

# RESEARCH ON OBTAINING AND USING MARKETING INFORMATION IN COMMERCE COMPANIES

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## *Abstract:*

*The present paper focuses on the issue of using marketing instruments (concepts, policies, strategies, research etc.) in commerce companies in Brasov. The research is about identifying the marketing instruments that are used in the activity of the commerce companies in Brasov and it underlines the peculiarities of marketing in commerce companies. The information obtained contributes to a better understanding of the way marketing activity works in commerce companies in Brasov. The method used to identify the attitudes and opinions of commerce companies' managers in Brasov, regarding collecting and using marketing information, is the focus group. The paper ends with the conclusions of this research at the level of a single city – Brasov.*

*Key words: marketing, marketing information, research, focus-group, marketing behavior.*

## **Introduction**

Within modern market economy, marketing per se is an essential instrument for a business to develop. In order to be successful under the conditions of strong competition it is important and necessary for companies to develop marketing strategies. One must create a model to be followed by using a series of well-known methods.

An unquestionable fact is that whoever has information has the power. Therefore, a correct gathering of information will help the company to understand its position within a certain environment.

The largest amount of information and, we may say, the most relevant, comes directly from the clients. By observing their behavior as consumers, very important aspects can be discovered, thus showing specialists the right solution for each situation.

Of course, consumers' behavior is not the only aspect envisaged when defining a marketing strategy, but a better acknowledgement leads to a

better satisfaction of the clients' needs and requests.

Therefore, the marketing activity is very important for any company, but there are some questions, such as: Do companies know how to do marketing? Do companies know marketing instruments and how to use them? Is it necessary for a company to have specialists to deal with these aspects, or marketing is also accessible to those with lesser knowledge in the field?

A qualitative marketing research was necessary, such as a Focus Group, to analyze the present situation, to observe the attitude of managers in Brasov regarding marketing instruments, whether they use them or not and how much confidence they have in marketing instruments when it comes to improving their activity. Furthermore, we wanted to identify the problems they faced and the solutions to these problems. We also focused on the advantages of using marketing instruments and on how helpful they were in the commercial activity.

If there are managers who do not use marketing instruments, we wish to find out the reasons for this.

All these aspects, resulting from the research, will help us understand better the relationship between the retailer and the client, and to observe the impact of using marketing instruments on consumption behavior.

**The methodology of the research**

The Focus Group implied two groups of subjects that work as managers in commerce companies in Brasov. We chose a focused debate because this kind of debates are more flexible and generate ideas. These debates allow participants to communicate freely, by presenting their own opinions, leading to the obtaining of relevant information.

The present research is about ***“Attitudes, opinions and behaviors of commerce companies’ managers in Brasov, regarding collecting and using marketing information”***.

The first group comprises 8 members, male and female managers, aged 20 to 40 years, just like the second group.

The sampling was made by means of a database that included the number

of retailers in Brasov, as well as their contact information (phone number, address etc.). The most recent information was from 2007. In 2007 the number of retailers was 7621, of different dimensions.

In order to define the sample we used the systematic random sampling method, and the range was 6, “every six companies”.

The recruitment is accomplished by means of a recruiting questionnaire. This questionnaire includes questions regarding all-important characteristics (age, sex, occupation, education, average income, etc.). With the help of the questionnaire, the possibility of including in the sample individuals who participated in similar debates in the last 6 months is eliminated.

The recruiting questionnaire is applied by using the phone until all participants plus reserves are identified.

56 persons were questioned out of the total target population, until 16 + 2 reserves were identified.

**Participants:**

At the level of the group, the imposed selection criteria were complied with.

The participants were:

First group:

- One person, female, aged between 20-30 years, Sales Point Manager – retail company	- One person, male, aged between 20-30, Marketing Manager retail company
- One person, male, aged between 30-40 years, General Manager retail company	- One person, female, aged between 30-40 years, Regional Sales Manager, retail company
- One person, male, aged between 30-40 years, General Manager public alimentation company	- One person, female, aged between 20-30 years, Regional Sales Manager, retail company
- One person, male, aged between 30-40 years, Regional Sales Manager retail company	- One person, male, aged between 20-30, Logistics Manager, retail company

Second group:

- One person, female, aged between 30-40 years, General Manager retail	- One person, male, aged between 30-40 years, General Manager construction company
- One person, female, aged between 20-30 years, PR Manager retail company	- One person, male, aged between 30-40 years, PR & Marketing Manager auto dealer
- One person, female, aged between 20-30 years, PR Manager retail company	- One person, male, aged between 20-30 years, PR Manager retail company
- One person, male, aged between 20-30 years Marketing Manager advertising company	- One person, male, aged between 20-30 years, General Manager catering company

**Defining hypotheses and objectives of the qualitative research**

**Defining hypotheses:**

1. Most companies in Brasov apply modern marketing in their activity;
2. Companies in Brasov use most of the available marketing instruments;
3. Companies in Brasov face certain obstacles in collecting information from the market;
4. Companies in Brasov are reserved concerning information exchange with business partners (suppliers, partners, etc.).

