

INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS – MEANS OF COMMUNICATION WITH CUSTOMERS

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Abstract

Within a company's activities, an important role is granted to the performance and implementation of information campaigns for the final consumers. The paper has the general objective to identify specific issues that constitute the premises for the preparation and conduct of such activities, and especially the expected results. The analysis is performed and based on a direct research among several companies, which operate in various fields, for the identification of a method of performance and implementation of information campaigns that are necessary for ensuring visibility on the reference market. The aim of the study was to identify the importance that the firms from Resita give to information campaigns addressed to a target audience. The study was carried from April to May 2013 on a sample of small, medium and large firms, which operate in trade, manufacturing and services. The questions and the discussions addressed to the public were meant to outline the specific aspects of the exact way in which the information campaigns were done for their clients, but also to underline the results obtained with the help of these campaigns.

Keywords

information campaign; efficiency; methods of information; promotion; visibility

JEL Classification

M31; M39

1. Introduction

Attracting customers and securing their loyalty is still a problem to solve for many companies. This aspect should represent a priority in the organisations' endeavour to reach a representative market share, as we are witnessing a multiplication of final customers' needs. In this respect, economic entities should orient their marketing activities so that the expected results should correspond to the efforts made for reaching their goals. There are numerous tools at the disposal of companies meant to operationalise them on the reference market according to the planning of specific activities, so that the message to be conveyed to the target market might correspond to the set goals. According to the literature, the modalities of presenting a firm's products or services are varied, depending on the proposed purpose, but especially on the messages transmitted to the target public, which has as final result the consumers' information. Numerous specialists (*Manole, Stoian, accessed, 2013.*) consider that promotion and communication represent two closely connected concepts, because in order to implement any form of promotion communication is necessary, and the instruments used in promotional activities are represented by the various

communication forms. All these aspects shaped in an efficient strategy of communication of the organisation with the customer's lead to the creation of the clients' attachment towards the organisation. Thus, the customers' loyalty comprises *"the measures a company takes in order to influence the present and future customers' behaviour intentions towards a company or its activities in a positive sense, in order to stabilise and develop its relation with them."* (Bruhn, 2003). Consequently, the organisation's communication with the customers represents an intentional process, which means an exchange of messages among them with the purpose to reach both individual (customers') objectives, and the objectives of the organisation. The organisation's success in its relation with the customers and especially its positioning on the reference market depend on the quality of this communication. Moreover, the efficient management of the relation with the customers represents *"the systematic analysis, planning, implementation and control of all measures taken by a company oriented towards the customer, with the purpose of persevering the relation with the customers and to maintain this connection as well as possible"* (Bruhn, 2001). The establishment of the organisation–customers relation is determined by the source's capacity to satisfy expectations and its ability to be convincing. Instability is not brought about by the impossibility to communicate, but by the result of the commitment to communicate or the impossibility to engage a long-term communication.

The difficulties occurring in the communication with the customers is caused by the persons involved in this process, as the modalities in which they process information result in the consequences of their action. Whenever the target public does not benefit from pertinent information interpretation, we may encounter incompatibilities, gaps or errors among the interpreters involved in communication, errors resulting from the insufficiency of real-time information. Time reality means the period when concretely and objectively the communication process can take place. Thus, for a correct, clear, actual and real-time information of customers, we consider that the most efficient modality is represented by the information companies, which in our opinion refer to the specific marketing activities with the role to inform the target public about the concrete aspects of the organisation in order to ensure its short-term, medium-term and long-term visibility on the reference market. That is why, for any organisation it is essential to know that the need for communication with its customers becomes a basic need in order to give a public existence to a certain activity, idea or product / service, so that it is not enough for these aspects to exist, but they should also be known. Moreover, beyond any organisation's basic preoccupations, they are permanently confronted with an environment which leaves no moment of respite and consequently its positioning in relation with the customers becomes an efficient modality for creating competitive advantage. In other words no organisation can resist on the market or can have a future if it fails to constructively communicate with its customers. We consider thus that in order to communicate in a constructive manner with customers through information campaigns it is necessary to know and apply several basic rules. These rules refer to the clear, concise and precise formulation of the message in order to be easily and entirely comprehended, to the customers' motivation raising in order to make them listen to the message transmitted, the use of a common language, the correct transmission of the message, the use of the most adequate communication channels, and, last but not least, the effort to ensure the flexibility and adaptability of the communication system to the requirements or influential factors.

