

GROUP 6

STARBUCKS

STRATEGIC MARKETING PLAN



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Proper implementation and execution of a strategic marketing plan is essential to the success of any company. A company may have an ideal product, but without proper positioning, identification of a target market, and a proper marketing plan a company would not be able to successfully market its products to consumers. Starbucks has been successfully able to convert an activity carried out at home to a commercial success through proper implementation and execution of its strategic intent. The firm has been able to convince consumers that its stores provide more than just coffee, but rather a rich experience that they should indulge in on a recurring basis. The company has been able to translate this consumer “experience” of its products into a highly profitable business.

This paper will discuss the marketing strategy being implemented by Starbucks, and will evaluate the company’s current marketing plan, including positioning strategies, targeting strategies, competitive environment, and various other factors that affect its marketing strategy. The paper will further attempt to provide recommendations to Starbucks on the course of action it should pursue to remain viable and maximize profitability - whether it is through improvements to its existing marketing strategy or implementation of a new strategy.

The first Starbucks opened in 1971 in Seattle’s historic Pike Place Market and was owned by Jerry Baldwin, Zev Siegel, and Gordon Bowker. During the first decade of its existence, the company sold fresh roasted gourmet coffee beans and accessories for brewing and roasting. In 1982, the founders were joined by an entrepreneur named Howard Shultz who functioned as the firm’s Director of Retail Operations and Marketing (“Facts about Starbucks Coffee Company”). While on a trip to Italy, Howard Shultz came across Italian “coffee culture”,

where patrons in the café would sit around the tables and enjoy themselves while drinking coffee. The café's appeared to function as a meeting place for Italians, where they would socialize and spend time in leisure. Shultz believed that this "coffee culture" could be replicated in United States, and that the incorporation of coffee bars in Starbucks stores could seed the coffee culture here. Shultz idea was rejected by the founders who believed that the firm should focus on selling beans and equipment rather than engaging in restaurant business. Schultz was nonetheless successful in convincing the founders to open a concept coffee shop that would incorporate his vision of coffee culture. The experiment was successful, but the founders hesitated to implement his vision company-wide. Frustrated, Shultz started his own coffee shop called Il Giornale. With his coffee shop becoming a successful venture, Shultz went on to acquire Starbucks in 1987 from its founders with the help of local investors. Shultz changed the name of his stores from Il Giornale to Starbucks and expanded aggressively ("Company Timeline"). Five years later, Starbucks was listed in NASDAQ and over the course of next 17 years, the company expanded into 49 countries with 16,000 stores and 160,000 employees ("Starbucks Corporation Fiscal 2008 Annual Report").

One of the key reasons for the company's success has been the successful projection of its stores as venues for socialization between office and work. This strategy provided Starbucks with a large customer base that could use Starbucks stores as a place to meet up or socialize on a recurring basis while not at office or work. This, along with the premise of being a premier specialty coffee brand that is perceived as an affordable luxury allowed Starbucks to charge a premium for its products.

As stated earlier, Starbucks strategy has been to position itself as an upscale brand and differentiate its offerings as being not just coffee products, but rather a rich “experience”. This Starbucks “experience” has been the company’s selling point. The company initially targeted young college students, social classes, and neighborhoods that would be most receptive to the idea of buying \$3 a cup of coffee and spending time with friends at their stores. With rapid growth and expansion, Starbucks target market expanded rapidly to include every individual of every age. The company targeted small towns, rural communities, ethnic neighborhoods, highway rest stops, and even markets already saturated with various coffee shops (“Starbucks Corp: Long-Term Growth Goal Raised To 30,000 Stores World-Wide”). What began as a niche target market eventually came to include consumers from all facets of life.

