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Integrated Marketing Communications: Branding Plan for Medicare y Mucho Mas

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BRANDING AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL
CREATING A BRANDING PLAN FOR MEDICARE Y MUCHO MAS IN
PUERTO RICO

by
Javier Camano

A project submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Communications
Brigham Young University

August 2006

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Brigham Young University
GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a project submitted by

Javier Camano

This project has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found satisfactory.

_____	_____
Date	Dr Plowman, Kenneth, Chair
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Date	Professor Cutri, Christopher
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Date	Professor McKinlay, Douglas

Acknowledgements

I want to express my appreciation to my project committee for all their wise and helpful advice, especially to Dr Plowman for all his feedback and help. To Doug Gullino for all his help and trust, if not for him this project would have never taken place. I would also like to express my appreciation to my family for their support and encouragement.

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Introduction

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) is one of the most used marketing approaches in the last decade, a step forward in reaching and satisfying customers and company needs. Because of the fast moving market and the competitiveness, it is of vital significance that marketing managers understand the importance of careful coordination of all the marketing and communication techniques available so they all can send one unifying and building message to target audiences as well as to businesses.

“The Crux of IMC’s approach is to coordinate all the components comprising an organization’s marketing communications carefully in order to assure that they all speak collectively in one voice, thereby amplifying and reinforcing the core organizational or brand message” (Wells et al., 2000, p. 22; Payne and Holt, 2001).

There are five main reasons why IMC is so important these days. First, it has become more difficult to target audiences with the traditional promotional tools. Second, the increasing competition has led the market into a mass customization of the market in order to reach the target audiences. Third, there is an increased emphasis on establishing long time relationships between customers and suppliers. Fourth, a greater desire to improve the communication productivity so the marketing communication can be more effective exists. Fifth, new technological tools like the internet have made significant changes in the marketing promotional mixes.

In addition, during the last decade scholars and practitioners have realized that the traditional “marketing tools do not have the same or equal effects at every stage of the consumer purchase process” (Aaker and Biel, 1993, pp. 1-3; Wells et al., 2000, p. 75), furthermore, in order for the marketer to influence the consumer in every stage in the

consumer decision making process effectively, the marketer needs to use several communication tools in a complementary manner. Beliefs that stand against the traditional understanding have treated advertising, sales promotions, point-of-purchase displays, and other communication tools as virtually separate practices.

Therefore, it has become critical for marketers that the promotional message will also affect the target audiences at any of several steps in the purchase process, including awareness, attention, comprehension and attitude or response, as well as trying to implement a solid and consistent message through out the different channels of communication. This concept implies a deeper understanding of the promotional tools available, in particular their weaknesses and strengths and especially the use of a strong branding as a way of communicating with the target audiences.

Traditionally there have been a number of marketing models to reach audiences, although because of the constant changes tools have suffered a number of amendments, one of the first models was AIDA (awareness, interest, desire and action), but like the rest of the models that were first developed, this model assumes that consumers respond to advertisement exposure in a sequence of stages. This method however does not consider the different variables affecting the different individuals in the several stages. But what is it?

Summary

The purpose of this paper is to explain one of the most significance variables when implementing IMC in a corporation, the appropriate and effective use of branding as a vital part of the communication process of an organization. In addition, this project will help identify issues to improve, increase the enthusiasm for the use of the brand and

help managers become aware of brand loyalty, the competition and how to measure the effectiveness of the brand.

Researcher's Interest

The researcher's interest in this study is derived from several years of working experience in the marketing field, as well as the education obtained in the field of advertising and marketing. Furthermore, the researcher also wants to apply his theoretical knowledge obtained from the different courses taken over in the US, UK and Spain in a practical scenario. Among the courses taken by the researcher that will benefit the project are classes in branding, business strategy, mass communication theories, advertising, international marketing and consumer behavior. Moreover, his interest in developing a more effective means for MMM to communicate with his clients as well as with other organizations derived from working for the marketing and sales department of this organization during the summer of 2005.

In addition, the researcher has worked in the marketing department of several companies around the world, giving him a broad perspective of branding. This experience helps enrich the project and its outcomes for the benefit of MMM.

Literature Review

As Mancini and Hallin explained in their mass communication models, there are several variables to consider when approaching an international market. Some of these variables are: literacy level, economic level, political situation of the country and the technological development of that nation. These variables will directly influence the

traditional promotional tools known as direct marketing, sales promotions, advertising and public relations.

