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1a. A marketing strategy refers to a business's overall game plan for reaching prospective consumers and turning them into customers of the products or services the business provides. A marketing strategy contains the company’s value proposition, key brand messaging, data on target customer demographics, and other high-level elements. The marketing strategy informs the marketing plan, which is a document that details the specific types of marketing activities a company conducts and contains timetables for rolling out various marketing initiatives. Marketing strategies contain value propositions and other key elements of a company’s brand, which generally hold consistent over the long haul. In other words, marketing strategies cover big-picture messaging. A carefully-cultivated marketing strategy should be fundamentally rooted in a company’s value proposition, which summarizes the competitive advantage a company holds over rival businesses. Whether it's a print ad design, mass customization, or a social media campaign, a marketing asset can be judged based on how effectively it communicates a company's core value proposition.

Marketing strategy is a long-term, forward-looking approach and an overall game plan of any organization or any business with the fundamental goal of achieving a sustainable competitive advantage by understanding the needs and want of customers. **A marketing strategy is all of a company’s marketing goals and objectives combined into a single comprehensive plan.** Business executives draw a successful marketing strategy from market research. They also focus on the right product mix so that they can get the most profit. Put simply, a marketing strategy is a strategy designed to promote a good/product or service and make a profit. A good marketing strategy helps companies identify their best customers. It also helps them understand consumers’ needs. With a good strategy, it is possible to implement the most effective marketing methods.

Marketing strategies are long-term, forward-looking approaches to planning. Their fundamental goal is to achieve a competitive advantage. When a company has an edge over a rival or rivals in the provision of a product or service, it has a competitive advantage. Marketing strategy is the comprehensive plan formulated particularly for achieving the marketing objectives of the organization. It provides a blueprint for attaining these marketing objectives. It is the building block of a marketing plan. It is designed after detailed marketing research. A marketing strategy helps an organization to concentrate its scarce resources on the best possible opportunities so as to increase the sales.

A marketing strategy is designed by choosing the target market. Target market refers to people the organization wants to sell its products to. Not all the market segments are fruitful to an organization. There are certain market segments which guarantee quick profits, there are certain segments which may be having great potential but there may be high barriers to entry. A careful choice has to be made by the organization. An in-depth marketing research has to be done of the traits of the buyers and the particular needs of the buyers in the target market. Marketing strategy is also designed by gathering the marketing mix. Marketing mix is how the organization proposes to sell its products. The organization has to gather the four P’s of marketing in appropriate combination. Gathering the marketing mix is a crucial part of marketing task. Various decisions have to be made such as What is the most appropriate mix of the four P’s in a given situation, What distribution channels are available and which one should be used, What developmental strategy should be used in the target market, How should the price structure be designed**. Product**s are the goods and/or services offered by a company to its customers. **Price is t**he amount of money paid by customers to purchase the product. **Place or distribution** are the activities that make the product available to consumers. **Promotion are t**he activities that communicate the product’s features and benefits and persuade customers to purchase the product. This means your marketing strategy should describe in detail your product or service offering, communicate the pricing strategy for how much you will charge, describe the place you manufacture and distribute your products or services and outline the promotional strategies for your company.

Marketing strategy provides an organization an edge over its competitors. Strategy helps in developing goods and services with best profit making potential. Marketing strategy helps in discovering the areas affected by organizational growth and thereby helps in creating an organizational plan to cater to the customer needs. It helps in fixing the right price for organization’s goods and services based on information collected by market research. Strategy ensures effective departmental co-ordination. It helps an organization to make optimum utilization of its resources so as to provide a sales message to its target market. A marketing strategy helps to fix the advertising budget in advance, and it also develops a method which determines the scope of the plan, i.e., it determines the revenue generated by the advertising plan. In short, a marketing strategy clearly explains how an organization reaches its predetermined objectives.

