

Integrated Marketing Communication in Nike

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Introduction

Integrated marketing communication is a relatively new term referring to the fusion of conventional and modern marketing communication techniques.

It is *“The concept and process of strategically managed, audience-focused, channel-centered, and result-driven brand communication over time,”* according to the definition given to integrated marketing communication by Jerry Kliatchko.

Don Schultz (2004) defines integrated marketing communication as *“integrated marketing communication is a strategic business process used to plan, execute, and develop, evaluate measurable, coordinated, persuasive brand communication programs over time with customers, consumers, prospects, employees, associates, and other targeted relevant external and internal audiences. The goal is to generate both short-term financial returns and build long-term brand and shareholder value”* (Schultz, 2004).

Being an original pioneer in the field of integrated marketing communication, Schultz argues that IMC’s real definition must incorporate the current market driver factors reflecting all the segments of audiences and stakeholders participating. It should describe how important measurements and metrics are and should represent the strategic view of marketing communication and its objectives. Integrated marketing communication will be changing and evolving ever as it does, though it will not last forever (Schultz, 2004).

The aim of integrated marketing communication is to reach the maximum audience in the most effective and efficient way, targeting the different segments of the market according to their needs and demands. Since the integrated marketing communication techniques have been incepted, they have been found to be the most reliable and effective mode of communicating the message of the businesses to target audiences. The underpinning feature behind the success of integrated marketing communication is that it incorporates the best of both traditional and modern communication techniques.

The ultimate purpose of integrated marketing communication is to develop and maintain a healthy relationship between the company and its stakeholders, primarily customers. The objectives of the implementation of integrated marketing communication techniques are to ultimately increase the profit margin of the business by reaching the maximum number of customers effectively.

Marketing experts categorize integrated marketing communication into certain types, such as

external, internal, horizontal, and vertical. External integrated marketing communication refers to the outsourcing of marketing or public relations companies by businesses to market their products and services. Outsourced firms are responsible for the design, planning, and execution of the marketing campaigns for the respective businesses. Internal integrated marketing communication refers to the development of healthy responses of employees towards the new products and services, so that a premature leakage of the product details is avoided and potential customers are excited about the new products before their launch into the market. Horizontal integrated communication for marketing involves open and efficient communication among the teams assigned to the development of products, their distribution, and the finance team. Such an approach basically aims at attaining the required synergy for a successful product communication campaign. Vertically integrated communication is a strategy that implies ensuring that the development of new products is in accordance with the company's corporate policies and structure as well.

Nike

Nike has been considered one of the ultimate sports product brands, especially for its revolutionary products of athletic footwear. The company started its operations in 1964, founded by Phil Knight, a middle-distance runner, and Bill Bowerman, a track and field coach. The two visionaries started working with the Japanese athlete shoemaker Onitsuka, and they had an agreement to improve the quality of athletic footwear. Originally, the company was named Blue Ribbon Sports. Phil used to sell the shoes personally, carrying products in his car, whereas Bill kept testing the products with the runners of the University of Oregon in order to determine the best quality of shoes.

The marketing communication of the company started when both the founders, for the first time, hired the staff after the completion of one year of the company's operations. The name of the new member was Jeff Johnson, who opened the first retail store of the company's products and devised the marketing campaign by creating marketing materials such as brochures and advertisement stuff for Blue Ribbon Sports. By the time Bill and Phil realized that they needed to start their own manufacturing rather than depend upon Onitsuka, with whom the company's relationships were deteriorating. Jeff, as a marketing technique, decided to rename the brand with the now-famous Nike. The trademark of the company today is the famous swoosh and the slogan "Just Do It." Footwear industry leader Nike manufactures sporting products through brands and business lines including Nike, Jordan, and Converse. Cole Haan was sold in 2013, and Nike announced the sale of Hurley in 2019, so neither should be listed as a current Nike sub-brand.

Nike is well known for its innovative and regular technique of communication to stay connected with its stakeholders and for research-based knowledge of its customers' needs and demands expected from their products, and who their customers really are.

Integrated Marketing Communication of Nike

Nike allocates 2.4 million dollars each year to the account of promotional schemes and programs, and communication with their customers through these programs. The company began mass-mediated advertising in 1982 and continuously revised and refined its marketing communication strategies. The marketing team of Nike constantly looks for the touch points by which they can engage the customers and communicate with them directly. Nike is at the forefront of using both conventional mass-mediated communication through advertising and promotional programs and social media campaigns to develop powerful and meaningful integrated marketing communication activities. Some of the activities that demonstrate Nike's integrated marketing communication approach are as follows;

Mass Mediated Advertising

Nike, for all its marketing strategies, has been working with an American Advertising agency named Weiden and Kennedy, famous as W&K, for a couple of decades, and the strong and healthy business relationship between the companies contributed to the success of both. W&K worked influentially for Nike by developing strong electronic and print media campaigns focusing on sportsmen and women equally that appealed to the customers from an emotional point (Anderson, 1999). The mass-mediated marketing communication majorly uses the transformational approach to persuade customers to purchase. Transformational advertising helps differentiate the product when consumers are suggested the types of enjoyable experiences they might have using the advertised products and services (Belch & Belch, 2012. P.296). Nike's mass media campaigns generally capitalize on consumers' emotions, speaking to their feelings of achievement, pride, actualization, and ambitiousness (Zazo & Seiz, 2013).