Direct Marketing

Direct marketing is a form of personal communication between marketer and individual customer. Personal communication is considered as more efficient because it gives immediate feedback telling the communicator whether he/she has been successful in conveying the intended message (Webster, 1971).

The objective of direct marketing is to generate an immediate response from customers. Essentially, each direct marketing piece contains the information needed for the customer to respond immediately and can provide a personal touch by addressing customers by first names (Burnett & Moriarty, 1997; Curtis, 1999).

Sales Promotion

Companies use many different ways to achieve their objective of sales and purchase. Consumer promotions such as price reduction, coupons, premiums, contests, etc. and trade promotions such as point of purchase displays, packaging etc. are all different sales promotion techniques and oriented to trigger buying action (Webster, 1971; Rossiter & Percy 1997).

Sales promotion is driven by the specific objective to encourage customers to purchase. Therefore, sales promotion is more action oriented and can be termed as "short-term inducements to customer buying action" (Rossiter & Percy 1997. p. 556).

Advertising

Advertising is essentially an activity that promotes the sales of a product and helps build the company and brand reputation. It provides information about the company,

product, and brand and helps identify the role of products for each consumer (Burnett & Moriarty, 1997; Berkman & Gilson, 1980). According to Frank Jefkins (1982),

"Advertising aims to persuade people to buy."

According to Burnett and Moriarty (1997), though advertising is directly related to sales, not all advertising results in instantaneous response. Most advertising is indirect and creates demand for a product in the long run. Advertisements generally aim at stimulating the consumer interest and awareness. The functions of advertising can thus be categorized into: attention, memorability, persuasion, and action.

Memorability of a product is classified as either recognition or recall. While recognition means remembering the image, recall means remembering the advertising message.

However, the goal of the marketer is to match the products and services to customer needs. Therefore, by customer driven marketing, marketers learn what customers want, "to maximize the profits and build brand loyalty, a marketer needs to customize the product and all the marketing communication efforts to achieve the same objective" (Rossman, 1994; Rossiter & Percy, 1997). Consequently, companies have to go further than advertising in order to achieve a continuous impact on their target audiences.

Organizations have to stress ongoing relationships with their customers and achieve this through relationship building. Relationship building is a key area of public relations, and a key tool to achieve this relationship is public relations.

Public Relations

“Public relations is a major force in the organizational communication in the United States and other Western countries” (Grunig, J.E., Grunig, L.A., Sriramesh, Huang, & Lyra, 1995). It is a key tool for the public image of an organization, a way to transmit perceptions, interactions, and the culture of the company to its stakeholders as well as to the general audience, a combination of communication tactics and strategies that helps to understand an organization and ultimately, it helps to encourage audiences to move in their purchasing process.

Among the many tools used by public relations mostly: corporate advertising, publicity, videos and films, special events and sponsorships, lobbying, fundraising, meeting and social activities, publicity is most easily recognized and identified by the key publics (Burnett & Moriarty, 1997; Norman & Allen, 1984).

However, the public relations practitioners have to choose effective communication models in line with the demands of the situation. Further research is needed on the universal applicability of these models, and identified cultural factors that influence the practice of these models in their pure form. Based on an organization’s cultural interactions to its immediate environment, practitioners in different countries practice public relations according to completely different models (Grunig, et al, 1995). The indigenous cultures of the underdeveloped countries have to be a major consideration for universal application of public relations models and ethics practiced in the developed world (Kruckeberg, 1996).

The significant socio-economical and technological differences between nations, makes it difficult for communicators to send global and coherent messages. This

perspective sounds a lot like the Magic Bullet theory of communications where the media is viewed as a powerful weapon capable to produce changes in the thoughts and behaviors of the audiences that receive those messages. Furthermore, scholars believe that media will be transmitted to every single eye and ear in the same way because of an understood uniformity of human behaviors in society. Individuals attend to events in similar ways and therefore cause uniformity when interpreting messages.

This realization derived into the accommodation of messages for specific target audiences, making it more difficult to target audiences with the traditional promotional tools of communication. In addition, there has been a major increase in competition.

Day after day it can be observed the constant creation, unification and growth of new corporations through out the globe. This stressing situation force those individuals involved in the progress of the organization to be constantly developing new communication techniques that will more effectively reach the target audiences.

