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Promotion Strategies in Online Marketing

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Abstract: In this paper, the authors present the importance of online promotion in marketing. The article includes a theoretical part in which the main types of electronic business are presented, and also practical ways through which we can ensure online presence. The article also includes a marketing qualitative research (focus group). The research conducted must answer the question: What is the perception and the attitude of Internet users towards online buying environment. The purpose of the research is knowing the perception and users’ attitude toward shopping online. Study participants have a high opinion of online stores. They identify the benefits of orders via the Internet: wide range of products, access to products not available in traditional stores, time saving, convenience, etc. But still their first option for purchasing products is traditional stores and this because of the risks associated with ecommerce website such as: the possibility of not receiving the order, the products do not comply, the products are damaged. Due to a continuous growth rate of Internet users and also due to the increasing value of transactions made online, e-commerce is present in all market fields. Promotional policy in an online business that offers services, is the key element of the marketing mix, being the decisive factor in maintaining a long-term customer relationship. It is essential that the messages that are transmitted through the promotional campaign to be concise, plausible, attractive and to be understood by all stakeholders. The campaigns must be understood by the targeted customers in order to influence the customer behavior and make a decisional difference among clients.

Keywords: promotional, marketing, internet, communication, strategy.

Introduction

The transition from industrial society to knowledge society and thus to the electronic one was done in a quick and stunning manner. The emergence of computing and information technology has revolutionized
communication and relationships between people and represented the dividing line between old and new, between XX and XXI century, between unilateral and bilateral, interactive communication.

Appeared in the '60s in response to the challenge of the Soviet Union, which launched the first artificial satellite of the Earth, the Internet has barely grown only after the 1980s, when it exceeded the boundaries of America. The Internet has generated a series of contradictions regarding the development of new structures and communication practices, as compared to traditional media.

Al Gore likened the Internet to an "information highway" on which the data flows in both directions. Among the most popular facilities offered by the Internet today are Web pages, e-newspapers, e-mail, files transfer, blog, money transfer and more.

Gabriela Grosseck defined the Internet as a free medium through which all forms of communication are used. Online communication can be two forms (Grosseck, 2006, p.198):

1) Asynchronous - a form that does not require the presence of participants simultaneously, and messaging is on a longer term;
2) Synchronous - is a dynamic manifestation and messaging takes place in real time.

Merrill Morris and Christine Ogan examined possibilities for communication and have grouped them into four categories:

1) Asynchronous communication "one-to-one" - e-mail;
2) Asynchronous Communication "many-to-many" - discussion forums and newsgroups;
3) Synchronous Communication "one-to-one", "one-to-few" or "one-to-many" - chat or IRC;
4) Asynchronous Communication "many-to-one", "one-to-one" or "one-to-many" - websites, blogs, social networks etc.

Changes in economic, socio-political, cultural and technological communication have made the need for a company to become acute. Organizations seek to establish quality relationships with employees, customers, suppliers and distributors, and in this situation marketing communication has an important role. (Popescu, 2002, p. 16) Using the Internet companies could outdo the competition and create products that meet consumer needs.

The Internet has undergone significant changes in marketing communications, including the following ones:

- The first major change occurred was switching from communication 'push' to communication 'pull'. Users are required to seek and to
access the desired information. The advantage of such communication is that only people interested in this information are the ones accessing it;

- The move from monologue to dialogue. The online customer is able to respond much easier and faster to the message received from the company;
- Improve existing communication tools and the emergence of other more performant and easier to use;
- The number of possible carriers of messages is increasing;
- Focuses on providing real-time detailed and complex information;
- Another important advantage is that to disseminate information via the Internet is less expensive than necessary for dissemination in traditional environment;
- The Internet differs from other types of communication that the information exchange is made in both directions. Unlike traditional media, the Internet has enabled communication switching from unidirectional to multidirectional communication. In such a case of unidirectional communication, the message is sent from the company to the public, and the last one has no opportunity to respond, while interactivity enables multidirectional communication between the company and its audience;
- The new trend in the marketing world is to combine different means of communication so as to exert a direct influence on the behavior of target audience. This shift in marketing is known as integrated marketing communication. (Grosseck, 2006, p.19);

Internet has emerged as a need in human communication. As traditional methods were too costly, slow or inefficient to meet these needs, the Internet, the Web generally eliminated these drawbacks and thus reached the most popular way of communication between people and by the people - being used worldwide, its great advantage is that it has removed the major constraints on time and space. This technology boom has not been spared from the dissenting views of traditionalists who vehemently deny the advantages that the Web presents. The fact that the world has become dependent on this instrument, and rapid development of the Internet brought a new challenge to marketers as consumers adopt new technologies and change their buying behavior (Danaher, Wilson & Davis, 2003, pp 469-476).
**Research methodology**

Problem identification and defining the scope of research:

The research conducted must answer the question: What is the perception and the attitude of Internet users towards online buying environment. The purpose of the research is knowing the perception and users’ attitude toward shopping online.