2. Research methodology

In order to correctly comprehend the aspects of realising and implementing an information campaign, we conducted a direct research among the firms of the town of Reșița, with the purpose of identifying the importance they grant to the customers information campaigns. The specific objectives of the research refer to: information modalities a firm uses in the relation with its customers; the frequency of using information campaigns; the expected results and the results obtained following the implementation of such campaigns, and the costs afferent to the realisation and implementation of such information campaigns. Conducting such a study meant identifying the stages necessary for its realisation. Thus, the stages had a logic sequence, from the identification of the general objective and the objectives specific to research, the identification of the target public, the selection of the study representative sample, the actual deployment of the study and the data centralisation, to the analysis and interpretation of the collected data and the study conclusions. (Costencu, 2003). In the case of our research, the subjects were the companies registered as operating with their basic economic activity in the town of Reșița, with the possibility of expanding their activity to other towns. Moreover, the respondents are legal persons operating in one of the following domains: commerce, production or services; they are classified into small firms (1-9 employees), medium firms (10-49 employees) and large firms (50-249 employees). Thus, the criteria for selecting the firms were based on three variables: positioning of respondent in the town of Reșița, domain of activity and size of the organisation. The modality of conducting the survey supposed an individual inquiry, structured in accordance with the chosen variables, based on a 15-question questionnaire, 13 of evaluation and two of identification. The questions are conceived and structured in a logical form, which means that for the identification of aspects relevant for the study both closed and open questions were asked, along with mixed, semi-closed or semi-open questions. The data collection was done directly from the representatives of the companies by the distribution of questionnaires and discussions on the basis of question and their answers, the data analysis and interpretation being done for each question and variant of answer. Due to the fact that the number of companies operating in the town of Reșița is not significant, the analysis constitutes a pre-inquiry for the determination of the representative sample for the Caras-Severin county for a future quantitative study. Thus, our analysis is a qualitative one, the respondents being in number of 65, as these companies are active on the reference market and correspond to our analysis criteria. The establishment of this sample paid attention to both internal and external factors as the percentage of small firms in Reșița is much higher than that of medium and large companies.

3. Analysis and interpretation of results

The first question refers to the existence or absence of information campaigns among customers. A number of 65 firms answered this question, which represents 100% of the total number of respondents. More than half (62.54%) claim they organise information campaigns for customers, and the most active firms from this point of view are the large firms followed by the medium ones, whereas small firms rank last. Furthermore, the firms in the field of commerce are those that conduct more information campaigns, followed by those operating in services and then in production. The second question refers to the modalities firms use in order to conduct information campaigns. Taking into account that this is a multiple-choice question, the data analysis points out the possibility of realising information campaigns, in

accordance with the proposed purpose. This question too was answered by a number of 65 respondents, representing 100% of the total. The most frequently used methods of organising information campaigns were implemented on the occasion of the promotion of certain products, services, or promotional manifestations (63.08%), of the realisation of different forms of publicity (47.69%), direct marketing (44.61%) or public relations (16.92%). Diverse modalities of customers' information are adopted in all three sectors of activity with higher weights in commerce and services compared to production. Question no.3 "*How efficient do you think your modalities of consumers' information were ?*" was answered by all the interviewed firms (a 100% proportion). Most respondents (52.31%) affirmed that these information campaigns were very efficient; 47.69% of them consider they were only efficient and there is no answer recorded for the "inefficient" variant. As for the firm's size, the higher percentage of the "very efficient" answer is represented by large firms, followed by the medium and small ones. As regards the question "*What were the costs allotted for the information campaigns?*", we should remark that a significant percentage, 49.23% of the interviewed firms, did not wish to answer this question. Nevertheless, among the firms that chose to answer, the largest sums were spent by large companies (between 13,000 and 60,000 RON), followed by medium enterprises (between 6,000 and 7,000 RON), whereas other respondents affirm to have spent amounts in accordance with their profit for the information campaigns.

When asked about the possibility to allot a larger budget for the consumers' information campaigns, more than half of the interviewed companies, 70.77%, consider that it is not necessary to allot a larger budget for the information campaigns, and a small percentage of the total respondents, 29.23%, claim that for an efficient confirmation of consumers it is necessary to supplement the budget allotted to information campaigns, probably for the diversification of the information modalities. In relation with the importance of allotting financial resources for the information campaigns, 69.23% of the respondents consider that it is very important to allot financial resources for the realisation and implementation of information campaigns, but without bringing forward arguments in this respect. Manufacturing firms, followed by service providers and traders confirm that a well-structured budget can constructively solve the consumers' information. Moreover, large firms stress the allotment of a certain budget for organising information campaigns; at the opposite pole we find small trade firms. Nevertheless, the most important actions for the consumers' information, in the respondents' opinion, remain the promotion actions, without specifying concrete forms of information.