You cannot achieve success in any area of your life without a strategy. The same is true of marketing. Marketing is not a standalone activity, distinguished from all other aspects of the business. Rather, marketing is a joint effort that involves collaboration from creative, financial, sales, and technical departments. And without a sound marketing plan in place, the organization will crumble. a marketing strategy analyzes all aspects of your sales activity and combines it in a way so that all departments know what it going on. Hence, a marketing strategy is the process that allows the organization to focus on available resources and utilize them in the best possible manner to boost sales and gain leverage over competitors. Marketing strategy helps to create harmony among the organizations.  Organizational efficiency improves as everyone is one the same page. So the product development team goes hand in hand with the advertising department to come with the most relevant marketing message. Benefits of developing marketing strategies are that distribution becomes more efficient, establishment of brand image and creation of products that sell.

A marketing strategy is based on research that focuses on a business’s competitors, customers, market size and the potential for market growth. The strategy will help to determine what aspects of the business have the most influence on its customers. It is a way for a business to maximize the results from money and time spent on marketing. The goal of marketing strategy is to set a foundation for a business’s marketing plan. This is accomplished by having a good understanding of customer wants and needs. A properly prepared strategy will allow the business to focus on the right mix of service and products, to allow it to obtain its potential for maximizing profits. A marketing strategy is a written plan that includes marketing topics like product development, promotion, distribution and pricing approach; identifies you company's marketing goals; and explains how you will achieve those goals. Marketing strategies can help you identify strengths and weaknesses of your company and your competitors so you know where to focus your marketing tactics. There are several important components of a marketing strategy that you should include when writing the document.

Because marketing strategy means finding ways to reach your marketing goals, one of the most important parts of your strategy is the goals and objectives section. Write your marketing goals so they are S.M.A.R.T. This means they should be "specific" because concise goals have a greater chance of being accomplished than general goals; "measurable," which means you establish criteria for measuring your progress; "attainable," so you focus on the goals most important to you; "realistic," which means they're not too lofty and out of reach; and "tangible," which means you can experience your goals with your senses. A marketing strategy also means comparing your product to your competitors' products to find competitive advantages. Examine the market opportunities for your business by conducting a competitive analysis. Make a list of each competitor and include addresses, total number of employees, sales figures, target market, market share, advantages and disadvantages. Then communicate how your company will position itself to develop and sustain a competitive advantage over each of these competitors.

b. Integrated Marketing Communications is a simple concept. It ensures that all forms of communications and messages are carefully linked together. At its most basic level, Integrated Marketing Communications, or IMC means integrating all the promotional tools, so that they work together in harmony. Promotion is one of the Ps in the marketing mix. Promotions have its own mix of communications tools. All of these communications tools work better if they work together in harmony rather than in isolation. Their sum is greater than their parts, provided they speak consistently with one voice all the time. This is enhanced when integration goes beyond just the basic communications tools. There are other levels of integration such as Horizontal, Vertical, Internal, External and Data integration.

**Horizontal Integration** occurs across the marketing mix and across business functions. For example, production, finance, distribution and communications should work together and be conscious that their decisions and actions send messages to customers. While different departments such as sales, direct mail and advertising can help each other through **Data Integration**. This requires a marketing information system which collects and shares relevant data across different departments. **Vertical Integration** means marketing and communications objectives must support the higher level corporate objectives and corporate missions**. Internal Integration** requires internal marketing keeping all staff informed and motivated about any new developments from new advertisements, to new corporate identities, new service standards, new strategic partners and so on. **External Integration,** on the other hand, requires external partners such as advertising and PR agencies to work closely together to deliver a single seamless solution, a cohesive message or an integrated message.

Although Integrated Marketing Communications requires a lot of effort it delivers many benefits. It can create competitive advantage, boost sales and profits, while saving money, time and stress.IMC wraps communications around customers and helps them move through the various stages of the buying process. The organization simultaneously consolidates its image, develops a dialogue and nurtures its relationship with customers. This ‘Relationship Marketing’ cements a bond of loyalty with customers which can protect them from the inevitable onslaught of competition. The ability to keep a customer for life is a powerful competitive advantage.