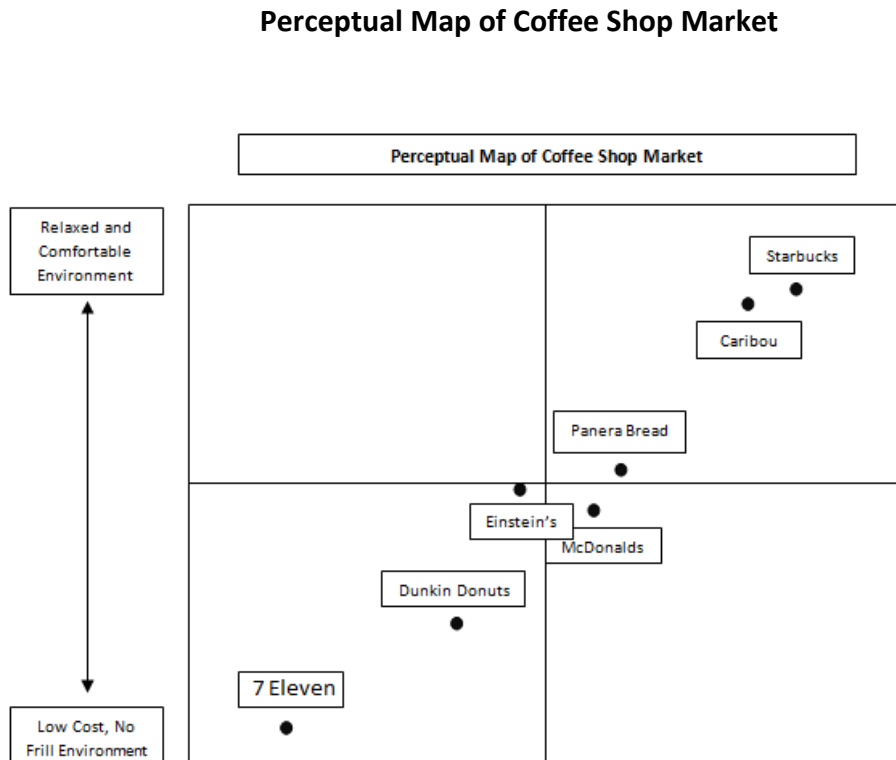
Starbucks' marketing strategy involved positioning its Starbucks outlets as a place where consumers can spend time other than their home or work. This was done by making each of its stores as comfortable and relaxing as possible. The coffee giant achieved these using creature comforts, such as comfortable furniture and relaxing music. Over the past several years, Starbucks also included offerings such as wireless internet, handicapped access, complimentary books, and common areas for collaboration. While Starbucks stores are positioned as locations where customers can spend time in a comfortable setting, their product lines are positioned at the higher end in regards to prices and quality.

Starbucks competitors in the coffee beverage sales include 7-Eleven, Dunkin Donuts, BIGGBY Coffee, Caribou Coffee, McDonald’s, Panera Bread, and Einstein Bagels. Competitors

such as McDonald’s and Dunkin Donuts not only have extensive menus, but also the financial resources and position to leverage their strengths to threaten Starbucks profitability.

In terms of perception, 7-Eleven and Dunkin Donuts provide coffee in a “no-nonsense fashion”, which attracts customers who are extremely price sensitive. Caribou Coffee’s environment is similar to that of Starbucks because of furniture, free internet, and cozy surroundings, but their lack of market expansion has prohibited them from gaining the notoriety Starbucks has achieved. Finally, BIGGBY Coffee is in the middle ground where the likes of Dunkin Donuts and Caribou Coffee separate themselves.

The graph below illustrates customer perceptions regarding various brands:



In order to maximize their brand awareness and establish themselves as the most recognized and respected brand in the world and within their target market, Starbucks implemented a well-integrated marketing program that would utilize a marketing mix (product, price, place, and promotion) that would satisfy the needs and wants of its target market. The four elements of marketing mix that Starbucks utilized are as follows:

Product: Starbucks product-mix expanded from 30 varieties of whole bean coffees to eco-friendly cappuccino, coffee makers, and other Starbucks paraphernalia. Its product offerings have also expanded beyond pastries and coffee to oatmeal, smoothies, and wraps to keep up with the competition and satisfy more customer needs.

The company has also been constantly introducing new products, such as “Instant via Ready” and “Full Leaf Tazo Tea Lattes” and “Tazo Tea Infusions”. The Instant via Ready is an instant coffee that the company claims is indistinguishable from its regular brewed coffee (Jargon). Full Leaf Tazo Tea Lattes and Tazo Tea Infusions are the company’s new tea offerings through which it hopes to attract tea drinkers (Edwards). The company also offers Starbucks coffee and cappuccino makers for consumers who wish to replace their existing home coffee makers.