**Research objectives**

1. Perception and attitude medium and heavy Internet users towards online
2. Perception of Internet users towards online shopping
3. Identify attitudes towards online shopping and buying habits of Internet users online
4. Perception buyers towards online payment methods

The research conducted is part of qualitative research and was conducted through focus group method. The sample selected is not statistically representative and cannot be extrapolated to the entire community investigated. It is made up of people aged between 18 and 45 years in urban areas.

To ensure homogeneity of the participants in the discussion group, two focus group discussions had to be realized, each with eight participants each. The first panel discussion was conducted with participants aged between 18 and 30, the latter having participants aged between 31 and 45 years.

The sample in both group discussions, was built on the following criteria:

a) person's sex: female, male, and;

b) behavioral criteria: to use the internet at least 30 minutes per day for personal reasons, to have done at least once an order via the Internet.

Recruitment was done through administration of a questionnaire for the selection of the participants. After being ascertained their compatibility with participation in this discussion group, they were asked to consent to participate in this discussion, being assured of the confidentiality of their identity and of the time duration of this group discussion. Following the administration of the questionnaire were selected 16 participants for the 2 focus group discussions.

The manner of data collection was focused group discussion. The discussion was recorded both video and audio to facilitate interpretation of
information. Group discussions were held at a date and time mutually agreed by the participants.

Gathering information was based on the conversation guide.

**Research results**

**Objective 1: Perception and attitude of the medium and heavy Internet users towards online**

Participants of all ages spend more than 3.5 hours daily surfing the internet. The main reasons why they do it are: to keep in touch with friends using email, social networks etc.; entertainment (access to movies, music, games) - to a greater extent the youngest ones; to get information, reading economic news sites - a greater extent those aged between 31 and 45 years.

**Objective 2: The perception of Internet users towards online shopping**

Both groups of participants consider online stores a good corporate initiative to facilitate access to products. The second group assimilates term online shops with a presentation of actual products available in the store, eventually with the option to be able to order directly on the site, when it’s impossible for the customer to reach the retail store. Those from the youngest age segment perceive online store as an independent company and not as a traditional representation of the company’ store on internet.

Participants deemed the most appropriate products to be sold online are products of digitalis, electronics and books. Digital products are represented by the various software and programs for computers; their download from the internet directly to your computer is the easiest way to receive them. It is the same with movies and music, though study participants did not associate downloading movies on the PC with an online purchase because they don’t pay for it. Those in the first group would prefer online stores to commercialize clothes or care products that they do not normally find them on the retail market in Romania. By doing so, they consider orders placed via the Internet as the only way to get your desired product. Those in the second category believe that all kind of printings, books, magazines etc. are products that can be sold successfully online. And they mentioned about printed products abroad which have not yet been translated and distributed in the country.

Those in the first group identify the online buyer by his need, meaning that he chooses the Internet to make an order because this is the
only way through which he can purchase the product he is looking for. Lack of product on the market sought, makes the buyer to seek external sites or intermediate order. Participants aged between 30 and 45 years identify the online buyer as a busy person who prefers this type of shopping to save the time needed for commuting through various stores in search of the most suitable offer. It's a pretentious person who prefers to do a lot of researches before making a purchase, to search and compare information, and finally to choose the solution that fits they best.

To place an order online participants will intuit that they will do the following steps: in the situation when they know exactly what product they are looking for (manufacturer, model, etc.), they will start with an online search engine (google.com). They will access several online stores that have the product available. Depending on the offer (price, means of delivery, duration of delivery, the warranty for the product, store reputation, feedback of the other customers) they will choose the e-shop from which they will order the product. If they intend to buy a generic product, but they have not decided yet on the brand or the model, those from the first group will access the most popular online stores (emag.ro, pcgarage.ro etc.) and they will analyze their offer. After they have decided on the product, they will resume the search of available providers, they will compare offers and after that they will place an order.

After they have placed the order, survey participants expect to receive a call within the next 24 hours from a sales consultant. Those in the first group do not consider this call mandatory and they find it likely to receive a message on their mobile phone with the date and time of the delivery. Those from the second group, expect to carry a conversation with the sales representative either to confirm the order details or to request more details about the product, about the way of its reception, or what are the returning conditions.

Younger participants would choose the courier delivery method for an online ordered electronic product and they expect the product to be delivered in 2-3 days. The maximum amount they would pay for this is 300 euros.

Those from the second group would choose as delivery method of the product the direct hand over in the showroom, they expect the product to be available for picking up, immediately after ordering and they would pay up to 1000 euros for that product purchased by ordering online.
Objective 3: Identify the attitude towards online shopping and online buying habits of Internet users

One of the criteria for training the two groups participating in the discussion was the purchase of at least one product online. In the case of the first group, participants said they have shopped online until now 10-15 times. The products they have ordered were electronics, clothing, care items, services as: prepayment of a sim card, utility bill payment, books, perfumes etc. Those from the second group have ordered on line electronic products, books, they have paid different bills and they have done it 8-9 times so far.

