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**PROMOTING**

**4**

## 4.1 BRANDING THE SPORT



### WHY YOU SHOULD READ THIS CHAPTER?

#### Branding Might be the Key to your Commercial Success

What is branding? We hear a lot about it without ever really knowing its meaning. Is it simply remodeling our logo? No, it's much more than that.

Branding is the creation of a symbol which represents the sport, organization, or club. This symbol carries with it values and attributes that speak directly to the consumer's mind in an emotional manner.

Successful branding enables the organization to be much more efficient when approaching sponsors, TV and spectators.

Branding should be done prior to selling, so that the process of generating revenues becomes a much easier one.

This chapter is an introduction to branding and its techniques.



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## From Sports Organization to Sports Brand

In conventional businesses it is clear that branding is one of the key success factors. The business of sport holds many successful and valuable brands, such as UEFA Champions League, NFL, Manchester United FC, Bayern Munich etc. In basketball, the NBA is of course a good example of successful branding. So how does brand building work? Let's spend some time looking at how to move from being a sports organization to becoming a sports brand.

### 1. What is a Brand?

A brand is a distinguishing name and/or symbol (such as a logo, trademark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of their competitors. A brand could also be described as a distinctive picture or association positioned in the mind of consumers for an object (product, service) or a subject (person, institution). Brands create images and can direct behavior patterns amongst customers and consumers.

When applied to sports this definition means that a product or service, such as a type of sport (e.g. basketball), an event (world championships), a person (athlete) or an institution (club, federation), can be perceived as a brand. It also means that sports consumers perceive these objects and subjects in a different way. So the key is to create a picture in your customers' minds because this perception will define the value of your brand. The thoughts that customers have concerning such a sports brand will include everything that he/she knows, thinks and would tell to others about the object or subject. This includes all tangible and non tangible properties such as products, services, appearance, emotions, expectations and assumptions. This means that the brand gives an impression, it stands for certain values, for an image and reputation and for a position in people's mindset.

Those who have been successful in turning their sport into a real brand have achieved what is called "brand religion". A place where the customers, the fans, have become "followers" of their sport, their league, or their team. This puts you of course in a very strong position where you can charge higher prices for your product (to the fans themselves but also to the sponsors). It also protects you from any

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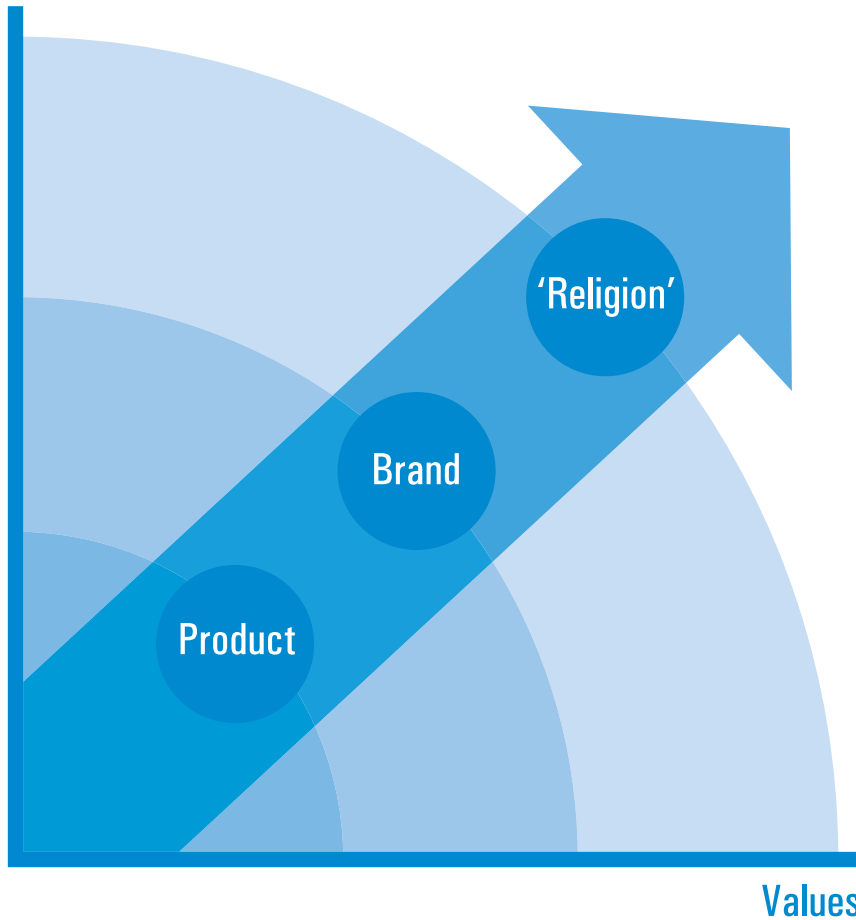
damage that might occur to your image: your consumers will be ready to "forgive". This gives you space for action, for taking more risks.

