

(PP) IMAGINEERING: CREATING FASCINATING WORLDS IN SPORT

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Introduction

Although sport participation in the Netherlands is high, 64% of the population above the age of 18 participates in sport (SCP, 2003), sport organisations nowadays are having a hard time to attract individuals. The more traditionally organised sport clubs run by volunteers are more and more in competition with their profit driven counterparts, i.e. fitness clubs. Sport clubs are facing declining membership rates. Sport participants are behaving like demanding customers who are looking for an optimal leisure experience and are weighing costs and benefits in their buying-decision process. Customers nowadays are searching for the fulfilment of emotional and psychological desires. They have an enormous freedom of choice. The result is that it is difficult to catch the eye of the consumer. New ways of communication are needed to create long-lasting commitments with individuals and target groups. In this presentation imagineering will be presented as a powerful solution for sport organisations to create this long-lasting emotional bond with individual sport consumers. In the presentation we will explain what Imagineering is all about. Furthermore we will explain how the Department of Leisure Management at NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences applies this creative tool to the sport sector and what the preliminary results are.

Project

Imagineering is about managing the relationship with the customer, based on an integral experiential concept that affects 'fans' in the heart, that will be translated in an experiential world in all contact moments with the customer. In short it's about using experiences, who can reach, touch, affect and fascinate the customer permanently (Nijs & Peters, 2002). At NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences imagineering is a key issue of the research programme and integrated in the educational programme of all affiliated departments. Diane Nijs, Professor in Imagineering at NHTV, pointed out the importance of Imagineering as follows: "In a world where people are more and more driven by self-expressional values instead of survival values, we need an additional way of engineering. We need Imagineering, engineering for imagination, to realise the challenges of the experience economy" (www.imagineeringacademy.nl).

In sport management, as in other economical sectors, imagineering is a relatively new phenomenon, although sport itself is a fascinating world full of imagination, passion and experiences. Sport organisations are not familiar with this new way of communicating with sport customers. At the Department of Leisure Management we took up the challenge to set up several projects on 'sport and imagineering' in cooperation with sport organisations. Individual graduates in sport management and groups of sport management students tested the imagineering-tool in different sport settings, coached by experienced tutors. Partners were amongst others the Royal Dutch Watersport Federation, Dutch Canoeing Federation, Dutch Badminton Federation, Rocks-n-Rivers (outdoor & events) and the Municipality of the city of Breda.

The objective of these projects is to create an experienced based concept to attract new members/sportconsumers and to create at least a memorable experience with these members/sportconsumers.

Methods

In the projects a step-by-step plan is followed to create experiential concepts. In the presentation we will explain the ins and outs of this ABCD-model (Nijs & Peters, 2002) and give examples to illustrate the different phases. The A-phase stands for Analysis and Attention. This is the research phase of the project, where information about costumers/target groups (values), the supply-side and the DNA of the organisation (brand values, image, profile) is gained. Research on values of costumers and sport organisation is a key aspect, as the experiential concept is based on these specific values. Value research methods such as laddering (means-end analysis) and questionnaires with statements are used in this phase. The aim is to look for a value fit between the values of the costumers and those of the organisation itself. In the presentation more about values and the methodology is explained. The B stands for Brood and Brainstorm: in this phase a vision is created. The vision is the basis of the concept that has to be developed. In this phase different exercises and techniques are used like the tombstone and heartbeat exercise and the technique of futurising. Phase C stands for Concept development, as a result of Analysis and Brooding, an inspiring experiential concept is created. To enhance the experience techniques such as Pine & Gilmore's four experiential domains (Pine II & Gilmore, 1999), storytelling (Gabriel, 2000) and co-creation (Pralahad & Ramaswamy, 2004) are used. In the D-phase the abstract concept is translated into one or more concrete products.

Results

The results of the (research) projects until now seem very positive. Recommendations to the sport organisations involved in the project consist of creative concepts to attract their key target group, e.g. youth, in such a way they feel attracted or tempted to commit themselves to the sport organisation, e.g. becoming a club member. From the concepts concrete products are derived which can be implemented directly. During the presentation we will give different examples of these creative concepts and products.

Discussion

A follow up of the projects is needed. More research has to be done with different sport organisations to analyse the general effectiveness of Imagineering in sport. In the coming years imagineering will be a key issue in the sport management research programme at our university.

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