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## Implementation of ambient marketing by organizations in Poland

### Summary

The paper deals with the matters concerning the marketing function management within an organization, concentrating on unconventional promotional instrument - ambient marketing. After putting into scrutiny the very idea and main features of ambient marketing, the research results concerning activity and views of Polish organizations in this field are presented and commented. Finally, the author defines the scale, objectives and perception of efficiency of ambient campaigns in Poland. This is the research article.

**Key words:** ambient marketing, marketing communication, unconventional promotional instruments.

**JEL codes:** D22, M30, M31, M37

### Introduction

Undoubtedly, one of the crucial factors which enable companies to create lasting competitive advantage is adequate measures in the field of marketing. However, research carried out in various countries shows that conventional promotional instruments, such as TV commercials, become less and less effective ([www.mp-studio.pl](http://www.mp-studio.pl)). As a consequence, organizations have been forced to search for more untypical forms of promoting their products. One of the answers might be taking advantage of so-called ambient campaigns.

At this point it ought to be emphasized that it is very difficult to construct a precise definition of ambient marketing, which at the same time makes this form so attractive. Thus, generally speaking ambient marketing represents all kinds of *unconventional* forms of promotion. Despite the fact that there exist some defined sorts of ambient campaigns (e.g. whisper marketing, shockvertising), their forms, being constantly reinterpreted, still develop into new ideas. It is definitely easier to define what *is not* ambient marketing, referring it to classic marketing tools such as leaflets, TV commercials or press advertisements. Thus, ambient campaigns constitute initiatives which are innovative<sup>1</sup> and whose main objective is to surprise a customer. As a consequence, a company hopes to draw clients' attention to its products or brands in a more efficient way ([www.blog.ambnetmedia.pl](http://www.blog.ambnetmedia.pl)).

<sup>1</sup> Some marketers express a very radical definition of ambient marketing - they believe that they are only the initiatives which use some creative idea for the first time. When some campaign bases on the previous one, it is not ambient.

Although ambient campaigns have already been appreciated in various countries, the author of the article makes an attempt to analyze Polish market in this respect. Hence, after putting into scrutiny the very idea and main features of ambient marketing, the research results concerning activity and views of Polish entrepreneurs in this field have been presented and commented. As a result, the author defined the scale, objectives and perception of efficiency of ambient campaigns in Poland.

## Main features of ambient campaigns

In order to understand the very idea of ambient campaigns it is important to stress that such initiatives base on joining two kinds of strategy – Above The Line and Below The Line. The first one concentrates on mass scale, public measures which are presented in traditional media (TV, radio, press), on billboards, through outdoor and indoor advertising. Below The Line strategy bases on initiatives which are designed and addressed to a particular, limited group of receivers (and which are not broadcast in mass media). In practice, most often these two strategies are used together (creating the synergy effect) in a following way: according to the BTL strategy principles a company arranges some event (in some particular place and time) in which some group of people is directly involved. Next, the event (and measures which often require people's personal involvement) is publicized and commented using mass media channels (ATL strategy). As a consequence, the information about some event reaches mass audience.

One of the main features which differentiate ambient marketing from conventional promotional instruments is exploitation of some places (mainly public) and things in connection with the function which they are supposed to realize. For instance, sitting places on bus stops can be arranged in an interesting and surprising way by a company producing furniture (using couches, armchairs, etc.). It is also possible to equip a bus stop (or a similar public place) with multimedia or toys, in this way presenting a company's offer or letting people use its products.

Another feature of ambient marketing, directly connected with the abovementioned, is getting into some kind of interaction with a potential customer. Campaign ought to encourage people to do something, to act in some particular way, or at least to conjure up a desire to gain more information regarding some product or a company. Moreover, often such ambient campaigns base on exploiting new technologies – mobile phones (applications), tablets and other advanced systems of information broadcast. Finally, organizations which decide to use ambient forms often decide to create promotional content which is supposed to be perceived as controversial. It is believed that it is more likely that such a message will be remembered by a receiver.

Concluding, ambient marketing exploits new tools and channels of communication, concentrating on creative and unique ideas. It is said that this form has a beginning and a middle part, but not the ending (Levinson 2007). As a result, it becomes possible to achieve the main objective of unconventional measures – intriguing, initiating interaction with a receiver hop-

ing for being remembered in a positive way. In order to achieve it, companies ought to exploit surrounding (public space), situational contexts, and redefine the way standard promotional tools are used.