**Defining the objectives:**

**I. The attitude towards the marketing strategy and the necessity of knowing the consumers' behavior:**

1. Identifying the promotional means used
2. Identifying the profile of the consumer in participating companies
3. Identifying the orientation of the company (towards market, product, or client)

**II. The conception regarding marketing instruments and their role in defining the marketing strategy:**

1. How does marketing work in the researched companies?

2. Identifying the marketing instruments companies use
3. Identifying the most frequently used marketing instruments
4. Identifying the reasons that set the basis for choosing the instruments
5. How reliable are the results obtained by using certain marketing instruments

**III. The impact of using marketing instruments on the merchants' strategy**

1. Identifying the marketing instruments used in defining the marketing strategy
2. How easy is it to use the marketing instruments
3. Identifying the disadvantages of using the marketing instruments
4. How cooperative are those who supply information

**IV. Suggestions for optimizing the efficiency of using marketing information**

1. Identifying the intentions of the strategy in use
2. Identifying the importance given to secondary data
3. Are the subjects willing to share information?
4. Identifying the methods to avoid conflicts in information exchange
5. Identifying the most important information for subjects

6. Identifying the persuasive methods of convincing those who possess information to share it.

### **Planning the moderators' guide**

The date must be carefully chosen in order not to coincide with any holiday or any other event (sportive, cultural etc.). The Focus Group took place on May 19, 2008, in room AIII1, on Colina Universitatii. Both focalized debates took place on that specific afternoon. The first group started the debates at 5 p.m. and the second group at 7 p.m.

Preparing for the debate:

1. preparing the interview guide
2. preparing the apparatus (2 video cameras, 1 photo camera and one recorder)
3. verifying the equipment that is to be used during the debates
4. preparing the snack (cookies, soda, water, etc.).

### ***Preparing the interview guide***

The debate starts with a series of questions meant to make the participants comfortable with the subject of the debate, and the identification questions so that all participants get to know each other. The introduction lasts for approximately 5 minutes, while the participants introduce themselves. The first part lasts for 20 minutes (each member of the group has approximately 2.5 minutes). The middle part (2+3) lasts for 55 minutes, while the participants supply information regarding the marketing activity that companies run, marketing strategies, marketing instruments etc. The final part lasts for 20 minutes.

### ***The process***

#### **The interview guide**

##### **Preamble (5 minutes)**

Good afternoon/ good evening!  
Welcome and thank you for accepting to

participate in this group debate. My name is Simona Balasescu. We will all participate to a communicative Focus Group. I will try to ask questions as clearly as possible and I must inform you that no answer will be regarded as wrong or right.

This debate will be recorded both video and audio, and my colleagues will follow the debate. If you wish, you can have soda, cookies or everything else on the table.

We shall start the debate on marketing information used by retailers as well as about instruments that help collecting this information. If there are any questions or ambiguities, please ask me now.

At the beginning, let us get acquainted! (each participant states his/her name).

#### **I. The attitude towards the marketing strategy and the necessity of knowing consumers' behavior (20 minutes):**

1. Generally, are you satisfied with the activity your company runs?

2. Do you consider the effort of maintaining your company on the market as unjustified?

3. What promotional means did you use to increase the awareness of consumers regarding your company/products?

4. Which of those means do you consider as being the most efficient?

5. Why do you think clients come to your company?

6. What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the term "strategy"?

7. Starting from the idea that the marketing strategy is ....., I would like to know your opinion regarding the importance it has in .....

8. Do you think it is necessary for a company to have a marketing strategy in order to be profitable?

9. In your opinion, how important is it for a company to know the consumers' behavior?

10. How would you characterize in today's consumer 2 or 3 sentences

11. Is studying the consumers' behavior sufficient for defining the best marketing strategy?

## **II. The conception regarding marketing instruments and their role in defining the marketing strategy (25 minutes):**

1. Do you think the company you work for has a clearly defined marketing strategy?

2. Who was in charge with defining the strategy?

3. Summarize in 2-3 sentences the most important aspects of the marketing strategy used by your company.

4. Do you have the tendency to rely on your intuition in taking the decisions?

5. How important is the marketing strategy for your company?

6. Is there a specialized person taking care of the marketing activity in the company you work for?

7. Select from the following list the marketing instruments you use in your activity:

- database
- data warehouse
- marketing research
- primary data (simulation, experiment)
- secondary data (internal – reports, graphics, situations; external – articles, works)

8. For what reason have you chosen this instrument (s)?

9. How reliable are for you the results obtained after using these instruments?

## **III. The impact of using marketing instruments on the merchants' strategy (30 minutes):**

1. Do you use marketing instruments to define the marketing strategy? What kind of instruments do you use?

2. Have you ever contracted a consultant (company) for helping you choose the marketing instruments?

3. How difficult it is for you to use these instruments?

4. How was the activity of your company influenced by the use of marketing instruments?

5. Which were the main disadvantages of using the marketing instruments?

6. Which of the marketing instruments do you think supplied the larger amount of information and was a real support in the activity of your company?

