site traffic; and perhaps the most important of these is probably the need to consider all points where customers interact with the brand.

6. Present a planning framework and consider the different elements involved in the development of marketing communication plans.

A marketing communications planning framework (MCPF) consists of the following elements.

- Context analysis
- Communication objectives
- Marketing communications strategy
- Coordinated communication mix (methods, tools and media)
- Resources (human and financial)
- Scheduling and implementation
- Evaluation and control
- Feedback.

The MCPF aims to bring together the various elements that constitute marketing communications into a logical sequence of activities. The rationale for promotional decisions is built on information generated at previous levels in the framework. It also provides a checklist of activities that need to be considered.

This framework reflects the deliberate or planned approach to strategy marketing communications. The MCPF represents a way of understanding the different promotional components, of appreciating the way in which they relate to one another and is a means of writing coherent marketing communications plans for work or for examinations.

7. Highlight the importance of the linkages and interaction between the different elements of the plan.

Just as the strength of the value chain lies in the internal linkages so the strength of a marketing communication plan is to be found within the various linkages that bind the components together. It is important to understand the nature of these links as they represent the interconnections between different parts of the plan and the rationale for undertaking the contextual analysis in particular.

Review questions

1. Write brief notes explaining some of the key approaches to understanding strategy.
2. Explain the role strategy plays in marketing communications.
3. Compare strategy with planning. In what ways might planning be the same as strategy?
4. What are the 3Ps of marketing communications strategy? Explain the differences between each of them and use the marketing communications eclipse to support your answer.
5. Explain the key characteristics associated with a pull strategy.
6. Draw two diagrams depicting the direction of communications in both the push and the pull strategies.
7. Describe what the 'core message' is and provide four examples.
8. Sketch the marketing communications planning framework – from memory.
9. Following on from the previous question, check your version of the MCPF with the original and then prepare some bullet-point notes, highlighting the critical linkages between the main parts of the framework.
10. Discuss the extent to which Internet strategies should be considered a part of marketing communication strategies as a whole.

MiniCase

'Ski Rossendale'

Angela Hall: Manchester Metropolitan University Business School

Introduction

Ski Rossendale is located on a hillside in the Rossendale Valley, Lancashire, 20 miles north of Manchester. It has excellent travel links, just off the end of the M66 motorway, and with buses from Manchester every 15 minutes stopping within 1 mile.

Ski Rossendale's slopes are divided into three main areas. The main slope is 200m × 25m (with 2 button tows), the fun slope is 70m × 15m (with 1 button tow and big air and railslide feature), and the nursery slope is 35m × 40m (with 2 rope tows and a travelator lift). Currently the fun slope and nursery slope are made from SNOWFLEX virtual snow, the main slope was upgraded during the last year to incorporate part SNOWFLEX and also a half-pipe was added to the bottom of the main slope.

There is also an on-site cafe that is owned and run by Ski Rossendale, and this is open while the slope is open. The cafe offers drinks, breakfast, lunch and dinner. While no formal research has taken place on usage and views of the cafe, it is generally considered to be under-utilised by the users of the slope. Currently the cafe has a general seating area, the back section of

which can be used as a separate small function area for children's parties, and an outside area where patrons can view the main slope while enjoying their refreshments.

Rossendale Leisure Trust (RLT) is a charitable trust and includes a number of business units within it. These take the form of five facilities: Haslingden Sports Centre, Haslingden Swimming Pool, Marl Pits Swimming Pool, Bacup Leisure Hall and Ski Rossendale. A sixth business unit operates under the title 'Lifestyles Team' and encompasses Sports Development, Arts Development and Healthy Communities.

Aims/objectives

Their vision is 'to establish Rossendale Leisure Trust as a benchmark organisation of its type in the UK' (www.rltrust.co.uk), with a mission of 'getting Rossendale on the move'. Seven trust values are presented:

- ensure every resident can access our services;
- help to bring our community together;



Exhibit 10.3

Ski Rossendale
Ski Rossendale.

- deliver better opportunities through partnership working;
- use resources effectively at all times;
- build on our achievements and learn from our mistakes;
- develop knowledge and understanding in sport and arts;
- provide a long-term legacy for the community of Rossendale.

No marketing objectives, or marketing communications objectives have been formalised by Ski Rossendale, and there are no formal marketing or marketing communications plans in place currently.

There is a business development manager at Ski Rossendale who took up position in July 2007. This person will develop business and focus on marketing activities, although they are from a sports science background, and currently has little marketing expertise.