Price: Starbucks products are priced higher due to perceived upscale image attached to its brand. The company also began to offer \$1 bottomless 8 oz. cup of coffee, with unlimited refills that cost approximately 50 cents less than any other Starbucks products. The company is also implementing “value strategies” that would emphasize more on inexpensive coffee products rather being perceived as unaffordable to price-skittish consumers. For example, the

company introduced \$3.95 "breakfast pairings," including popular breakfast items paired with a coffee, and highlights \$2 brewed coffees instead of the more expensive specialty drinks (Jennings).

Place: As stated earlier, Starbucks can be found in any neighborhood where there is a perceived high traffic for its stores. Starbucks outlets can also be found in-store of various large chains including Barnes & Noble and Target. Their locations are extremely conducive for individuals that are on the go and for those who enjoy reading or listening to music. Starbucks has also been recently testing "stealth outlets", where the store is named after the street it is located on. The new stores attempt to "localize" Starbucks stores with no Starbucks logo on any of the products being offered there, and instead have the specific street address as the brand name (Allison).

Promotion: Starbucks has implemented numerous promotions to reach its target markets. Promotions are listed as follows:

- One of the promotions that Starbucks has used is the Starbucks Card. Starbucks Card is an initiative that offers customers the opportunity to promote company's products through a referral system. When a customer purchases a gift card, it not only shows brand loyalty, but it also provides the company with free advertising, and brings in new customers. Starbucks also provides a card for corporate sales, which are used for extrinsic rewards to show employee appreciation for a job well done, or a gift to client or a vendor.
- Coffee services delivered to offices without coffee size restrictions.

- Appealing to a diverse customer base by offering international teas and coffees to accommodate those customers that want a taste from home or for locals that enjoy tea.
- Using philanthropy as a means for promotion - Starbucks contributes to several non-profit organizations as a way to improve brand image and awareness in local communities.

The description of the company's history, accompanied by present marketing practices, allows one to describe Starbucks' marketing strategy as being that of a differentiator. As previously mentioned, coffee is sold just about everywhere, as such, Starbucks has to make itself stand out as a company that is not only selling a cup of coffee, but an experience. In order to achieve this, the company has been trying to differentiate each store within the company by having it represent the specific needs of each community in which it is located. Individual stores serve as a medium for each community, and as an extension of the community's values and ambitions.

This section will explain in detail what differentiates Starbucks from its competitors. The evaluation will consist of analyzing the marketing concepts, principles, and strategic tools that Starbucks utilizes in differentiating themselves. After creating a SWOT analysis for Starbucks, we will show how the company can reduce some of the weaknesses that could pose a threat to it. This will be followed by discussion on the greatest areas of resistance Starbucks faces - both internally and externally, and the forecast of the affects Starbucks will experience if it continues with its current operational methods.

As stated earlier, Starbucks is a company that has differentiated itself by convincing consumers that it is selling more than a cup of coffee. Further, their brand image is associated with a sense of community activism. Starbucks feels that if they can identify with customer's societal endeavors, they would be differentiating themselves on these principles. Five decades ago, General Electric stated, "the marketing concept holds that the planning and coordination of all company activities around the primary goal of satisfying customer needs is the most effective means to attain and sustain a competitive advantage and achieve company objectives over time." (Mullins, Walker Jr., Boyd Jr., 36). This statement made over fifty years ago still holds true today. A company's ability to adapt to changing markets wants and needs is a key to its survival. Starbucks is a great example of a company that has done a tremendous job in this area. The company managed to maintain the wants and needs of the customers at the top of its list, and through a differentiated strategy earned incredible revenues from a readily available commodity, coffee.

