

MARKETING A BRAND IN CRISIS

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In life, there is no person, object or company which is perfect and the same applies to brands. Every brand runs the risk of getting into a state of crisis if not managed properly. In today's competitive world, reputation is everything. The definition of a brand is quite well known, however, it should be noted that great brands are championed by everyone.

Creating a new brand is not easy and there are several items such as the brand identity and brand claim that need to be considered and thought through very carefully. Great brands pay attention and are responsive to their consumers. They change with the times, move to meet goals, meet a compelling need and inspire loyalty. In addition, brands need to add some sort of value, facilitate choice and insulate against competition. Overall, brands need to make money sense.

For any start-up, there are 6 simple steps which could be used to determine which direction the brand will take. Individuals or corporates should consider defining the need of that particular brand, write down and capture the objectives, analyze the outside world in regards to strategic placement and competition, develop a draft brand platform and strategy, test and refine the entire brand concept, and finally, develop the brand tools such as the marketing plan.

A solid plan will guide a brand from its conceptualization through its first years all the way to when it matures and hopefully, never dies. The aim of most brands should be to create and build a brand that will gain good credibility and stronger brand equity as the years go by. Of course, the road to greatness does not come without a few bumps and potholes. Crisis is usually created by the external public, and can easily lead to loss of business or sales, and long term negative publicity. One of the keys to restoring a brand's image is to reestablish consumer trust.

Brand Kenya is a perfect example of a 'Brand in Crisis' due to the general insecurity in the country given the recent terrorist attacks in parts of Nairobi and Mombasa, and the hard

economic times which are currently upon us. To add to that, the diplomatic gaffes, strikes, political infighting as devolution comes under trial, and a bloated wage bill also doesn't contribute positively to Brand Kenya, or the way the public perceive Brand Kenya.

There is really no guarantee for any company to determine whether or not they will be subject to negative brand perception. It is for this reason that it is very important to have a plan in place to manage such situations should they arise. Another key element of marketing a brand in crisis is to address the situation in a timely and efficient manner.

Consumers want to connect realistically with a brand, therefore it is usually best to acknowledge the negative comments being thrown around such as: the travel advisories from the US, UK, Australia and France warn against traveling to Kenya, the ICC and its pursuit of justice, the journalist Walter Barasa went to go to jail for witness tampering, the Kenyan police crackdowns which resulted in a power struggle between Kenya and Somalia, and the Saudi embassy complaints over the arrest of one of their citizens while being on holiday in Kenya.

Once a brand has shown the external public that it is also aware of what is happening, the next best thing to do is engage in discussions, or publicize the brand's future intentions, that is what the brand are planning to do about the current predicament.

In regards to Brand Kenya, it is important to boost the brand by looking for positive ways to inform its target audience that regardless of all the insecurities and perceptions, they should continue to look for opportunities and not hesitate from getting involved with Kenya as a whole. Rwanda is a great example of a country that has had its fair share of negativity, especially due to the genocide and insecurities in the country thereafter.

Since that incident, the country has managed to build its reputation in a way that attracts foreign investors and tourists, and even Kenyan companies such as Equity Bank have spread their businesses across to that terrain. Rwanda may not have much to offer in terms of return on investment, but it's the way they have marketed their country, leveraged on incidents that have negatively portrayed them, and taken pride in their products like Rwanda Air that have helped boost their economy and overall brand perception. Each country has its flaws and Kenya is one of them, but Kenya is also a land of opportunity. Brand Kenya has potential to truly thrive despite its current crisis, but only if they market themselves in a way that will show their target audience that the company understands their views and concerns, states the current affairs, and portray the problems on a global scale.

The right kind of communication is critical, and consumer reassurance is vital. Kenya is still the place to travel and invest in, as it has ever been termed as the 'headquarters for Eastern Africa' and the 'gateway to Eastern Africa'. The use of a prominent authoritative figure to back up the Brand Kenya initiative may also be a good idea for this particular situation to add

credibility to any statements made, and perhaps influence those who are being targeted.

Taking Brand Kenya as an example, the ideal authoritative figure would need to be someone with a similar personality as the brand. The first person who comes to mind in this scenario is President Uhuru Kenyatta for the simple fact that he is still being investigated by the ICC, but still manages to come out a hero and represent the country both at a national and an international level.

Despite the current outlook from the external public on Kenya, the President's perception and visibility is very positive and very high. President Uhuru Kenyatta recently closed a major logistics deal with China, and was invited to Washington DC to be part of the Africa-US summit in August 2014.

It is without a doubt that the President is excellent at building strong relations with the external public and Brand Kenya would be wise to adopt his tactics and strategies as a 'brand'. Furthermore, Brand Kenya could leverage on the President's great reputation both nationally and globally to promote Kenya's image in an optimistic, encouraging and positive way. There are two main questions which are glaringly obvious now that it has been established that there is a brand which is in crisis, and that there is an influential figure who may be able to help.

Firstly, how can 'Kenya' the 'brand' put Brand Kenya on the road to recovery? And secondly, how can President Uhuru Kenyatta use his already existing thriving brand to influence the countries Brand? It should not be forgotten that the aim of marketing a brand which is in crisis is to get that specific brand out from crisis, and even enhance its position in the community. It does not matter if the brand is a company, an object or a person; all brands should take heed and come up with a marketing plan which is able to handle moments of crisis quickly.

Corporate heads should not compromise on marketing especially when the going gets tough or when the upward trend starts dipping as this is when marketing is most needed. KTB, EPC, Brand Kenya Board, and Ken Invest have partnered up to form one entity which is known as 'The Kenya Investment Promotion Service'. Irrespective of whether or not the government is right in deciding to cut down its marketing budget by merging key marketing institutions, it is strongly advised that good marketing is kept up to its highest standards and quality as that is what is essential, especially in crisis moments.

Going forward, it is important to remember that all brands can be perceived negatively in their lifetime so it is almost mandatory to have a marketing strategy in place to deal with the crisis as soon as it happens. There are different approaches which can be taken to manage a crisis, and each approach is highly dependent on each individual situation.

Many brands forget about crisis management until it is already happening, at which point it needs urgent and immediate attention. It is for this precise reason that it is never a good idea to cut the budget on marketing as it can significantly govern the survival of the brand.

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