Social Media Campaigns

The explosion of social networking websites has provided businesses a variety of channels to interact with their customers directly. Nike touches the new customers through social media campaigns and engages the existing customers as well. Nike is successful in maintaining a strong and powerful brand image across all popular social media channels, ensuring that the enjoyable experiences that its customers have by visiting the retail stores are available on interactive media online (O'Malley, 2006). The corporate website of the company is ranked among the top five sports companies visited by customers. The highlight of the social media communication strategy of Nike is that it has around fifty microsites maintained separately and tailored to meet the requirements of integrated marketing communication strategies (Anderson, 1999). The company is among the first to assess the potential of engaging customers through viral video channels, such as YouTube. For instance, Nike's video featuring Ronaldinho received twenty million likes in 2006 (Wasserman, 2006). The company, along with its strong presence on all social media, including YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and others, 's has

its own social networking site known as Nike+. Such strategies are key devices for an [integrated marketing communication plan](#) for Nike.

Celebrity Endorsements and Sponsorships

Nike throws heavy sponsorship programs and celebrity endorsements to project its products, drive awareness, and gain popularity and a positive image among the audience. Through sponsorships and celebrity appearances, Nike gives an impression of a link between its products and the success of celebrities (Johnson, 2013). Endorsements to Tiger Woods and Michael Jordan, and setting subsidiaries in their names, Nike boosted its image as the top sports products companies that pay tributes to great players. Hundreds of sponsorships have been signed with the universities, sports clubs, and international sports teams, which enabled the company to get its logo emblazoned on the uniforms of the players so that Nike is visible to every viewer of sports, considering each of them as a potential customer.

Integrated Marketing Communication and Brand Strategy

Kevin Keller is a branding expert who posits that for the process of development and sustenance of product identity and equity, integrated marketing communications have an important role to play. Kevin Keller developed a model of brand equity based on customers' orientations; this model suggests that marketing communication activities contribute to the awareness of the brand by linking the associations of brands with consumers' minds. By doing so, the brand creates a positive image of the products and feelings for them that ultimately result in brand loyalty (Keller, 2008). Establishing brand equity demands products and brands that are well-known and have favourable, strong, and unique associations in consumers' minds (Keller, 2008).

Integrated marketing communications can help firms communicate to their stakeholders, especially customers, effectively and efficiently. Integrated marketing communications, together with strategies of brand identity, play a critical role in the development of an overall brand equity for the company (Madhavaram et al., 2005).

The techniques of integrated communication enabled the Nike brand to reach the widespread marketplace and engage its existing customers through multiple touch points, such as concentrated media, social media, and sponsorship programs. Through integrated marketing communication, Nike developed and sustained its brand equity in the market as the leader of the industry. Launching brands as endorsements to sports celebrities such as Michael Jordan, Michael Johnson, and Tiger Woods cultivated a positive image of the brand among the customers and celebrities, as well as top and successful brands in the sports products industry. (Coucha, 2011).

Integrated Marketing Communication: A Business Process

Marketing communication, especially integrated marketing communication, is not merely an advertising approach; rather, it is a managed and planned strategic tool for businesses that can bring the business a successful brand identity and brand equity. It can rather be taken as a whole business process by looking into the external, internal, horizontal, and vertical integrated marketing communication categories. Belch & Belch (2012) suggest that marketing experts of a company should evaluate and monitor the activities of the integrated marketing communication process and execution in order to determine the effective factors and areas of improvement through the process (Belch & Belch, 2012). The evaluation of the effectiveness of the communication tactics and tools before and after the execution of the plan enables the marketing experts to do the following;

Eliminating the costly mistakes – If the [communication plan](#) struggles to achieve the set objectives, the marketing managers need to redesign the plan by eliminating the costly features that could not hit the target. The next plans will be more refined and more effective in reaching the objectives.

Devising Alternatives – The strategies of integrated communication for marketing can be changed and altered when there is a need to replace the unsuccessful elements and features from the plan.

Conclusion

Integrated marketing communications are strategic tools that not only bring long-term effective results for the companies but also enable the companies to build a healthy relationship with the customers that ultimately turns into brand loyalty. The purposes of integrated marketing communications are many-fold; they serve knowledge-based product development catering to the needs and demands of the customers, and also keep the customers excited about the new launches by the brand.

The case of Nike demonstrated that proper and strategic integrated marketing communication can help a company achieve not only a larger profit margin and share in the marketplace but also enable it to enjoy fruitful relationships with the stakeholders. The mix of promotions across the available media channels, interactive internet media celebrity endorsements, and sponsorships keeps the customers engaged and loyal, with the brand putting efforts to get closer to them. The marketing communication with an integrated approach builds a high profile for the brand that contributes to the esteem of the business. Nike, for instance, upon the success of integrated communication techniques for marketing over social media, concentrated media developed an everlasting brand equity, leadership position in the market, awareness of brands among the customers, and the launch of new products in the name of celebrities that ultimately helped the company to grow strategically.