## Forms and objectives of ambient marketing in Poland

Taking into consideration the fact that there are numerous forms of ambient marketing and, what is even more important, that this instrument still naturally develops, offering unlimited possibilities of creative reinterpretations, it seems interesting to take a closer look at the scale and motivation for using ambient marketing by organizations operating in Poland.

### Realized forms

In this context it is worth to put into scrutiny the results of research carried out<sup>2</sup> in 30 agencies realizing campaigns for Polish entrepreneurs. Surprisingly, almost half of agencies declare that the number of companies which decide to commission ambient forms is 'very high', one-third believe that it is 'high'. The results correspond with the information regarding the frequency of commissioning such services. 60% of agencies admit that ambient campaigns are realized at least a few times a month, one-third pinpointed the option 'once a month'. These declarations show quite vividly that organizations in Poland have already appreciated ambient forms of promoting their products.

At this point let us focus on analyzing what sort of ambient marketing forms are most popular amongst Polish firms. There are three forms which are equally most-often exploited:

- unusual use of standard channels,
- unique events,
- using indoor space in connection with its function.

Quite popular are also billboards and contextual arrangements of outdoor space.

These forms are realized mostly by using various forms of whisper marketing, whose main objective is to reach a target group with a message which is perceived as spontaneous (Hughes 2008), in order to initiate discussion about a company or its products. Organizations put an effort to create atmosphere which supports such deliberations. An example of such an action might be a situation in a spa – a person who provides some service can initiate a conversation with a client about some cosmetics that are being used. It is also quite popular to sign a contract with some celebrity, in which the person in question is obliged to use some product and at the same time indirectly publicize this

<sup>2</sup> Research was carried out in 2014 by W. Czepulkowska in 30 agencies operating in Wrocław (13 advertisement agencies, 9 marketing agencies, 8 creative agencies). The research was done basing on opinions of agencies, because they are the ones who use/create analyzed instruments (ambient marketing) – as a result they are capable of assessing efficiency. Companies which commission the service are only final beneficiaries of agencies' work and, consequently, they focus mainly on monitoring final results (effects) of using some form of ambient marketing.

fact (then it is called trendsetting or product seeding). In this way organizations benefit from a so-called copying effect. By providing highest quality of a product (or service) the company hopes that the positive information about them will spread. This form, which is quite similar to public relations initiatives (it aims at creating positive image of a product), is very effective. It appears that decision about purchase is made basing on opinion of family members, friends, or comments which can be found on the Internet forums (Balter, Butman 2007).

Clients may contribute to creating message in the confines of whisper marketing without being aware of it. Organizations set up the Internet blogs dedicated to some product, or activity connected with it (e.g. sport, culture, cuisine), at the same time actively taking part in discussion (such a form is called brand blogging). Moreover, companies often exploit quite a similar initiative – by creating the Internet forums or fan-clubs they support some communities which are interested in some form of activity or idea which corresponds with the delivered product.

Another form of whisper marketing used by companies is a so-called cause marketing – it bases on supporting social initiatives which are important for a firm's clients. Such involvement is especially effective when realized on a small scale, together with local communities. Of course, according to the BLT/ATL strategies, such initiatives may and ought to be publicized in mass media in order to reach wider public.

Exploitation of another form of whisper marketing – evangelist marketing – ought to be referred to a very important phenomenon. Nowadays a traditional advertisement (commercials) becomes less and less effective. This fact has been confirmed by the research carried out by The Fournaise Marketing Group – it appears that efficiency of traditional advertisement campaigns realized on developed markets (Europe, USA, Australia) has dropped by 28% (www.labber.pl). As a consequence, organizations have been forced to search for other instruments of promotion, which do not base on a short-term, one-way communication (commercials), but concentrate on building strong, close relations with clients. The answer is evangelist marketing, whose sources can be found in a so-called partnership marketing (Fonfara 2004; Newsom, Scott, Vanslyke 2013).

According to research results, another form of ambient marketing which seems natural for Polish companies is viral marketing. It concentrates on creating some situation or content which will activate a customer to spread information about a company or a product among potential clients (Cova, Saucet 2015). Very often the ultimate goal is to create awareness of a brand. Typical examples of such initiatives are: placing in the Internet funny, provocative or mysterious short films or photos (together with links to this content on selected pages, forums, portals etc.); sharing free gadgets, books, advice etc., which at the same time include some promotional content; logging in (as a typical, common user) at social media portals, forums, blogs, in order to initiate dialog with other people; creating catchy promotional slogans, hoping they will become popular in colloquial speech.