The reasons for choosing this specific manner of shopping, ordering online, instead of going to stores were: product availability, direct and free transportation, wider offer of products, easier access to information in order to make comparisons, time saving, lower prices.

Study participants from the first segment explain the reason of selection of a certain online store as follows: it has been recommended to them by friends, positive experience they have had in the past, free delivery compared to other stores, a promotional offer of limited duration. Those from the second segment of age chose that particular online store because of its online market experience which gave them confidence they did the right choice, and the feedback left by customers. When buying electronic products another reason for choosing one particular online store was the warranty offered by that particular store and the fact that they were offering post-sale service directly, without guiding the buyer to the manufacturer.

Participants are satisfied with the product received, they consider that the online product presentation is genuine. But they do not consider the product to be the one that differentiates traditional made acquisitions from the ones made online, because the product is the same in both cases. Important are also time of delivery, relationship with the sales consultant from the time when the order was placed until the product is received, provider’s flexibility to adapt to changes: for example a change of delivery address after ordering.

Those from the first group are not loyal to stores that have made these orders, if in the future they will find the product they are interested in at a satisfactory offer, they will order it again. In case of a product which they can find it both at the store they are already customers and at another eShop but at a better price, participants would prefer the second option, the price being a very important criteria for them. For those from the second group, the experience they have had in the previous online orders affects
their future purchasing decisions. So they will prefer online shopping in the same stores where they had a positive experience, because they perceive some higher risks in connection with this kind of trade. But if their experience was negative: the product did not meet their expectations or the product broke shortly after the acquisition, delivery was delayed, the support given after sales was unsatisfactory, they will be reluctant to everything what online trade means, not only to that particular shop. But this is a hypothetical situation, study participants are generally satisfied with the orders placed, the product received, with the whole shopping experience on Internet and most probably they will make other orders in the future.

They would recommend or had already recommended to friends the shop they have bought online, recognizing the benefits of this kind of trade.

Objective 4: Buyers’ perception versus online payment methods

Study participants would choose as a method of payment for online orders, payment when product is delivered or when it’s picked up from the store. Those from the first group are also considering a guarantee payment made through an online bank transfer when the seller must initiate an order as well. It is about the situation of online clothes articles orders, when the seller is the one who commissioned a foreign site. He calls a part of the order’s value in advance and a fee for processing orders as an intermediary.

Participants from both groups have made payments online, especially through internet banking services. They have initiated money transfers or they have paid bills, rates, fines.

Participants aged 18-30 are somehow reluctant to make online payments using credit cards. They know that the payment is made through secure platform and that those servers do not keep information about the user or about the card. But they also know that any site can be broken and that it is very likely that your personal information and money may be stolen. They are the ones using online security products such as antivirus programs.

Those from the second group do not trust direct online payments by card. One solution for them is to have a debit card specially dedicated for online payments and this debit card will be debited only when they need to buy something. They would never utilize the salary card to make online payments. They consider that this payment method is useful especially when they want to save time, because they no longer depend on the program of an institution.

Fears of card payments are not felt in the case of payments through internet banking. The fact that the payment is initiated using bank’s interface
offer a sense of security, considering the fact that banks take all necessary measures for their clients’ protection.

Participants have considered normal to pay a delivery charge and they don’t associate it with a reimbursement. If they have to choose between paying by card and paying cash on delivery a higher amount, depending on the difference in costs they would opt for one of the two methods. If cash payment on delivery involves higher costs by 10%, they will either probably opt to pay online or will give up the order. Those from the second category find such a condition tricky, considering that any attempt to convince a customer to pay in advance is questionable. One of the risks of online shopping is to pay and be fooled by not being shipped your order.

**Conclusions**

Study participants have a high opinion of online stores. They identify the benefits of orders via the Internet: wide range of products, access to products not available in traditional stores, time saving, convenience, etc. But still their first option for purchasing products is traditional stores and this because of the risks associated with ecommerce website such as: the possibility of not receiving the order, the products do not comply, the products are damaged. Mostly, the young people are more open to the online shopping but they are also willing to pay less if they have another alternative.

When choosing an online store from which to shop, customers consider very important its reputation: its age experience and its customer database, its feedback, the manufacturers with which the store collaborates etc. Conceptually, although the structure of promotional activity does not currently bring any noticeable news comparing with other older periods of time (ie advertising, sales promotion, public relations, trademarks, promotional events and sales forces), specialists’ concern to put in scientific terms the whole process is remarkable, which is treated on cyber bases and verified in practice (communication system includes the transmitter, encoding, message itself, decoding the message, the receiver, the answer to the message sent, loop feedback from the receiver to transmitter and the eventual disturbing element).

As accredited in the specialized literature, both from abroad and from our country, presently, it is fully recognized the importance and usefulness of conducting extensive promotional activities in all modern businesses or organizations.
Online payment by card is preferred by customers, they prefer payment on delivery system, even if the costs are slightly higher.

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