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## **THE ROLE OF OFF-LINE AND ONLINE STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL PRODUCT POSITIONING**

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*The study of the article is done on off-line and online strategies that companies use for their successful positioning. The goal is to establish the role and the significance of the strategies for successful product positioning in off-line and online environment.*

**Keywords:** *strategies, positioning, offline strategies, online strategies.*

**Introduction.** Positioning is a major asset for the companies. It is not just the result of a set of activities, but a real evaluation that users give to their application and how the company is seen in their eyes. Positioning is associated with the construction of identity and image of a product, brand or company, based on the competitive advantages which the company have for a clearer differentiation and identity.

Sustainability of the strategies for positioning depends on the clear idea of the strengths of the company, which will be presented in such a way to the audience that it could see the uniqueness that the company offers in practical dimensions.

The power of positioning comes down to a few most common features. The first is to provide value and benefit to the users in solving their specific problems. The second is associated with the construction of an image and a social commitment of the company and its activities embodied in the product, brand or corporative identity. And the third important feature is the influence on user's perceptions by the possession or usage of the

products or services of the company. Very often companies, in order to provide sustainable competitive advantage, use the three features together, giving an exceptional value to the customer. The skillful management of between the relationships the enterprise and its customers allow for the establishment of its high market sustainability and optimal competitive positioning on its serviceable target markets [4, p. 83]. This makes those relationships the most important resource of an enterprise along with materials, finance, information, human and other resources [4, p. 79].

Knowledge of strategies for product positioning requires companies to put more effort into their incorporation in the overall marketing strategy. These strategies are not static systems, they continuously change and develop as a result of competitive pressure, penetration of technological solutions in the business world and the integration of online and offline lives of consumers. Therefore it is necessary these strategies to be well known in searching for synergy in the implementation.

**Analysis of researches and publications.** Combining off-line and online strategies will allow full coverage of the targeted audience by focusing the companies' effort to maximize compliance with the habits of the modern consumers that stay on the Internet and is an important part of their daily lives. The network today is a major source of information and a powerful tool for establishing a specific consumer's behavior.

Off-line strategies. The positioning has a priority in the modern marketing. In conceptual aspect the positioning is considered as a part of organizational communication policy. The positioning is defined as the opposite of the segmentation process [14, p.96]. Moreover - the process only makes sense when there is interaction with the target segment. According to the definition of A. Reis and J. Trout the positioning is not what you do with the product, but in people's minds [17]. In essence, it is a process of applying the product, build image and creating maximum satisfaction from its use by the targeted audience. The consumer must be convinced that the characteristics and properties of the product best meets his requirements and preferences, i.e. that it was created specifically for him. In this regard, J. Trout and St. Rivkin pay attention to the fact that no matter how unique the newly developed products are, they will not be profitable without them being well presented and to be able to create perceptions at the consumer [19, p.9].

A key moment in the development of an effective product policy is the designing of the product position before its creation. Therefore, the starting point in the process of positioning is the analysis and evaluation of the product position that the company would like to take on the market: a position that would have an impact on selected segments. In this case, it is necessary to analyze the possibility of positioning the

product. When selecting a target market, the company can concentrate on one or several segments. Approaches that can be applied in terms of positioning could be based on different consumers' categories, specific needs, product characteristics, etc. In this context it is essential to assess the company's product how it's perceived by the target audience, what is the image of the brand, the company and product, what are the main specific features that are preferred by users compared with those of the competitors. It is not a surprise that for the construction of an effective product strategy, some companies prefer the «multiple» than «the only positioning» [12, p. 119]. Closely related to the positioning is to build a leading position on the market.

D. Acker and J. Shansbi offer six strategies for a positioning: by attributes, through correlation between price and quality, in relation to the competitors, by an application, by usage of the product and by a product category [1, p. 62]. F. Crawford and R. Matthews offer a different perspective. According to them there are five alternatives for a successful positioning: product, price, ease of access, value-added services and customer experience [12, p. 11]. G. Rafailova classifies the strategies for positioning by the following six types: characteristics and properties of the product; benefits, needs, desires; consumer's category; emotions, feelings, activities; differentiation from the competitors; a combination of the foregoing [16].

We may complement that the benefits of using the product and its method of use are important as well. It became clear that the company must choose its strategy for positioning both in terms of the consumers and its competitors. The strategy in terms of the consumers should be geared towards developing a new product or repositioning the existing one. It should be borne in mind that the company, considering its competitors, must choose between: leadership, imitation, demand for new segment, etc. Porter highlights the following strategies for building a competitive advantage: cost leadership, differentiation, cost focus and differentiation focus [15]. In this case, however, the cost leader must consider the competing products and their characteristics.

