

MANAGING BRANDS AS THE BUSINESSMAN'S PERMANENT JOB—AND THE CONSUMER AS JUDGE

It's a known fact that “public presentation” and final positioning of any for- or non-profit product, service, or undertaking generally is not enough in itself—no matter how original, creative, and/or innovative as the offer may be—rather it depends on the favorable convergence of a variety of internal or external variables in order to reach the ultimate goals of the project submitted for the pertinent market's consideration.

Keep furthermore in mind that, with but few exceptions, most entrepreneurs hope that their initiative will last for some time and cross beyond the borders of the territory where the “idea” starts to take hold. The “idea” is precisely the main focus of this anniversary edition, dedicated to those trademarks that have been able to stay present in the lives of many Venezuelans and that, in the case of brands originating in our country, definitely form a part of our national core, and in the case of foreign brands, have established themselves as permanent guests.

For this to happen, one of the most obvious (though not easily forged) tools is the selection of the “passport” for the product, service, or undertaking that wishes to make itself known (i.e. BRANDS) in such a way that “immigration officials” (the eventual public) take good notice of the identifying characteristic of that brand with respect to the corresponding good.

Thereafter, what may result is a “simplified” formula, meaning the selection of a “name” or a “presentational tag” that individualizes a particular good in the public mind, which normally ends up having a direct influence on the success or failure of a commercial enterprise where, even with a successful formula or quality offer, an inappropriate legal attire halts or hinders the fulfillment of the objectives in the short run, or, what's worse, creates an apparent “solidness” (as with brands devised from elements directly related to the products or services) that later on gets diluted with the rise of *similar* offers with *look-alike* names.

Thus, the integration of the capabilities among specialists in advertising, marketing and intellectual property should become mandatory for any businessman that manages a business plan where the offer requires a “brand,” with the intent of finding the identifier that, without departing too far from the good to be distinguished, will be capable of transmitting a distinctive advertising concept and individualizing it in such a way that it becomes “unique” to the consumer.

But, seeing as the selection process for a brand is just the beginning of *something* that hopes to become successful, it is not merely enough to have an efficient trademark, rather the lifespan

of a business's or institute's plan demands extra "intangible" accessories that bestow the creation with a unique identity, among them:

- a) Concept or idea for the development of advertising campaigns as well as the configuration and demands of the marketplace to which the product is delivered or the service aims
- b) Advertising phrases (commercial slogans)
- c) New brands that become incorporated as variations of the originally known brand, (iconography, image updating)
- d) New "shapes" (e.g. "vessels," which function perfectly as 3-D brands; case in point, the classic "Coca-Cola" glass bottle) that allow for commercial success starting with the "container" (e.g. perfume flasks) even without having any contact with the contents

In this way, the effective positioning of a brand at a particular moment cannot be seen by the beneficiary (businessman, association, partnership, etc.) as the "end goal," but rather as a new jumping-off point from which one should work at the sustained upkeep of the endorsed quality levels for the customer's or user's approval, and refashion the product's public image—embodied in its portfolio of brands and in the advertising campaigns that accompany it—in such a way as to be able to detect at the right time changes in the *target's* tendencies or in the variables that influence the capacity for consumption, so as to adapt at the opportune moment and not remain behind the times.

We see then how those assets (brands and trademark) that allow for communication from "businessman-to-product-to-advertising-to-consumer" demands close attention at all moments during their lifespan in order to keep them in the public eye, a duty that attaches to strictly legal matters in the upkeep of portfolios (which also includes the procedure of throwing out those labels that have lost their "crispness" during that time while avoiding taking on unnecessary costs and efforts), as well as attacking initiatives by competitors that can weaken your existing rights.

And this is a complex subject, for what today is known as a "*strong*" brand (where for the end recipient of the offered good there is no confusion about the brand and the specific product or service that it identifies) could wide up becoming *generic*, in legalese what we call "vulgarization," a concept recognized in Venezuela following the implementation of the 486th Decision of the Andean Community in 2000, which is simply the loss of the "individualizing power" or distinguishing efficacy of a given brand.

For situations such as this it becomes difficult not to think about the case of local (luckily still) brands, like “Pepito” for cheese cornsticks and “Paisa” for cheeses, which, thanks to efficient communication strategies, have managed to survive (despite the ironic punishment), proving to be in their day an undeniable leadership that have been able to fulfill the aim of a brand in being perceived by the consumer as a “type” of product, instead of an individualized product, with a unique company origin (for more information see “El Reto de Hacer Marca” by the undersigned therein and Ricardo Antequera Parilli, published in *Producto*, August 2000).

As if the problems weren’t enough, the rise of digital technologies, along with the internet as an established phenomenon in the present and future culture, has generated opportunities along with, regrettably, threats for those who mean to “show” and let known their business’s or institution’s message, as the case may be. Thus, “identifying oneself” efficiently through the *web* by domain names has been a priority of late, that in its day created multiple inconveniences (essentially cases of cyber-squatting or cyber-pirating) amidst persons who take advantage of a registration system where the legal issues, at least in principle, are of little of importance and the domain names (usually brands) are simply assigned to the first one who asks for the registration.

The same dynamism of the internet and the increasingly difficult acquisition of clientele have spurred the development of relatively recent concepts such as the previously mentioned “*image updating*,” including for supremely traditional brands, or the use of technologic tools in order to “liven up” conservative logos during their stagnant moments (e.g. the cases of the brands “Columbia Tri Star” or “Universal Studios” where, while keeping the conceptual structure, the brand is livened up thus adding mobility), or a brand like “Google” which has incorporated into its permanent branding policy “popping up” in different ways (always with the same name) in response to events of international importance.

For all these reasons, it is clear that keeping up with the times is not a simple path, that it requires multidisciplinary capabilities that make brands and the goods or presentational styles that they distinguish into a business asset, one on level with the articles in this anniversary edition.

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