The research results also suggest that Polish entrepreneurs might appreciate guerilla marketing and shockvertising. The first one concentrates on exploiting unconventional, original

techniques, and the content is mostly placed outdoors. It has a form of e.g. graffiti or a sticker on a bus stop. In order to make this technique effective, it is crucial to understand perception of the space by receivers of the message (Borghini et al. 2010: 115-119). The latter form bases on controversy, the element of surprise, it is supposed to conjure up mixed feelings, to embarrass (Vitale 2008). However, it is vital to be conscious of the fact that shockvertising is supposed to provoke, but not to offend. Companies using this technique are aiming at referring to clients' sense of humor or tolerance, they fight stereotypes or some values (Levinson 2006). It is also important to note that shockvertising is used mostly in order to stimulate sale in a short term (Beckwith 2006).

The last form of ambient marketing which may seem attractive for organizations in Poland is aroma-marketing (Lindstrom 2009). The idea is to influence customers' behavior by scents. It is worth to remember that even a very delicate, almost difficult-to-detect scent may have a positive impact on the way a product is perceived. The best results are achieved when the aromas are coherent with the nature of surrounding (Czerniawska, Czerniawska-Far 2005).

What seems especially interesting is the fact that the three abovementioned most often used forms do not take advantage of two extremely important and valuable aspects of ambient marketing:

- possibilities of getting into some kind of direct interaction with people (which requires active participation of customers),
- using new technologies.

Campaigns basing on such relations (channels of communication) are relatively less popular among Polish companies. Thus, they do not exploit such forms like mobile marketing or affiliative marketing. The first kind bases on sharing promotional content, or some applications, using electronic mobile devices (mobile phones, tablets, etc.), but also billboards on moving vehicles or products presentation in public places. Definitely one of the biggest advantages of such a sort of communication is a possibility of reaching a target group fast and precisely, with a highly personalized message. The latter kind (affiliative marketing) constitutes a system of placing and accounting for promotional content in the Internet. Some company initiates cooperation with a partner who places ad banners on their web pages. The partner receives payment for sharing the space – it may depend on number of clicks, some particular behavior of a potential customer (registering to a company's service, buying a product) or a partner may receive some share of the profit generated by a customer who entered a company's service through the advertisement placed on a partner's webpage.

It is worth to mention that both of these forms are often exploited in a so-called silver marketing, which constitutes another ambient marketing variation. Silver marketing is dedicated to the youngest groups of clients – children and teenagers. It is important to realize that this segment becomes more and more attractive regarding consumer behavior and spending power (Mazurek 2007). Research carried out by IPSOS in 2009 shows that in Poland children under 13 have over one billion zloty at their disposal ([www.marketing-news.pl](http://www.marketing-news.pl)).

## Set objectives

According to the results of the research carried out among 30 agencies realizing campaigns for Polish organizations, the main objectives concerning exploitation of ambient marketing instruments are:

- to be close to a customer and attract their attention to a product or service,
- to conjure up positive associations with a product or service.

These goals seem quite obvious and typical for most promotional activities. However, another picked objectives are very interesting, because they refer directly to the very idea of ambient campaigns. Agencies declared following goals:

- to tempt to do something controversial,
- to shock, to conjure up indignation,
- to test level of tolerance.

The results prove that Polish companies are conscious of possibilities of such a kind of campaigns and they also tend to exploit controversial, uncompromising forms of promotion.

The abovementioned expectations from ambient marketing ought to be juxtaposed with assessment of its efficiency. According to the analyzed research, as many as 77% of agencies declare that ambient campaigns are a very efficient instrument. It is also important to emphasize that no agency expressed negative opinion.

What is vital, such views have been confirmed in another research concerning ambient marketing in Poland, which was carried out in twenty nine media houses operating on Polish market (TNS OBOP 2012).<sup>3</sup> Their representatives pinpointed numerous advantages of getting involved in ambient marketing campaigns, mainly:

- non-standard, distinctive message which intrigues and draws attention,
- possibilities of precise matching the message to the receiver by interactive relations,
- possibilities of reaching target groups which are very resistant to traditional promotional content,
- being different from competition (TNS OBOP 2012).