In most commonly used approaches to the competitors the differentiation should be paid not only to the characteristic differences of the product, but also on the consumer perception, image, marketing, service, etc. In the focus strategy the company must choose between focusing on costs or focus in terms of differentiation.

Once the company chooses an appropriate strategy for positioning, it is necessary to take effective action on the tactical elements of the marketing mix.

The most common mistakes in the positioning strategy are limited to weaknesses in its elaboration; Lack of clarity in its presentation to the target audience; bad media presentation [2, p.123].

With the technology development, this problem is easily overcome by the companies. Internet widely entered everyday life. More and more entrepreneurs direct considerable efforts and resources into their online presence and for encourage the online consumers.

Online strategies. The specific characteristics of the Internet environment require the construction of a specific marketing model to attract consumers, an influence on their perceptions, strong persuasive arguments and their involvement in action or as Seth Godin interpreted the marketing in the electronic age «Turning strangers into friends and friends into customers» [6, p. 2].

The paradigm about the traditional communication model «one-to-many» was reversed with the construction of the new model «many-to-many», proposed by D. Hoffman and Th. Novak, suited to the new conditions by the network. Its essence comes down to the fact that in an interactive environment every user can be a provider of information [7]. Priority in the study of the consumer motives for visiting at the web-based sites is given to some variables such as interactivity, creating respect to the site relevant to the advertised brand and formation of purchase intentions in users. People actively engage in surfing when they want to satisfy their needs. The reasons that cause the use of the web are directly related to the level of interactivity. If the level of interactivity is high, consumers are actively involved in the process of persuasion by controlling the posted messages, the volume of the desired information, the order of presentation in the appropriate time and in accordance with their needs and preferences.

The clarity of the leading motives that direct users to a website is essential for a proper development of the online strategy and involvement of users in the sales funnel (sales pipeline / sales funnel). It is important to consider what the goals and opportunities of the company are because some of the instruments could be completely free, others – extremely expensive.

The most commonly used techniques for generating traffic are the banner ads, search engine optimization (SEO), social networking, blogs, advertising per click in the search engines, content distribution and more (See Figure 1).

Their combined use provides an opportunity to generate more targeted traffic, including users who are interested in the offered information resource. Therefore for the entrepreneur is important what tools will use in the applied online strategy to generate more traffic to the online-based resources.

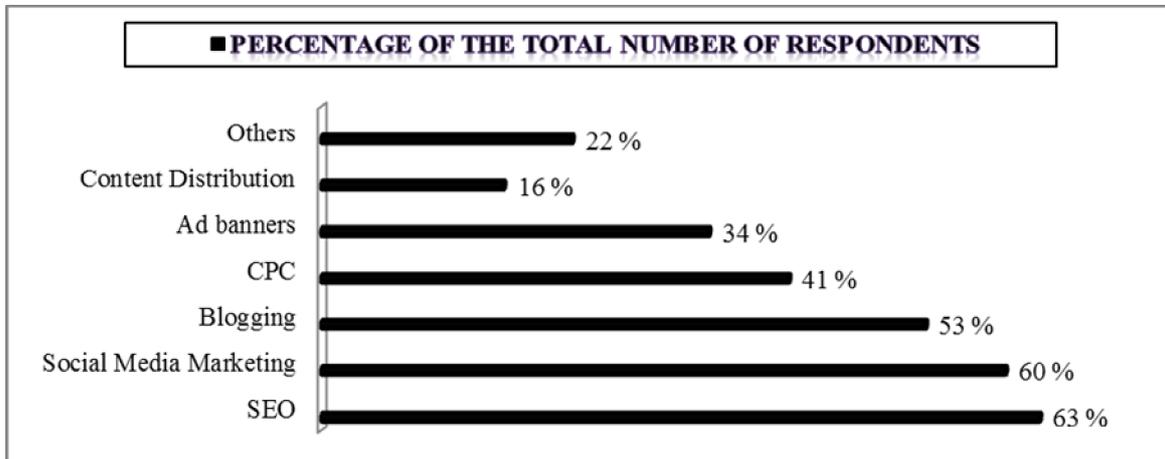


Figure 1. **Online marketing techniques used by U.S. b2b marketers, August 2012**

(Kiberman, T., (2013), First in Google, ed. «Franchising BG» OOD, Sofia., p.18)

**Previously unsettled problem constituent.** In the scientific literature there are many studies investigating the problems of the product positioning but there is no scientific research that thoroughly explore its linking to off-line and online strategies.