Target audience

No detailed analysis of those using the slope has taken place. However, all those attending the slope are asked to give their postcode, this is recorded in paper form when hiring the equipment. Currently some very basic analysis of this is undertaken. The main geographical areas customers are from are Greater Manchester and

Lancashire, with smaller numbers from Cumbria down to North Wales and into Yorkshire. Ski Rossendale would like to look at how to capture data on current users and build relationships with these people. Data on usage figures are available, but it is recognised that this information needs to be improved. Retaining existing customers and getting them to use the slope more is seen as a key objective in the immediate future. This is especially important bearing in mind competition from the Chill Factor e (a new indoor real snow development near the Trafford Centre, Manchester), which may well try to take customers away.

Potentially, anyone interested in keeping fit and interested in outdoor activities could be targeted. Research indicates that outdoor activity participants are sporting all-rounders, with many taking part in three or more sports overall (Mintel, 2004). There is a much higher interest in extreme sports (such as snowboarding and extreme skiing) among the 15–24 year olds (Mintel, 2003). Although 1.2 per cent of UK adults go on snowsports holidays (2003), some 3.7 per cent consider themselves leisure snowsports participants (Mintel, 2003). It is estimated that there will be a 7 per cent projected growth of 18–30 year olds between 2005 and 2010 who are seen as a key target audience (Mintel, 2005). While skiing and snowboarding are seen as minority sports, there are currently 1.6 million skiers

and 0.5 million snowboarders aged 15+ within the United Kingdom (Mintel, 2006).

Ski Rossendale see one of their key target markets as being those people who are going on winter ski/snowboard holidays. The ski slope is at its busiest during the December to March period, as many people prepare themselves for their winter holiday, and lessons tend to be at full capacity during this peak period.

Currently Ski Rossendale acknowledges that they have poor links with local schools and consider this as an area for growth. However, one of the issues here is the cost of transporting children to the slope. The government has been encouraging further participation in sport with a number of plans (e.g. Plan for Sport March 2001, Game Place strategic view). Long term, the government see the promotion of sport in schools as especially important. The strengthening of links between schools and community sports clubs and the re-establishment of sport as an extra-curricular activity could be crucial in motivating schoolchildren to maintain their participation after they leave education, by introducing them to methods and venues for playing outside school. Also, increased sports participation in general is likely to encourage greater participation in extreme sports (Mintel, 2003). During the school summer holidays Ski Rossendale offered a number of holiday courses for children and this also allowed free use of the ski slope for the remainder of the school holidays.

Good links have been established with disabled groups, and the Uphill Ski Club is based at Ski Rossendale. Disabled groups are catered for much better than competitors, with disabled adaptive instruction, groups allowed to store specialist equipment there, and concessionary rates provided.

Saturday morning Kids' Club is popular, especially during the peak season. They cater for children from the age of 3 (Kindergarten classes run for 3–5 year olds). Two sessions 9.30 to 11a.m. and 11.30 to 1p.m. run every Saturday, but tend to be quieter and not running to full capacity outside the peak season. The summer Sunday race league is also aimed at children and getting them to engage with the ski slope on a more regular basis.

A key objective is to increase the level of usage of the slope at times outside peak season, especially with regard to lessons with instructors. The aim would be to offer incentives for individuals, families and other groups (e.g. schools) to increase their usage of the slope and lessons outside peak season. As the months of January and February are especially busy, they would also like to encourage people to start preparing for their holiday earlier.

Furthermore, the opening of the Chill Factor e at Trafford Park in Manchester is likely to take away some of Ski Rossendale's existing customers. Therefore, an increase in marketing communications in order to retain existing customers is also essential.

Children's parties have become increasingly popular for Ski Rossendale. This involves the use of large tubes that are sat on to come down the nursery slope, followed by a meal in the cafe. It is felt that there is potential for this to be developed further, especially during the summer months when the weather is better, and the slope quieter.

Adult parties are also starting to become popular. The use of the tubes is not restricted to the nursery slope, and therefore allows adults to go at a much faster speed. Party bookings allow for customers to bring their own alcohol and food. This allows the slope to be used outside normal opening times, and there appears to be potential to bring in increased revenue.

Prices 2008

Use of slope and hire of equipment only

Adult:	Standard Ticket (up to 2 hours)	£17
	Super Ticket (over 2 hours)	£19
Child:	Standard Ticket (up to 2 hours)	£10
	Super Ticket (over 2 hours)	£12
Adult Concession (students and over 60s)		
	Standard Ticket (up to 2 hours)	£10
	Super Ticket (over 2 hours)	£12

Special passes

Child:	Full year pass	£140
	Full year pass, direct debit	£13 per month
Adult:	Full year pass	£280
	Full year pass, direct debit	£25 per month

Ski lessons (including equipment hire)

Ski/board taster session (50 minutes)		
Adult:		£14
Child:		£8
Ski/board lessons (1 hour 45 minutes, range of levels offered)		
Adult:		£25.00
Child:		£17.50

A variety of full-day courses, ½ day courses, holiday courses etc. are offered in addition to the above. Instructors can also be hired for exclusive use by an individual or group. See www.ski-rossendale.co.uk for further information.