In addition, studies have shown the importance of loyal customers and keeping them happy is the main reason for the number of car commercials on TV. Car commercials on TV are not designed with the objective to increase sales, but to confirm and reinforce the sale already made by a customer. This feeling of satisfaction will evolve into the word of mouth communication, or how it was explained by scholars, the ‘two step flow’ which is one of the most effective ways of communication.

After the World War II there was an intense period of research in the field of communications. Furthermore, there was a realization that the process of communication was far more complex than anyone had previously thought.

Two-Step Flow

Two-step flow of communication consisted on the realization of the existence of two main groups of influence, a first group formed by close social ties, such as coworkers, and so on. And a second group, formed by family members and peers. The finding showed that the primary social relationship was a significant factor in the way people behaved.

Leadership can happen in many forms, some more visible than others, such as managers, politicians, parents and so on, but another kind of leadership is far less visible. It takes place when people turn to others at their same social level whom they know and trust. They do this because they need advice or interpretations to try to make sense of a specific situation, like the purchase of a car or a house.

There are a number of studies on opinion leaders that tried to determine who influenced whom in different areas like marketing, advertising and on. Some of the results found were that opinion leaders are far more influential than a commercial. However, it seems obvious that people will refer to those they trust, thinking they will have more knowledge of opinion. Associates are trusted more than public sources that are not directly aimed to us, because of the ambiguity of responses that public sources can derive.

Social Comparison

Furthermore, there is another variable that needs to be considered here in addition to the opinion leaders' theory. Festinger (1954) developed a theory called Social Comparisons, this theory states that the cognitive information includes an assessment of

how our ideas, opinions, characteristics and attitudes match up against the desired ideas of important referent groups. This idea implies several corollary statements:

- a) We are members of many reference groups.
- b) The value of reference groups may vary individually.
- c) The comparisons we make can be conscious or unconscious.

These concepts add several assumptions regarding the receiver, to our discussion, and in addition, there are four independent variables that we need to consider; the ideal me versus the real me, self concept, feedback and comparisons (upward vs. downward).

- The ideal me versus the real me; most people have an idealized perception of themselves that allows them to maintain their self-esteem.
- Self Concept; this concept means how we perceive ourselves physically, socially, our knowledge level and so on.
- Feedback; this concept refers to the social comparisons, a measuring mechanism of ourselves.
- Comparisons; social comparisons happened so the individual can evaluate himself and improve. These comparisons can be upward or downward.

Upward comparisons are those that inspire us to improve, to become better, and downward comparisons are those that bias comparisons that help us to maintain our self-esteem and feel better with ourselves.

This concept of social comparison will influence our purchases, uses of media and behavior towards different brands depends on who we see using them in the media. If the individuals using certain brands belong to our reference group or the reference group we

aspire to be part of, those brands will have a more positive message on us than those used by individuals that we try to imitate, emulate or aspire to be like.

If our friends (as a reference group) are conservative people, and to reinforce their beliefs, they use the Fox channel as a source of information, those individuals that look up to them and try to become more like them or part of their social group, click, they will be more inclined to use the Fox channel as a source of information, than those individuals with strong liberal beliefs that may use a different TV channel for their acquiring of information.

In addition, the structure and content of the message will affect the retention and effects of these messages. But to achieve this level we need to convince opinion leaders. They need to have a building and connecting experience with the specific brand, organization, etc that will make them have positive thinking towards that organization and its products. This goal is only achieved through the communication tools and techniques in connection with a good quality product.

Schema Theory

This concept is connected with Schema theory, Piaget (1920's), Anderson (1977) and more recently by Doris Graber (1983). Schema theory states that individuals acquire and store hierarchized information from prior experiences, and that this information is used and put together depending on the situation.

There are three main ways of acquiring information;

- a) Assimilation; new information is easily stored
- b) Tuning; new information is combine with previous information

- c) Restructuring; new information that is totally incoherent with our previous experience is assimilated and consequently, a new category needs to be created.

This theory also points out the concept of resonance, when an idea watched on TV or any other source is connected with the previous experience of an individual, and therefore it has a bigger effect. In addition, this schema can also be used not only to interpret but also to predict situation occurring in our environment, and consequently the development of multiple schemas, can guide our behavior, furthermore, in order for the receiver to effectively process the information received, the existing schemas related to the new content need to be activated. Although, we need to consider that not all files retrieved, because they are not necessary, and we can only retrieve those that our memory allow us.

