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Reinforcing and Revitalizing Brands

The main assertion of this chapter is that marketers must actively manage brand equity over time by reinforcing the brand meaning and, if necessary, by making adjustments to the marketing program to identify new sources of brand equity.

A. Reinforcing Brands

Generally, we reinforce brand equity by marketing actions that consistently convey the meaning of the brand to consumers in terms of brand awareness and brand image. As we have discussed before, questions marketers should consider are as follows:

- What products does the brand represent, what benefits does it supply, and what needs does it satisfy? Nutri-Grain has expanded from cereals into granola bars and other products, cementing its reputation as "makers of healthy breakfast and snack foods."

- How does the brand make those products superior? What strong, favorable, and unique brand associations exist in the minds of consumers? Through product development and the successful introduction of brand extensions, Black & Decker is now seen as offering "innovative designs" in its small appliance products.

Both these issues—brand meaning in terms of products, benefits, and needs as well as in terms of product differentiation—depend on the firm's general approach to product development, branding strategies, and other strategic concerns. This section reviews some other important considerations for brand reinforcement, including the advantages of maintaining brand consistency, the importance of protecting sources of brand equity, and trade-offs between fortifying and leveraging brands.

1. Maintaining Brand Consistency

Without question, the most important consideration in reinforcing brands is consistency in the nature and amount of marketing support the brand receives. Brand consistency is critical to maintaining the strength and favorability of brand associations. Brands with shrinking research and development and marketing communication budgets run the risk of becoming technologically disadvantaged—or even obsolete—as well as out-of-date, irrelevant, or forgotten.

Market Leaders and Failures. Inadequate marketing support is an especially dangerous strategy when combined with price increases.

Consistency and Change. Being consistent does not mean, however, that marketers should avoid making any changes in the marketing program. On the contrary, managing brand equity with consistency may require making numerous tactical shifts and changes in order to maintain

the strategic thrust and direction of the brand. The most effective tactics for a particular brand at any one time can certainly vary. Prices may move up or down, product features may be added or dropped, ad campaigns may employ different creative strategies and slogans, and different brand extensions may be introduced or withdrawn to create the same desired knowledge structures in consumers' minds.

Nevertheless, the strategic positioning of many leading brands has been kept remarkably uniform over time by the retention of key elements of the marketing program and the preservation of the brand meaning. In fact, many brands have kept a key creative element in their marketing communication programs over the years and, as a result, have effectively created some "advertising equity."

Brands sometimes return to their roots to remind existing or lapsed customers or to attract new ones. Such efforts to refresh awareness obviously can make sense. At the same time, marketers should be sure that these old advertising elements or marketing appeals have enduring meaning with older consumers but are also relevant to younger consumers. They should examine the entire marketing program to determine which elements are making a strong contribution to brand equity and must therefore be protected.

2. Protecting Sources of Brand Equity

Consistency thus guides strategic direction and does not necessarily prescribe the particular tactics of the supporting marketing program for the brand at any one point in time. Unless some change in either consumer behavior, competition, or the company makes the strategic positioning of the brand less powerful, there is likely little need to deviate from a successful positioning.

Although brands should always look for potentially powerful new sources of brand equity, a top priority is to preserve and defend those that already exist. Ideally, the key sources of brand equity are of enduring value. Unfortunately, marketers can easily overlook that value as they attempt to expand the meaning of their brands and add new product-related or non-product-related brand associations. The next section considers these types of trade-offs.

3. Fortifying or Leveraging

In managing brand equity, marketers face tradeoffs between activities that fortify brand equity and those that leverage or capitalize on existing brand equity to reap some financial benefit.

Marketers can design marketing programs that mainly try to capitalize on or maximize brand awareness and image—for example, by reducing advertising expenses, seeking increasingly higher price premiums, or introducing numerous brand extensions. The more marketers pursue this strategy, however, the easier it is to neglect and perhaps diminish the brand and its sources of equity. Without its sources of brand equity, the brand itself may not continue to yield such