Ski/snowboard party
(includes equipment hire
and use of slope) 50 minute
lesson with an instructor,
followed by a party meal in
restaurant (minimum 6 in group) £15.00 per person

Snow Tube party, with party meal £10.00 per person

Competitors

At the moment, the main competitors are seen as Castleford, Sheffield and Halifax and the new facility next to the Trafford Centre in Manchester from November 2007.

Xscape Castleford (www.xscape.co.uk): This is the only real snow slope competitor currently, and therefore prices are much more expensive (e.g. 1 hour £21, 2 hours £31, lessons from £27 for 1 hour adult, and £23 per child). A wide range of facilities are available at the slope.

Sheffield Ski Village (www.sheffieldskivillage.co.uk): This is not seen as a main competitor, due to its distance, although facilities there are excellent, especially for skiing. A more complicated pricing structure exists here, although they offer a number of children's activities and 'piste & feast' events also.

Halifax (www.ridehalifax.co.uk): Closer than Sheffield, although the slope is smaller. It is more attractive to snowboarders, with a wide range of jumps (e.g. main 20ft kicker, side kicker, small learner jump, 10ft quarter pipe).

Manchester The Chill Factor e (www.chilfactore.com) opened in November 2007. It is next to the Trafford Centre, Manchester, and is a ski complex offering snowboarding, skiing, ice wall for climbers, tobogganing facilities, along with a rock-climbing wall and a children's play area. There are three ski slopes, the longest being 180 metres long. There is also an après-ski area with alpine-themed bars and restaurants. This is Britain's biggest indoor ski slope. Prices are £22 per adult and £18 for children at peak times for 1½ hours, and £17 adult/£14 children at off-peak times (although these prices do not cover hire of equipment, unlike Ski Rossendale).

Marketing communications

Ski Rossendale has recently out-sourced the production of a web site, which contains basic information concerning opening times, courses and costs, and allows for electronic queries to be raised.

Generally, little marketing communications is undertaken. A variety of leaflets is produced and these are available at the ski slope or at the other organisations within the trust. Some leaflets have been inserted into local newspapers, and some leaflet drops have been undertaken in some of the local areas, but this only happens very occasionally. Some local newspaper advertising has been undertaken, as well as limited PR through a small number of press releases. Representatives from Ski Rossendale also attend the annual Ski Show in Manchester, which takes place in October, and run ski lessons on the ski slope at the event. Some mutually beneficial marketing communications has been undertaken with Jaguar at Bolton and Blackburn, which involved Ski Rossendale banners and information being put up in its showrooms, while Jaguar brought demonstration cars to Ski Rossendale for a weekend. The first annual open day is being held this October where use of the facilities will be free for the day. The Marketing Manager feels that far more marketing communications could be undertaken. Innovative ideas are sought that will help to stretch the budget of £40,000 per annum. Although small, this is a substantial increase in the £10,000 available two years ago.

There is an opportunity to build relationships with existing customers, although at the moment, they do not have a full, useable database of these existing customers. Very few PR activities have been undertaken, and with such a small budget there is potential here to stretch this. Over the next year the key groups to target are: existing customers (retain them and increase their usage); better links and usage by schools; increase in use as a party destination (children and adults). In the longer term more users need to be attracted and usage for corporate events increased (although at the moment, they do not have the facilities to cater for this market).

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MiniCase questions

Your brief

The assignment is based on the Ski Rossendale case study. You are to take on the role of a marketing

communications consultant to the Trust. Your task is to provide an analysis of the marketing communications problems and issues, set objectives and develop a new communications strategy for the club. This is to be implemented over the next 12 months.

Tasks

1. Analysis

You should provide a thorough, logically structured analysis of the facts as reported in the case, using other information to support your analysis. You will need to consider internal and external influences and use the figures, where appropriate, to provide evidence to support your analysis. This should include a summary of what you believe the key issues are that the Trust faces. These should be focused on areas that come under your remit as a consultant in marketing communications.

2. Objectives

These should be specific; they should relate to the 12-month period; you may include longer-term objectives. You should include some numerate objectives.

3. Marketing communications strategy

The final part of your report will provide strategic direction for the organisation. Define target segments. How should the organisation position itself? Which elements of the communications mix should be utilised and to what purpose? You should include a schedule of the methods and media to be used. You should also present an outline budget indicating the cost and allocation of budget to your communications proposals. Sources should be clearly quoted for all costs.

4. Evaluation of the marketing communications plan

Discuss how you would measure the effectiveness of the plan, and how this would be monitored and evaluated. Ensure you refer to appropriate theory in this area.

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