You achieve brand religion by strengthening the values that you attach to your sport, and therefore by increasing the involvement of the people consuming it. The stronger your values in your given

community, the stronger the link you will create between you and your community, the stronger its involvement. You will move from being a simple product amongst the products (people can "chose" between Basketball and, let's say, football), to a brand carrying meaningful attributes and values, to a religion, where people will follow you regardless of athletics results. Following is a small graph representing this pathway.



Involvement



## 2. The Advantages of Branding from your Organization's Point of View

The brand simplifies the ability to distinguish products amongst a wide range of offerings. Even in the world of sports the number of offerings are continually growing (e.g. the growing number of new sports). Therefore every kind of sport, every federation and every club has to find a way to distinguish itself from its competitors'. In a crowded marketplace it gets more and more difficult to differentiate the services offered. The brand allows a positive demarcation of the competitors' offerings.

A strong brand enables the transfer of the brand to new products. This allows sports organizations to offer new services and products, which do not depend on the success at the athletic level.

An organization having a strong brand is better protected from crisis and impact of competitors. In times of trouble and crisis they also provide a certain bonus amongst customers. So mistakes and market fluctuation do not have as much impact on sales for sports organizations.

A strong brand enables an organization to build customer loyalty as they trust the brand and its quality, e.g. season tickets for some professional sports clubs are sold years in advance.



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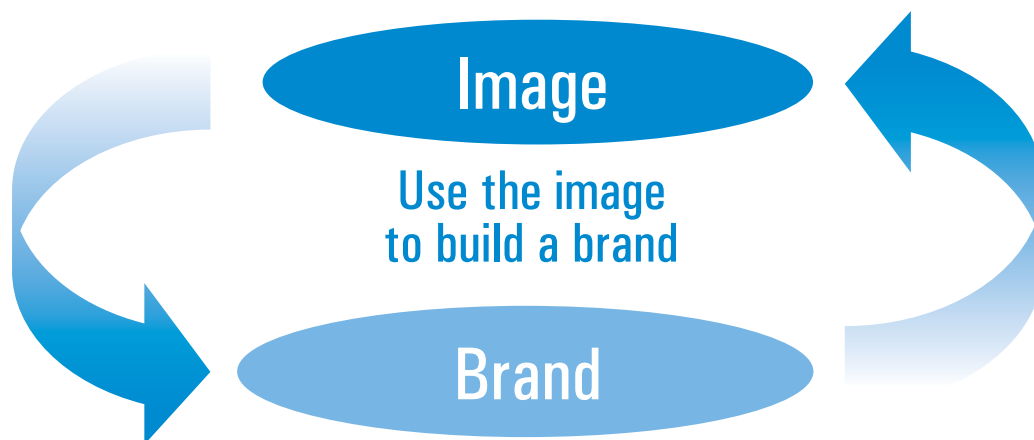
A brand creates trust and confidence. A strong brand presents a proof of competence from the customers. It suggests quality and bestows image and prestige to its buyers. For this reason consumers are also prepared to pay a higher price for products and services offered.

This being said, let's not forget the main goal of branding. The main goal of branding for a Federation is to "package" the sport in a way that it becomes as attractive as possible to potential sponsors. Going

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through this "internal" process will make it easier for you, or your marketing department to approach potential sponsors. It will also prepare you to answer any questions they might have regarding your brand values and attributes. And what you intend to do (with them!) in the future.