Starbucks is selling an easily accessible tangible product, but has evolved into a company that is doing much more than that. There is also a philosophy and an image Starbucks is attempting to promote through its products. The company is heavily involved in public relations, promoting an image of a responsible company that has the resources to make good on its promises. Starbucks promotes ethical sourcing, environmental stewardship, and community involvement and goes as far grading itself on the company's website ("FY 2008 Global Responsibility Report"). The company boasts of being ethically committed to all stakeholders in the business - from the coffee bean farmers to the issues of climate change. Starbucks maintains that being ethical is a top priority of the organization. Starbucks is also very

much involved in community activities. The company sent 2,000 volunteers to Louisiana to help locals get their lives back on track after Hurricane Katrina, and in several communities laid sod, and planted over 1000 trees (“FY 2008 Global Responsibility Report”). As one volunteer said, “Starbucks is all about the human connection” - this statement is a powerful representation of what the company represents. The focus on the greater good of the customers is what Starbucks wants to be known for. Starbucks wants its customers, and potential customers to perceive them as a company that has a positive impact on the world. This is one of the ways Starbucks is using marketing concepts to strengthen its marketing strategy of a differentiator.

The marketing principles, or the four P’s, also follow the differentiator marketing strategy. Starbucks is competing in an industry where marketing principles has to follow the differentiator strategy, or it risks losing market share. The company must create value to its customers, or the customers will find another place to spend their money. The marketing principles of Starbucks, can be argued, are the basis of the company’s competitive advantage within the industry. Starbucks products are associated with quality, and the company has differentiated itself during the years as being committed to producing high quality products. Because of this association with quality, Starbucks has been able to charge a premium for its product.

Until recently, Starbucks did not face the type of competition it is experiencing today. Not too many companies that were as large as Starbucks were in the gourmet coffee business. Starbucks, though its promotions was able to create a perception of a premium gourmet

coffee. Originally, this was what gave Starbucks a huge advantage over any potential competitors. The place or location of each outlet is also in line with the company's differentiator strategy. With 17,000 outlets worldwide, Starbucks individualized each outlet based on the surrounding communities. In addition, Starbucks also prides itself on innovation of new products, which further differentiates it from other competitors. Each of these aspects of the marketing principles that Starbucks utilizes helps to contribute to its differentiator strategy.

A SWOT analysis will help emphasize exactly what Starbucks is doing right or wrong. It will provide us an insight on what the company is good at, and in what areas Starbucks could use assistance. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) are described below:

- Strengths
 - It is a global coffee brand built upon a reputation for fine products and services
 - It has almost 17,000 stores in 49 countries.
 - The organization has strong ethical values, commitment to the environment, and community activists.
- Weaknesses
 - The organization has a strong presence in the United States of America with more than three quarters of its cafes located in the domestic market. In order to reduce business risk, expansion is needed.

- Starbucks has a reputation for new product development and creativity.
However, they remain vulnerable to the possibility that their innovation may falter over time, and product acceptance will come to a halt eventually slowing growth.
- Opportunity
 - The company has the opportunity to expand its global operations. New markets for coffee such as India and the Pacific Rim nations are beginning to emerge.
 - Co-branding with other manufacturers of food and drink, and brand franchising to manufacturers of other goods and services both have potential.
- Threats
 - Starbucks' success has led to the market entry of many competitors and copycat brands that could pose potential threats. How they combat these threats will determine their future.
 - Starbucks is exposed to rises in the cost of coffee and dairy products.

Starbucks is a large company with a competitive advantage that is shrinking because of its huge success. This is because Starbucks model has been copied successfully by its competitors and this poses a serious threat to the company. If Starbucks cannot retain its differentiator strategy, it is doomed to fall out of popularity, as it would end up being a store that is selling nothing more than a cup of coffee.

With majority of its stores concentrated in United States, Starbucks is also limiting its growth and exposing itself to risk. Any negative changes in the domestic market could severely

hurt Starbucks viability as a firm. If Starbucks can retain its strengths and build on opportunities, while suppressing weaknesses and extinguishing threats, it will be able to grow throughout the world market.

The SWOT analysis also gives a starting point for a discussion on what Starbucks can do to reduce its weaknesses. Due to its large size, Starbucks sets trends for the industry that can be backed up by the volume of their delivery. Exactly how long Starbucks can dominate the market depends on Starbucks itself. Starbucks has a large number of stores for coffee outlets, all of which are owned outright by the corporation and no franchisees. Minimal revenue requirements have been placed on each store, and those that fall short are closed. The company closed down over 600 stores that fell short of its revenue requirements (“Fiscal 2008 Annual Report”). The large number of stores is a huge asset or a liability, depending on how one assesses the situation. If there is a strong economy and people have disposable income, then there is a benefit on having so many stores to generate revenues. On the other hand, during economic downturns, the vast number of stores will become a huge financial liability. By consistently enforcing revenue requirements for each store, Starbucks will be able to maintain or increase its same store sales, and while at the same time reducing one of the weaknesses of being so large.