**Main purpose of the article.** The aim of the study is to reveal the role of off-line and online strategies for successful product positioning.

**Results and discussions.** It should be borne in mind that the influence of several factors, such as the economic development, consumer tastes, competitive struggle, etc., may require repositioning of the product.

The identification of the product with its specific characteristics and properties in the consumer's mind has a direct impact on the search. Therefore the building of a positive image and preference for a product is closely related to the raising of the competitive advantages not only for the product but also for the brand and company.

An important condition for satisfying the requirements of the target audience and increasing consumer's interest is the choice of the exact time and location for placing of a product. A necessary condition for the information provision process is a comprehensive study of all the factors that influence on the positioning. It should be borne in mind that the encouragement of the potential consumers depends on many factors such as tastes and preferences, purchasing power, etc. Consequently the presence of a sufficient number of product advantages and favorable conditions for its locating suggests the superiority of the product over that of the competitive.

The construction of particular product characteristics that distinguish it from others helps in the presenting of a unique message that will shift the focus from the

competitors' products, directing it to our ones. When choosing the competitive advantages of our product, should be given a study of the competitors - the image features of their product, target audience. The company could choose one competitive advantage of the product, but the best strategy in this case is to stake on a message highlighting more than one benefit for the consumer. This will allow the company to capture more market segments.

The process of positioning is related to the complex application of strategies and techniques referring to all components of the marketing mix. The building of a strategy for a product positioning is related to the issues about what image the company wants to build in terms of its product; how it is perceived by consumers; what the comparative advantages of the product are to distinguish it from those of its competitors; how to strengthen the image of the product in the minds of the target audience; whether to fight for the conquest of company leadership or to follow the leading competitors; what the ways are to occupy a market niche and how to position its products in the consumers' minds. The criteria must be chosen with great care, because by them the product will be assessed, what their weights are and the possibility through them to distinguish the product from others on the market.

The strategic approaches to build an online strategy and the correct selection of appropriate techniques for generating traffic are essential to achieve the company goals.

Internet is the fastest growing market. Every day thousands of new sites, blogs and forums appear whose life depends on the consumer and it is a matter of marketing strategy and its successful implementation in a web environment. The shortest way to inform the audience of the page of the company is to find a place in the world's most popular search engines. Search engines index the content of each page with automated programs called "spiders". Even if the page is not explicitly added, their algorithms are designed to discover any new page that appears. However, it is desirable the page to be added personally to the search engines. Consumers are interested in any kind of information: products and services, seeking opinions and evaluation of other users. Therefore, for every company is essential its site to appear in the first page in the search engine. According to a study by Cisco among 5000 consumers from 5 countries, 78% of all buyers in the U.S. use search engines to explore and purchase goods or services [11, p.14]. This statistic gives an answer how the Internet can be considered as a powerful tool for obtaining popularity and how marketers must adapt their marketing strategies to the requirements of this communication channel.

The most popular search engines are Google, Yahoo, Bing and others. Google covers 83.1% of the total number of users using search engines. Statistics show that consumers rely more on sites found by the search engines than ads on websites, content

distribution on the Internet and others. This draws more marketers to the techniques of search engine optimization, aiming to climb the website of higher positions in the ranking of search engines. The biggest advantage of search engine optimization is that, unlike other alternative ways to drive traffic, with SEO (Search Engine Optimization) it is more targeted, the audience is sorted out and directs potential customers to the site. Although overshadowed by the search engines, banner ads are a tool in the years proven to be effective to stimulate consumer interest and drive traffic to websites. This type of ad formats floods the web and therefore it is not coincidentally that in the practice was established term "banner blindness." Banner ads are featured on sites, in blogs, on forums and search engines, etc. The low cost of this type of online advertising and easier access, which provides customers to reach the desired site, makes the format extremely favored by advertisers. Growing insensitivity of consumers to this format and attractive low price for advertisers directs more effort in their development. In early 2014, IAB Europe has launched a set of ad formats that provide optimum potential in branding campaigns company called Brand Builders [8]. This kit includes six recommended ad formats that offer new branding medium for advertisers. The set includes static and dynamic ad formats, which are diversifying opportunities for online presentation. Innovations in ad formats are that in the kit are also included commercials compatible with the TV screen, which extend the capabilities to maintain a built-in video advertising. However, larger ad banners do not mean more traffic. The goal is to provoke the interest of the user to click on it, and this is done by the very design of banner advertising. Yet it is increasingly relied on the emotional connection, which is aimed to be built with users. This type of advertising efforts is aimed at increasing brand awareness. According to research by Millward Brown MediaBrix and 88% of marketers consider advertising formats such as effective as it can be achieved by building emotional connections with consumers to increase brand awareness, loyalty and trust [13].