Branding

Therefore, the concept of branding becomes one of the most effective ways to communicate. Through this communication a corporation can transmit a number of messages that can be either positive or negative for the organization. Therefore, it is of major importance to comprehend the potential dimensions of a brand.

The concept of brand has been defined as “a name, symbol, design, or some combination, which identifies the ‘product’ of a particular organization as having a sustainable differential advantage” (Doyle, 1997, p. 4). This realization of the importance of a brand has derived into major discussions in the scholar and professional world.

Schultz and Gronstedt (1997) observed that marketing expenditure accounts for 50% or more of corporate costs, a substantial increase from a level of approximately 20% in the 1950s.

“The question therefore becomes whether these new interpretations of ‘brand equity’ are valid or if they merely an excuse for the unwillingness or inability of marketers to provide evidence of the short- and long-term effects of marketing communications expenditure or investment?” (Eagle & Kitchen, 2000)

There are a number of strategies in the communication force of an organization. One of these is advertising, although it is typically seen as “a cost which reduces current profits rather than as an investment in future profits” (Farr, 1996).

The answer to the validity of brand equity would be YES. The process of communication is vital for any society and when talking about international communications, it is more significant even. There are a large number of countries in this planet, but the population of each one of these countries, even within the same country, doesn't have access to the same sources all the time. There are a number of reasons for that like the technological development, socio-economical factors, censorship, politics, religion, etc. Therefore it is vital to have a brand that can reach all the audiences in all the markets and communicating the same messages to everyone. This idea will imply the understanding that some people have access to certain brands through different sources, some through newspapers, TV, and so on, while other people have access to the same brands through internet, which represent a more interactive and self-learning process, peers, family, radio or non-conventional ways of media. Furthermore, these different ways of communication can vary depending on the location and the tools available. For

example, even though a computer is a computer, a person in Utah (USA) may be using a different type of computer and internet connection than another person in Lima (Peru). Both individuals have a computer and have access to internet, but due to the technological differences, they may experience diverse perceptions of the same brand. In addition, the culture, the translation of some information into the local language as well as how the organization is supporting that information online, with other sources of information, may significantly vary the way that individual may interpret that brand, but if we analyze the environmental opportunities and threats, as well as thoroughly appreciating the nature of the brand's competitive advantage, we can develop strategies that will position the brand to achieve the best it can, although it would depend on the sustainability of its competitive advantage, a solution to this issue could be 'brand stretching'. If we use the benefits of the main brand by association, then the awareness, quality, and other attributes that the brand already has, will be related to the new one, encouraging people to try the new product, "the trial purchase". This will increase the sales and profit for the company.

There is no doubt that the benefits from brand stretching are uncountable. It rejuvenates the brand, fulfills customer's needs, enables the brand to move from the mono product, increases the chances of success, reinforces its position in the market and defends the mother brand. It also reduces the barriers of entry and adds a perception of quality (if the mother brand has it). It speeds the process of establishing product awareness, using an existing brand name to launch a product makes it easier to obtain distribution. Consequently, as long as it would be well planned and along the lines of the

company, shareholders and customer's expectations, the chances for success are very high, for example the brand stretching of BYU (Brigham Young University).

BYU currently has three campuses in the US; Utah, Idaho and Hawaii, although for a number of years there was only two; Utah and Hawaii, but thanks to the good brand of BYU, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, has been able to stretch the brand by adding the famous Idaho college 'Ricks', into the BYU brand.

However, it is clear, that communication it is vital and that it does not just come down to one independent variable, but to a number of variables that can create different challenges depending on different factors, like Mancini and Hallin explained in their mass communication models. Some of these variables are: literacy level, economic level, political situation of the country and the technological development of that nation. These variables will directly influence the traditional promotional tools known as direct marketing, sales promotions, advertising and public relations as I previously explained, and therefore, it is necessary for any organization to effectively integrate its marketing communication tools. This integration will improve the company's image and perception as well as facilitate the communication and business process.

Part of this vital course of action is building a good brand that will represent the corporate identity in any scenario; consequently, the purpose of this project is to create a branding plan that will help Medicare y Mucho Mas to improve its branding.