The company has managed to maintain the competitive advantage because it has offered conveniences and an atmosphere customers can enjoy. As long as Starbucks fulfills its customer’s wants and needs, Starbucks will continue to be a leading force in the market. Starbucks should continue to create more value at its stores. Starbucks has created a

perception that it is focused not just on profits, but also on societal agendas. The company's stores have become a medium for people and communities to come together and promote a better place to live in an environmentally conscious society. Starbucks found a niche market where it identified what makes its customers happy, and has delivered it to them. Continuing to accomplish this will allow Starbucks to maintain its competitive advantage for years to come.

As stated earlier, Starbucks historically positioned itself as an upscale brand. Due to the economic downturn and increased competition from large quick-service restaurant chains and specialty retailers, the company saw its profits being eroded. The company introduced new products that would appeal to price-skittish customers and implemented techniques that would standardize its stores and reduce costs. The new strategy carries with it its own risks. Starbucks has been known as the "anti-fast food" chain, and any perception that it is now competing with McDonald's in bare-bone products and services could risk brand devaluation. Starbucks's most loyal customers might start to see its stores as being no different than any other McDonald's store, and move to rival coffee specialty stores or independent coffee shops. The new standardization techniques could also face resistance from Starbucks employees or "partners". Starbucks "partners" might see the new standardization techniques including time saving measures and material cost reduction measures as a way of turning them into robots or factory workers.

Since Starbucks enjoyed such a rapid growth in its business, the company expanded anywhere it saw profitability for its stores. This has meant that Starbucks stores are as readily available as McDonald's and as such the Starbucks "experience" the company asserts it

provides, might be seen as no different than the experience of McDonald's. As in the case of appealing to mass market with bottomless coffee, Starbucks's core customer might move to other stores where they perceive the "experience" is still being provided.

If Starbucks continues its store closing measures and implementation of its various cost cutting initiatives, Starbucks is likely to see increased profitability. The firm has closed over 800 company-operated stores in the United States and approximately 100 stores overseas ("Starbucks Posts Strong Fourth Quarter and Fiscal 2009 Results"). Closures of these less profitable stores will likely increase company's same store sales and profitability. The company is also introducing 100 new stores in US, and 200 new stores in International markets, which might positively affect the company provided they are successful. Aggressive adoption of "no-frills" products to bring in new customers could also affect Starbucks's profitability. Until now, any increase in commodity prices are more or less offset by company's high prices, but a "no-frills" products would put downward pressure on company's profitability, and possibly even damage Starbucks image as an upscale brand.

As we recommend strategies to orchestrate a turnaround for Starbucks, we will accomplish this in two forms. First, we will identify the particular strategy that will be addressed, and then we will provide specific scenarios where it is appropriate. The three strategies that we will address are the corporate strategy, business strategy and the marketing strategy.

In our attempt to orchestrate a turnaround, we first examine the Corporate Strategy. We identify Starbucks as existing in the service industry, particularly the "Fast Casual

Restaurant “sector. This is a highly competitive and fragmented industry. While there are major players in this sector such as McDonalds and Dunkin Donuts, no one is in the competitive position to set industry prices for products. The customers are price sensitive and brand loyalty is normally low. Because Starbucks has established a strong brand and a moderate amount of brand loyalty, we recommend focusing on increasing profitability and return on investment. We have chosen this particular action because we want to strengthen our recognition as a provider of premium beverages.

Another corporate strategy that we recommend for the turnaround of Starbucks is the strategy of acquisition. The strategy of acquisition would allow us to purchase other competitors in the fast casual industry that will allow us to increase profits and gain market share (Mullins, 2009). Organizations such as Caribou Coffee currently have market capital of \$170 million dollars and are currently trading on the stock market at less than \$8 per share (“Caribou Coffee Company, Inc.”). By acquiring Caribou Coffee, Starbucks can take advantage of several factors. First, Starbucks can merge administrative costs of both organizations into one. Second, since there is low R & D in the beverage industry, Starbucks can merge that operation in addition to their distribution system. Marketing functions will originate from one central location. Caribou Coffee can be repositioned in the market below Starbucks. The lower price point of their products would serve a larger market than the market segment that Starbucks would target, therefore, the higher volume revenues can be generated and directed towards the parent company.