Another popular technique to generate traffic is by using the potential of social networks. Network traffic is organized thanks to them and the trend will continue. Using the "Share" allows users to share content in their profiles, which triggers secondary communication (viral marketing) between consumers and encourage sharing on social networks, and brings to the company more targeted visitors.

Practice shows that the main traffic that is generated from social networks remains through Facebook and Twitter, so they are the main target for most authors of Internet content. The time zone in which the publication is made is important so it could be fully shared. Research company Bitly, measured the hundreds of links and data among a group of American consumers shows that different social networks have a different

peak of attendance, which requires publications at the right time for a particular social network. [18] Activation of viral marketing depends on the time and day of publication. The good knowledge of social media is important as a reliable source of income. Using these channels, product positioning requires companies to devise a media schedule for the publication of advertising for various social networks because each has its own culture and model of consumer behavior. [10]

A successful tool that composes the strategies of an online product placement is blogging. According to a study of the Content Marketing Institute among 500 companies in North America, 62% of respondents believe that blogging is an effective tool that must be included in the branding strategy. [3] Using blogs positioning should be done delicately and with a dose of a doubt in the result because bloggers always express their personal views and attitudes and this poses a risk to the content of the published information. According to PR specialist Kremena Georgieva, there are constructed and effective mechanisms for communication between marketers and the media, but between marketers and bloggers are still under development. It is therefore necessary that these relations to be formed on the basis of continued effective communication, in the center of which stands the trust. [5, pp. 75-79] An important condition about the use of blogs as a technique for positioning included in product branding strategy is to match the theme of the blog. A good alternative is the creating of corporate blogs of the companies in which the emphasis is on human factors as there is published informal information and events related to the life of the employees and the company. As part of the strategy for online positioning can be seen exchanging links with other sites. This is a good way to climb into the top positions of search engines. For this purpose it is necessary to establish firm relationships with partners who are related or complementary content to the site of the company.

In recent years, generating traffic through images gets more and more popularity. Much of the information which users gain is due to the related topic of the site, company, and product images. Consumers prefer to receive a great deal of information with a display of the content. Here also apply few simple rules. The first thing that can be done in this respect is to optimize the images. Google no longer works only with text content and images, and indexed, so it is necessary optimization and pictures that are published to the site to pull in the forefront. It is important that the image to be associated with the text of the article. It is recommended to maximize the large images that attract the attention of consumers and extend their stay on the site. Experience shows that at this stage the most shared content on the web are the pictures and video clips. It is therefore important that they be optimized and adapted to social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, etc. Integration of telecom services and IT sectors

formed a dynamic IT environment. As a result of the development of mobile communications a niche market has opened for entrepreneurs in the use of mobile applications, thus successfully implement its product positioning. Not surprisingly, it is considered that 2014 will be the year of the multi-screen. [9] Expectations are increasingly more attention be paid to online video advertising.

**Conclusions and further researches directions.** Combining off-line and online strategies will allow full coverage of the targeted audience by focusing the companies' effort to maximize compliance with the habits of the modern consumers that stay on the Internet and is an important part of their daily lives. The network today is a major source of information and a powerful tool for establishing a specific consumer's behavior.

Further scientific research should be on the study of the factors affecting product positioning. This is an area that has not been studied enough and the results of such research will contribute to the successful company development.

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*Дослідження в цій статті охоплює оффлайн та онлайн стратегії, якими користуються компанії з метою їх продуктового позиціонування. Ціль роботи – встановити роль і значення стратегій для успішного продуктового позиціонування в офлайн та онлайн середовищі.*

*Ключові слова: стратегії, позиціонування, оффлайн стратегії, онлайн стратегії.*

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*Исследование в этой статье охватывает оффлайн и онлайн стратегии, которыми пользуются компании в целях их продуктового позиционирования. Цель работы – установить роль и значение стратегий для успешного продуктового позиционирования в оффлайн и онлайн среде.*

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