A key aspect to understand in the branding process is that you need to determine what you want the image of your product to be before you start communicating about it. Once the communication has started, it is then very difficult to modify your message. This is why it is crucial to define what you want to stand for before telling the world about it.



The brand then becomes your "protection", the "shield" behind which you will be able to control your image, even if it damaged by an impromptu event. The stronger your brand, the less damage you will suffer in case of crisis.

### 3. Brand Management

A strong brand determines all future marketing activities and therefore represents an important instrument to influence and control the market. Brand management can be practically defined as finding strategies to build and to cultivate a brand in order to achieve competitive advantages. The main objective in brand management is to achieve a strong position within the mindset of customers and to generate public confidence.



The process of strategic brand management follows these steps:

- It starts with an analysis of the current assets of the federation. Where are your strengths and your weaknesses compared to your competitors', in terms of different aspects such as products, services, organization, staff etc?
- Next you should find out what it is that you want to brand and how do you want to be positioned. Is it your sport, your federation or your product (e.g. event)? Within a Basketball league for instance it has to be determined whether you want to promote the league or single teams. The advantage of promoting the league is that even if one or the other teams suffers a crisis, the brand value of the league can be retained, which is crucial for a league such as the NBA, for example.
- The next point that has to be determined is what is your market. Is it a regional market, a national market or an international market? Then you have to determine who your competitors are in this market.
- Based on your initial analysis of your assets you have to analyse how your competitors are positioned on this market. In other words how do their customers perceive them? Furthermore you need to discover where your customers would ideally position you. Such a positioning map is mainly based on two or three attributes. These attributes decide whether customers "buy" a product or not. The map shows where your competitors are positioned, where you are positioned and where you should ideally be positioned from the viewpoint of the customer.
- This positioning within the map should give a clear idea about the brand image that should be required. The goal would be to be positioned as close as possible to the ideal position determined by the customers.
- The second objective after the brand image is to determine the brand awareness. In other words, how many people in the contemplated market know your brand. Both of these strategic objectives then have to be transferred into action through the marketing mix.

#### 4. Building a Brand

Using the various instruments of the marketing mix – your product(s), their price, where you sell them and how you promote them – you should then be able to make sure that all objectives concerning brand image and brand awareness are achieved. This requires a consistent picture of the intended brand to be

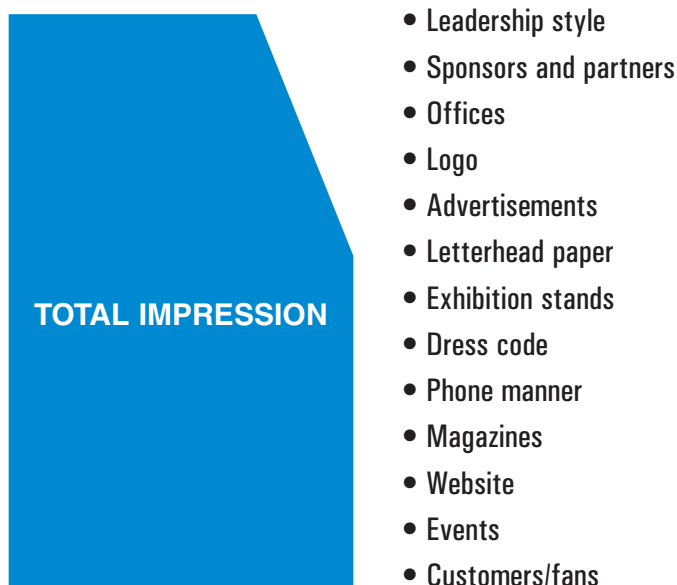
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drawn by all the different instruments in the marketing mix. So that all actions in terms of product, price, place and promotion (communication) have to fit exactly within the intended brand position.

This means that your products and services reflect the values and attributes of your brand as well as the price. Also the place where you offer your products and services should match with the picture that you want to create in the minds of your customers. Last but not least communication has a big impact on the creation of a brand. In the next chapter, Media Relations, we will take a look at the tools you have in hands in order to achieve this.

Working on your brand involves many activities, and every single sector and department should be part of the process. No detail should be overlooked and you have to aim at creating the best “total impression” at every single level. All the points of contact you have with the outside world need to be taken in consideration. Here’s a non exhaustive list of what you need to think about in the process.

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