We will now make our recommendations regarding the business strategy of Starbucks. We recommend the “differentiator “and “defender “strategy to be pursued at Starbucks. The fast casual sector of the industry has products and services that are provided in high volume and low profit margin, which contributes to the low brand loyalty. As a defender, Starbucks will try to protect its domain by providing higher quality and superior service therefore maintaining a secure position (Mullins, 2009). We recommend that Starbucks differentiate themselves from the others in the market. The differentiation strategy would allow Starbucks to establish a clear difference between themselves and their competitors. They must create a perception that the customer is actually receiving superior value from a Starbucks product that cannot be provided by Tim Horton’s, Panera Bread or Dunkin Donuts. This can be accomplished by focusing on providing superior customer service and reinforcing the idea that they are providing the highest quality products in the industry. Differentiating themselves successfully from the competition will provide Starbucks with a competitive advantage and allow them to charge a premium for the products and services.

The product market that we recommend Starbucks focus on is high quality brewed coffee, coffee beans, select food items, branded equipment and providing food service. We do not recommend that Starbucks attempt to provide full line of food items which would create a situation that may make it hard for the customer to distinguish between themselves and Tim Horton’s or McDonalds. Their products and services should continue to support a feeling of exclusivity.

Our final recommendations would apply to the area of marketing strategy. Our recommendations attempt to address each one of the four P's. Regarding the product, we recognize and would continue the practice of carrying an extensive line of coffee and coffee beans. We recommend extending the line of food that is offered at the retail stores. The focus should concentrate on fresh baked goods, sandwiches and pastries with natural ingredients such as blueberries and nuts. New and different combinations should be introduced in limited markets and the products that deliver the best results should be retained and added to the permanent menu. The line of personal equipment products by Starbucks can be extended and offered at the retail level or on the company's web site. We recommend that Starbucks introduce a line of premium fruit drinks. New flavors of energy drinks should be introduced and marketed towards teens.

We recommend that the price for Starbucks' products and services be set approximately 10% higher than comparable products of their competitor. In establishing Starbucks as a provider of premium products and pursuing a differentiator strategy, the organization must not try to compete on price against organizations such as McDonalds. The price should be reflective of an exclusive product of high quality. Although we do recommend that Starbucks create greater value by packaging brewed coffee products and fresh baked goods and sandwiches.

In our attempt to analyze the issue of place, we recommend that Starbucks focuses on exclusivity. By this, we mean in order to establish yourself as premium, and different, you must reduce the accessibility of the product and service. This would require Starbucks to

reduce the number of stores that it has in operation. The practice of having multiple stores existing in a 1-mile radius must be cease. The strategy of rapid expansion can no longer continue at this point. We recommend that stores in high volume and business districts be redesigned. These new designs should incorporate a comfortable feel for the customer and encourage large gatherings. In the targeted areas, the new store should be able to accommodate a small conference of up to 15 people. Ultimately, what you want Starbucks to do is be able to host gatherings for business meetings, college student groups, book signings, etc.

The final area of our recommended strategy changes would apply to promotion. To differentiate themselves from the competitor, Starbucks must conduct more aggressive promoting. Customers can be rewarded with free cups of coffee for accumulating a certain amount of points on their Starbucks card and coupons could be issued. We recommend that television commercials be created perpetuating a distinct difference between Starbucks and their closest competitors. The point must be driven that premium coffee shipped from around the world cannot be substituted by McDonalds or Dunkin Donuts. We further recommend that Starbucks sponsor events that are in line with the interests of customers who purchase premium products. This would include sponsoring professional golfing events, college games, the arts and business conventions. College students, young professional adults and those with more disposable income should be targeted. In order to increase traffic into the stores, we recommend that they focus on promoting some of their existing products at a limited time rate. This would include allowing customers the opportunity to use the Wi-Fi service free with the purchase of a premium sandwich and specialty beverage for an hour. We recommend

allowing the purchase of new release music at a discounted rate on release day through their website.

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