IMC also increases profits through increased effectiveness. At its most basic level, a unified message has more impact than a disjointed myriad of messages. In a busy world, a consistent, consolidated and crystal clear message has a better chance of cutting through the ‘noise’ of over five hundred commercial messages which bombard customers each and every day. At another level, initial research suggests that images shared in advertising and direct mail boost both advertising awareness and mail shot responses. So IMC can boost sales by stretching messages across several communications tools to create more avenues for customers to become aware, aroused, and ultimately, to make a purchase Carefully linked messages also help buyers by giving timely reminders, updated information and special offers which, when presented in a planned sequence, help them move comfortably through the stages of their buying process and this reduces their ‘misery of choice’ in a complex and busy world.

IMC also makes messages more consistent and therefore more credible. This reduces risk in the mind of the buyer which, in turn, shortens the search process and helps to dictate the outcome of brand comparisons.Un-integrated communications send disjointed messages which dilute the impact of the message. This may also confuse, frustrate and arouse anxiety in customers. On the other hand, integrated communications present a reassuring sense of order. Consistent images and relevant, useful, messages help nurture long term relationships with customers. Here, customer databases can identify precisely which customers need what information when… and throughout their whole buying life. Finally, IMC saves money as it eliminates duplication in areas such as graphics and photography since they can be shared and used in say, advertising, exhibitions and sales literature. Agency fees are reduced by using a single agency for all communications and even if there are several agencies, time is saved when meetings bring all the agencies together – for briefings, creative sessions, tactical or strategic planning. This reduces workload and subsequent stress levels – one of the many benefits of IMC.How do we communicate? How do customers process information? There are many models and theories. For example;

Simple communications models show a sender sending a message to a receiver who receives and understands it. Real life is less simple as many messages are misunderstood, fail to arrive or, are simply ignored. Thorough understanding of the audience’s needs, emotions, interests and activities is essential to ensure the accuracy and relevance of any message. Instead of loud ‘buy now’ advertisements, many messages are often designed or ‘encoded’ so that the hard sell becomes a more subtle soft sell. The sender creates or encodes the message in a form that can be easily understood or decoded by the receiver. Clever encoding also helps a message to cut through the clutter of other advertisements and distractions, what is called ‘noise’. If successful, the audience will spot the message and then decode or interpret it correctly. The marketer then looks for ‘feedback’ such as coupons returned from mail shots, to see if the audience has decoded the message correctly. The single step model. Here a receiver getting a message directly from a sender is not a complete explanation. Many messages are received indirectly through a friend or through an opinion leader. Communications are in fact multifaceted, multi-step and multi-directional. Opinion leaders talk to each other. Customers talk to opinion leaders and they talk to each other. Add in ‘encode, decode, noise and feedback’ and the process appears more complex still. Understanding multiphase communications helps marketers communicate directly through mass media and indirectly through targeting opinion leaders, opinion formers, style leaders, innovators, and other influential people. How messages are selected and processed within the minds of the target market is a vast and complex question. Although it is over seventy years old, rather simplistic and too hierarchical, a message model, like AIDA, attempts to map the mental processes through which a buyer passes en route to making a purchase.AIDA stands for attention, interest, desire, and action. The AIDA model can be used by organizations to guide marketers to target a market effectively. American advertising and sales pioneer, Elias St. Elmo Lewis, is credited for developing the AIDA model.

There are many other models that attempt to identify each stage. In reality the process is not always a linear sequence. Buyers often loop backwards at various stages perhaps for more information. There are other much more complex models that attempt to map the inner workings of the mind. In reality, marketers have to select communications tools that are most suitable for the stage which the target audience has reached. For example, advertising may be very good at raising awareness or developing interest, while free samples and sales promotions may be the way to generate trial. This is just a glimpse into some of the theory. Serious marketers read a lot more. Integrated marketing communications is an approach used by organizations to brand and coordinate their marketing efforts across multiple communication channels. As marketing efforts have shifted from mass advertising to niche marketing, companies have increasingly used IMC to develop more cost-effective campaigns that still deliver consumer value. Typically, communication tools for IMC encompass both traditional and digital media, such as blogs, webinars, search engine optimization, radio, television, billboards, and magazines with so many products and services to choose from, consumers are often overwhelmed by the vast number of advertisements flooding both online and offline communication channels. Marketing messages run the risk of being overlooked and ignored if they are not relevant to consumers’ needs and wants.