Taking into consideration the periodicity of the information campaigns, most respondents, 61.54%, affirm that these campaigns are realised and often implemented by the firm for the information of customers; 26.15% of them claim that these campaigns are implemented very often, while a 12.31% percentage admits to rarely organise information campaigns. We should also remark that small firms rarely organise information campaigns, but the respondents did not specify what "often", "very often" or "rarely" means in their opinion, when it comes to precise sequences in time. The general purpose of realising and implementing information campaigns refer, for the respondents, to answers as "attracting new customers", "keeping the existing customers' loyalty" or other variants indicated by the respondents. When answering this question, more than half of the respondents, 64.61% consider that the general purpose of information campaigns is found in the dimension of attracting and securing customers' loyalty, an important aspect for large firms, followed by the medium companies and the small enterprises. We remark that there is no other reply variants beside those indicated.

When analysing the customers' opinion about information campaigns from the respondents' perspective, a 50.77% percentage considers that most customers are content with the message transmitted, without specifying, nevertheless, the reason or reasons making them think that. This answer is chosen by most medium firms, followed by the large ones and then the small ones. However, 49.23% of the respondents affirm that most customers are satisfied that these campaigns bring about price cuts, special offers, promotions etc. We must remark that no interviewed firm considers information campaigns as dissatisfying for customers, which constitutes strength in their relation with their customers. An especially important aspect refers to the identification of human resources conducting these information campaigns. 69.23% of the respondents confirm the fact that these information campaigns are not realised by specialists from the marketing department of the firm, answer given by most small firms; there are also respondents who chose not to specify this aspect. Moreover, it is remarked that in small firms customers' information is frequently done by the firm's personnel, irrespective of their position. Consequently, a 30.77% percentage affirms that the marketing department of the firm conceives and implements information campaigns for customers, answer indicated by large companies. We should also remark that in small enterprises there is no marketing compartment/department, which represents a weakness of theirs as regards the planning and conducting of these information campaigns. We must also underline that, if the interviewed firms operate in other towns too, the information campaigns are done simultaneously in all locations, in different specific periods, either in an identical manner or in different ways. Most significant percentages are recorded among large firms in the sector of commerce, services or production. As for the modalities of customers' information, they may be the same or different depending on other factors specific to the central or secondary locations.

After conducting this study, we may draw several conclusions that constitute both advantages and disadvantages in the establishment and/or preservation of the relation with customers by means of information campaigns. Thus, most firms organise information campaigns, but there are also firms that do not, especially small enterprises, which constitutes a huge weakness, as the customers' information should represent the core point of the firm in establishing the relation with the customers. Most of the interviewed firms affirmed they used several modalities of customers' information through publicity, sales promotion, direct marketing or promotional events, public relations being the less used method, also mentioning that these information campaigns were very efficient. Furthermore, most respondents affirmed that it was very important to allot financial resources for such activities, in some cases the budget should be increased, but there are also situations when the budgetary share was a constructive one. However, there was a significant percentage of respondents who did not want to specify the budget they allotted for the information campaigns. The goal of conducting such campaigns refers to attracting customers or securing their loyalty, they are frequently organised, most respondents being large companies. We should also remark that most firms do not organise information campaigns within the marketing department of the firm, these activities being performed by other employees (in small firms), and part of the firms carry on their information campaigns in other towns too, where they have secondary activity locations, and most of them organised identical information campaigns.

4. Conclusions

From the documentation studied, but also from the survey applied we may remark that the activity of information focused on a firm's customers should represent a priority of the organisation's management, in the complex endeavour of identifying, attracting or securing customers' loyalty, because no company can developed without informed and satisfied customers. Moreover, we consider that irrespective of size, firms must absolutely conduct customers' information campaigns, and the modalities of implementation should be integrated into a process with positive finality. The costs for each information campaign should be set in accordance with the general and specific objectives of these campaigns, and these costs must be written down in the promotional budget of the company. Creating a marketing department or division within the firm or externalising these activities to marketing specialists able to organise such information campaign will definitely result in the implementation of specific activities with positive results. Consequently, raising the management's awareness as regards the necessity and importance of information campaigns, correlated with the selection of the most efficient implementation tools may lead to the attraction of new customers, preservation of the present ones, and ensuring the firm's visibility on the reference market.

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