Concluding, it can be stated that ambient marketing undisputedly has numerous advantages and substantial potential. However, this form of marketing communication is not free of disadvantages or threats. It is crucial to realize that the process of creating unusual, interesting and concise message may generate high costs. At the same time it may be very difficult to assess how much the instrument in question influenced financial results or brand image, which means that it may be hard to control efficiency. Moreover, since ambient campaigns are untypical, always bring some new element, it might be difficult to find a trustworthy, professional partner with whom such innovative undertakings could be realized. As a consequence, an organization may have problems with quality control. Finally, a considerable threat may be related to a customer's reaction to ambient message. Since this form often

<sup>3</sup> Report commissioned by Krewcy Krawcy agency. Representatives of 29 media house operating on Polish market have been interviewed, using the method of an in-depth interview.

bases on controversy, it may spark off negative emotions, the content may be misunderstood and interpreted in a way which will result in a company's problems with image (Żukowska 2010).

## Conclusions

Nowadays most companies operate on markets and sectors where they are forced to fight strong competition. In order to survive and succeed, organizations build their position by implementation of various management concepts (Lisiecki 2010), which are supposed to match market reality, consumers' behavior and needs in a precise way. It seems that ambient marketing constitutes an extremely interesting alternative for traditional promotional instruments. This form makes it possible to single out among numerous competitors, draw customers' attention, spark off emotions, and also create strong, positive image of an organization and its products. There are various forms of ambient campaigns and they still develop into new interpretations, since this instrument bases on creativity, avoiding cliché and exploring new dimensions of promotional content.

Attractiveness of ambient realizations becomes even more vivid if they are juxtaposed with efficiency of conventional promotional tools. Results of the research done by The German Ambient Media Association Media e.V confirm this assumption very clearly. The same product has been promoted in two ways – using traditional methods and with accompany of ambient forms. It appeared that the level of recognition of the conventional campaign was considerably lower (18%) than in case of the ambient one (52%). Moreover, there were more people who perceived the ambient promotion in a positive way (36%) than a traditional campaign (22%).

It seems especially important to become aware of the fact that a well-planned and implemented ambient campaign allows very effective exploitation of nowadays most powerful medium – the Internet. Interesting, controversial, shocking or amusing ambient message will spread in the net in an instant and it will reach thousands of potential customers.

The research results show quite clearly that organizations in Poland have already noticed the potential of ambient realizations. Vast majority of agencies declare that the number of clients which wish to exploit ambient forms increases constantly. What is even more important, almost all of them admit that such campaigns are very efficient. However, regarding the scale of using ambient promotion, it is vital to emphasize that still there are forms which are not popular, especially exploitation of new technology and active involvement of potential customers. This fact simply might be the result of lack of ideas for unconventional campaigns, but this issue requires further examination. Moreover, the most often realized objectives of ambient campaigns are quite typical and may be perceived as rather reserved. However, taking into consideration the fact that such unconventional marketing constitutes an open form and that companies in Poland have already realized its efficiency, it is very plausible that in the future the exploitation of ambient campaigns will constantly increase.

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## Wdrażanie *ambient marketingu* przez organizacje w Polsce

### Streszczenie

W artykule poruszono kwestie dotyczące marketingowej funkcji zarządzania w organizacji, skupiając się na niekonwencjonalnym narzędziu promocyjnym – *ambient marketingu*. Po dokładnym zbadaniu samej idei i głównych cech *ambient marketingu* przedstawiono i skomentowano wyniki badań dotyczące działań i za-



patrywań polskich organizacji w tej dziedzinie. Na koniec autor określa skalę, cele i percepcję skuteczności kampanii *ambient marketingu* w Polsce. Artykuł ma charakter badawczy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** *ambient marketing*, komunikacja marketingowa, niekonwencjonalne narzędzia promocyjne.

**Kody JEL:** D22, M30, M31, M37

## Внедрение *ambient*-маркетинга организациями в Польше

### Резюме

Статья посвящена вопросам, касающимся маркетинговой функции управления в организации, и сосредоточивается на неконвенциональном инструменте продвижения – *ambient*-маркетинге. Изучив детально саму идею и основные черты *ambient*-маркетинга, автор представил и обсудил результаты исследований деятельности и мнений польских организаций в этой области. Наконец, автор определил масштаб, цели и восприятие эффективности *ambient*-мероприятий в Польше. Статья имеет исследовательский характер.

**Ключевые слова:** *ambient*-маркетинг, маркетинговая коммуникация, неконвенциональные инструменты продвижения.

**Коды JEL:** D22, M30, M31, M37

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