7. How cooperative are the subjects you must collect information from?

8. What were the biggest problems you faced in accessing information?

## **IV. Suggestions for optimizing the efficiency of using marketing information**

1. Do you intend to change the present marketing strategy?

2. What other instruments do you consider using in the near future in order to better define the marketing strategy?

3. How important do you think secondary data are in taking decisions concerning the present issue?

4. Under what circumstances are you willing to share information you own with suppliers or business partners?

5. From your experience, did you have any conflicts with partners regarding information exchange?

6. How can conflicts between supplier and retailer be avoided, when exchanging information?

7. If you had at your disposal a full database of consumers, what information would you like it to include, that would help you improve your activity?

8. By what means can clients be persuaded to supply various information required by the marketing strategy?

If you feel like adding anything, please feel free to contribute!

This is where our conversation ends! Thank you for your participation!

### **The abstract of the final research report**

In the respondents' opinion, both the direct and indirect promotional means are considered very efficient, but particularly the indirect ones, which are more accessible to the company, irrespective of its dimensions. The promotional means are selected depending on the exact needs of the company, as well as on the companies' financial possibilities.

Regarding the profile of the consumer, all subjects characterized the consumer by means of one term. A full profile could be: snob, picky, undetermined and easily influenced. In other words, the nowadays client's profile is: clients who want high quality, low prices and as short delivery terms as possible.

Some of the companies are oriented towards the market, others towards profit and some others towards clients. This statement results from the association of the term "strategy" with a random term. Considering the fact that most companies are oriented towards clients, we may say that the commercial activity in Brasov has a good direction.

In the researched companies, the marketing activity is performed mainly by a department (6 cases), but in the case of 25% of the companies (2

companies), the marketing activity is conducted by the General Manager, which does not allow a good development of the company. As long as the 2 companies do not have a marketing department and not even a specialized person to do this activity, it is obvious that a marketing strategy does not exist. In these 2 companies, decisions are often taken intuitively, which leads us to say that the market activity does not observe exact rules, like in the case of the existence of a marketing department which defines a viable marketing strategy or plan.

Regarding the marketing instruments, smaller companies use primary data and databases obtained using their own means, while larger companies use all the marketing instruments mentioned by the moderator, meaning: databases, primary and secondary data, marketing research etc. From all these, the most efficient are: databases in the case of smaller companies (37.5% - 3 nominations), marketing research in the case of larger companies (62.5% - 5 nominations). Smaller companies chose databases as the main marketing instruments because of the lack of funds for using other instruments, while the other companies chose all instruments for a better analysis of the market, or for better understanding the client, or even for increasing the profit. There is accordance between the answers provided to this question and the association of the term "strategy" to a random word, strengthening their orientation as company, towards client, market or profit.

The subjects are very confident in the results obtained by using marketing instruments. We may say that this confidence helps them because it allows them to build a clear vision and mission of the company.

When defining the marketing strategy, small companies use databases, whereas larger companies use all the instruments, especially

marketing research. The representatives of the 2 companies without a marketing department stated that they did not have a well defined marketing strategy.

Taking into account the difficulty of supporting the instruments on the market, we reached the conclusion that it is not difficult at all to use marketing instruments, but quite easy.

Two issues may appear when using marketing instruments, more exactly: non-representative data and irrelevant data. Subjects stated that, sometimes, the data from databases are out-of-date, incomplete or wrong, which makes them irrelevant (in the case of smaller companies that use databases as main marketing instrument), while others stated that information is not always representative (in the case of larger companies that use mainly marketing research), referring to the fact that they receive some information from marketing research, but they see a difference when they contact the client directly.

All respondents stated that those who possess information do not cooperate and do not share it, and the lack of communication (and the low budget in the case of small companies) is an obstacle in accessing information. Hence conflicts result when it comes to exchanging information.

Most subjects intend to change the marketing strategy in the near future. Small companies are willing to use marketing research as a marketing instrument that will help with their marketing activity, and larger companies will continue to use all marketing instruments.

Regarding the secondary data, they are very important to all respondents. Using secondary data as a marketing instrument reveals a great importance given to the marketing activity, even in the case of the companies that have neither a marketing department nor a specialist dealing with the marketing activity.

Considering the problems we identified in the information exchange, small companies are willing to share information, but an absolute "no" comes from larger companies concerning this exchange.

Provided respondents owned a full database, they would like to find more information in it referring to the history of their partners, exact needs of the consumers, satisfaction, and other information.

## **Conclusions**

We can conclude that the marketing activity is very important to all companies. This can only lead to improving their activity on the market. The marketing instruments companies use are various, including all elements brought into discussion. The importance given to the marketing instruments, strategies and plans emphasizes the fact that marketing activity is essential to the success of any company also in our country.

The present work is only the first step in understanding marketing in commerce companies. A quantitative marketing research will follow and the results will be published on the occasion of a future scientific event.

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