

(SP) BRAND MANAGEMENT IN THE PROFESSIONAL SPORTS CLUB SETTING

Michael Schilhaneck
University of Bayreuth, **GERMANY**

Introduction

Across a broad range of industries, branding is one of the most important issues facing management at present. Recent evidence indicates that this is equally true for the professional sports club setting. Especially the empirical work by Gladden and Milne (1999) illustrates the importance of club brands, where brand equity was found to significantly impact the economic success of sports organizations. However, market research results (UFA 1998; 2000; Sportfive 2002; 2004) indicate that the analysed sporting clubs lack professional brand management practices. While strong brands are characterised by a high level of brand awareness and clear brand associations, the surveys demonstrate that the clubs on the one hand achieve a high degree of brand awareness, but on the other hand in almost every case fail to create distinct brand associations. Having acknowledged these shortcomings in club brand management practices it is the purpose of this paper to develop a conceptual brand management framework for the professional sports club setting that provides information about how strong club brands are built.

Method

The principal idea for the development of a conceptual club brand management framework was to choose a generally valid theoretic brand management model which represents the present state of academic research and to modify it to the special requirements of the chosen field of analysis.

From the range of existing theoretical approaches the model by Meffert and Burmann and its extension (1996; 2002) was selected. In this model the authors classify the wide variety of potential brand elements into four categories, while each of the categories is furthermore specified through an extensive list of characterising parameters.

- 1) product-related brand elements: qualitative features, product design, clear geographical ties, presentation PoS, price setting.
- 2) symbol-related brand elements: brand name, brand logo, brand history and brand communication.
- 3) organization-related brand elements: affiliation to organizations, concerns or branches, employee behaviour.
- 4) person-related brand elements: timing of market entry, cultural connection, perceptions of the typical user/ the typical usage.

The quality and quantity of the implementations of these parameters determine the brand's identity. On the other hand, the consumers' perceptions of these different identity elements define the image of the brand.

The methodology for the suitable modification of the reference framework comprises the following three steps:

- 1) Evaluation of the importance of the different elements in the reference framework for the professional sports club setting and identification of necessary reductions.

- 2) Discussion of the economic peculiarities of brand management in the professional sports club setting and necessary extensions of the reference framework.
- 3) Integration of brand management recommendations found in specialised literature which are not considered in the reference framework.

Results

The modification of the theoretical reference framework for the professional sports club setting can be outlined as follows:

- 1) product-related brand elements:
qualitative features such as attraction and success of the team at present, brand presentation PoS/points of contact, pricing, experience-marketing, CRM/services, distribution, club merchandising.
- 2) symbol-related brand elements:
primary reference points such as the club's name, its logo and its colours, the club's infrastructures (stadium, office, training facilities), club history/tradition, integrated communication strategy (tools: PR, advertisement, sales promotion, event marketing, cause-related sponsorships, new media).
- 3) organization-related brand elements:
behaviour of the players and management, behaviour of the contact personnel (both employed by the club as well as outsourced service enterprises), corporate identity, strategic cooperations, strategic sponsors, youth development programs.
- 4) person-related brand elements:
personalities related to the club, fan community.

Since these club brand elements at this point merely form a collection of possible management options, they consequently need to be structured into a management process model which considers sequence and interaction of the different elements. This model differentiates between a conceptual level (brand objectives, brand philosophy and brand strategy as a basis for all following implementations), an operational level (club brand essence: present success in the league, club history, club infrastructure, public figures, fan community; branding instruments: enhancement and transport of the club brand essence by the implementation of branding instruments such as CRM, PR, CI, cause-related sponsoring, advertisement etc.) and a result level (economic brand value determined by the factors brand awareness, brand associations and brand loyalty). The model has an iterative character and furthermore, includes factors that influence the management cycle (e.g. environmental conditions; adequate organization structures and resources; heterogeneous customers; quality and quantity of customer information).

Discussion

The developed brand management process model for the professional sports club setting shows that there are various promising club branding options. However, only a comprehensive and persistent branding procedure (stringent presentation, communication as well as enhancement of the club brand essence through the implementation of the abovementioned interlocking branding instruments) can lead to clear and distinct club brand associations.

Future research should consequently focus on the examination of the relationship between and the hierarchical order amongst the different branding elements comprised in the model.

References

- Gladden, J. M. & Milne G. R. (1999). Examining the importance of brand equity in professional sports. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 8, 21-29.
- Meffert, H. & Burmann, C. (1996). Identitätsorientierte Markenführung (Arbeitspapier Nr. 100) [Identity-oriented Brand Management (working paper Nr. 100)]. Münster: WGMU.
- Meffert, H. & Burmann, C. (2002). Managementkonzept der identitätsorientierten Markenführung. In: Meffert, H.; Burmann, C. & Koers, M. (Hrsg.), *Markenmanagement [Brand Management]* (S. 73-99). Wiesbaden: Gabler.
- Sportfive (2002, 2004). *European Football*. Hamburg: SPORTFIVE
- UFA Sports (1998, 2000). *UFA Fußballstudie [UFA Football Survey]*. Hamburg: UFA Sports.

E-mail: michael.schilhaneck@uni-bayreuth.de