Integrated marketing communications marketers can clearly and effectively communicate their brand’s story and messaging across several communication channels to create brand awareness. IMC is also more cost-effective than mass media since consumers are likely to interact with brands across various forums and digital interfaces. As consumers spend more time on computers and mobile devices, marketers seek to weave together multiple exposures to their brands using different touch points. Companies can then view the performance of their communication tactics as a whole instead of as fragmented pieces. Integrated marketing communications creates a competitive advantage for companies looking to boost their sales and profits. This is especially useful for small or mid-sized firms with limited staff and marketing budgets. IMC immerses customers in communications and helps them move through the various stages of the buying process. The organization simultaneously consolidates its image, develops a dialogue, and nurtures its relationship with customers throughout the exchange. IMC can be instrumental in creating a seamless purchasing experience that spurs customers to become loyal, lifelong customers. The communications process involves two or more persons attempting to consciously or unconsciously influence each other through the use of symbols or words. Our ability to receive, communicate, and process information and external stimuli all play a part in the way we perceive advertising and promotional messages. The nature of a person’s role and their environment and personal characteristics both affect the way he or she perceives marketing messages and company brands.

2. AliExpress is an online retail service based in China that is owned by the Alibaba Group and was launched in 2010, it is made up of small businesses in China and other locations, such as Singapore, that offer products to international online buyers. It facilitates small businesses to sell to customers all over the world. AliExpress has drawn comparison to eBay, as sellers are independent and use the platform to offer products to buyers. Sellers on AliExpress can be either companies or individuals. AliExpress is different from Amazon because it acts only as an e-commerce platform and does not sell products directly to consumers. It directly connects Chinese businesses with buyers.

Aliexpress has been racked with challenges early on in this crisis to the point aliexpress warned customers earlier in the month that there might be some delivery delays due to the Corona virus outbreak “Some shipping and logistics are experiencing longer waiting times for processing orders,” the platform said in a Facebook post. There is Massive out of stocks as Nigerians, who purchase items from the site and resell to customers here, may also be affected.

Alibaba-owned AliExpress, Chinese sellers, and Westerner companies who drop ship from China lose a lot, though, in the end, the biggest loser will be the end consumer since prices will be dramatically hiked yet offering no additional benefits to the buyer. Since the outbreak, international logistics has been affected, with international courrier services and freight discontinued, transportation routes closed, and production facilities remaining in lockdown for months. Consequently, the standard shipping service offered by most sellers on AliExpress comes with impressive delays

However, upon closer inspection the “potential delays” are creating serious backlogs. Consumers are complaining on social media that they are waiting months for their packages and the communication with customer care service is reduced to talking to chat bots instead of support agents. According to U.S. News & World Report, buyers lamented that orders were not only taking a long time to arrive but were being automatically renewed, instead of being canceled and refunded.

 On Reddit, a user pointed out that the delay is not a problem considering the COVID-19 outbreak, but he has an issue with “the blatant false advertising” that says, “your orders should arrive in 32 days.” According to him, a company of the size of AliExpress should have the “basic courtesy” to include realistic shipping times. Other users highlight that these lengthy delays have little to do with COVID-19, since Chinese sellers on eBay and Amazon don’t have this problem.

 It’s worth noting that many Reddit users point out that products ordered in January and February still haven’t arrived yet, and the guaranteed delivery time is no longer reliable anymore. On the other hand, drop shippers in the US complain that they offered discount codes and additional perks to their customers who are waiting for orders since February. This is killing their business since customers cancel orders and leave them in the red.

Given the current state of affairs, it’s safe to say that the current drop shipping business model has been, if not killed by COVID-19, seriously damaged. If companies want to keep their heads about water, they will have suffer a significantly decrease their profit margins to make up for these issues.

Due to the fact that the pandemic has seriously affected all aspects globally, producing or delivering products from one country to another is a difficult task and this causes price of goods and services to drastically increase especially since shopping malls are closed and people have turned to online shopping making it difficult to easily satisfy consumers. Because of the pandemic it is difficult for people to access products they need easily as the touch point that allows consumers to purchase a product is being delayed. The promotion of their business is failing as consumers are deviating their attention from them because they are not satisfying them due to delays.