Additionally, there are several other objectives:

How important the brand is perceived to be as a valuation and as a performance.

Whether advertising and other promotional tools are perceived as offering long- term influence on the MMM brand, brand values = loyalty for MMM.

Whether maintaining or increasing brand is an important objective for marketing communication activity of MMM and, if so, how changes are measured.

Whether MMM is appropriately and effectively using branding as part of the communication process of the organization

Based on an analysis of the findings from these exploratory objectives the researcher will then attempt to contextualize these findings from an integrated marketing communications perspective.

Background

This particular case study we will focus on Medicare and Mucho Mas, a Puerto Rican health organization that works under the funding, laws and regulation of the US for HMO's.

HMO's have existed in the US since the founding of the Ross Loos health plan in Los Angeles in 1929. The industry's roots go back to the American revolutionary war when George Washington, among others, employed contract surgeons to provide care for plantation workers.

The HMO's entered a new era in the early 1970's when tremendous concern over rising healthcare costs and the prospect of socialized medicine finally led to the appreciation of the benefits of the prepaid healthcare systems offered by HMO's. This led to the passage of the HMO Act in 1973, which pronounced the need and value of HMO's and provided \$364 million federal grants and loans to start up HMO's between 1973 and 1981. More than 100 HMO's received initial founding under this act.

There are several basic HMO's models of implementation. The two most used are:

- a) Staff model; HMO's are own by hospitals and medical centers and hire physicians to provide for members' needs. They are typically very successful at controlling costs, but require large capital expenditures and are the most difficult type of physicians to expand. Since a Staff Model physician are employees and not underwriting risk.
- b) Open Panel; By contrast, Open Panel HMO's, which include individual practice association (IPA), group model, and network model HMO's, contract with independent hospitals and physicians for their services. The HMO does not own buildings or hospitals as do the Staff Model types.

The revenues of most HMO's work on a system called 'capitalization', whereby the HMO receives a fixed payment each month for each member. For the commercial members, this payment comes from employer. Payment for Medicare beneficiaries is received from CMS. In exchange, the HMO agrees to provide all the member's healthcare needs.

It costs exceed premium payments; the HMO incurs an underwriting loss. To the extend that the HMO, in turn capitates doctors and hospitals (IPA Model) risk shifts to these providers. HMO's that do not capitates their IPA doctors typically reimburse them on a discounted fee-for-service basis, with incentive pools withheld to reward appropriate use of specialist and hospitals. Since HMO's and their outside doctors are at financial risk, which is their incentive to design and efficient healthcare delivery system.

Because most seek to increase enrollment, HMO's have an incentive to provide high quality, as well as low cost services. All of the larger, for profit HMO's have extensive quality assurance systems in place to ensure this occurs.

Description of Preliminary Work Undertaken

During this summer the researcher was working for the sales and marketing department of MMM (Medicare y Mucho Mas), an HMO located in Puerto Rico, that aims to provide a better health plan to individuals with disabilities, older than sixty five years of age or/and that they qualify for Medicare parts A and B.

During this experience the researcher got acquainted with Mr. Douglas Gullino – SVP Sales & Marketing of MMM, with whom the researcher spoke about my career interest and future goals. Mr Gullino agreed helping the researcher to achieve his objectives by providing him with the resources to examine the improvement of their marketing and communication organization.

Since then, there has been a consistent 'email' communication between Mr. Douglas Gullino and the researcher.

Organization's Background

Five years ago, a group of investors from Denver, Colorado in cooperation with a group of physicians from Puerto Rico identified a need for federally funded health services for the Puerto Rican senior and disabled population. The investors visited the island and conducted exhaustive research and analysis including interviews with physicians, hospital administrators and others in the health care arena. Based on their findings, they set out to establish a different way of offering services to seniors and

disabled persons on the Island – a more personalized approach that would take into consideration individual needs and limitations with the goal of high quality health care for every member. It was out of that goal that the MMM Mission Statement and Vision were developed.

MMM Healthcare, Inc. is dedicated to providing high quality health care services to their Members, with dignity and respect, in partnership with their providers, acting with absolute honesty, integrity, and fairness, in a manner that will be cost-effective, eliminate administrative obstacles, reduce access barriers and improve the quality of life of those Medicare beneficiaries they serve.

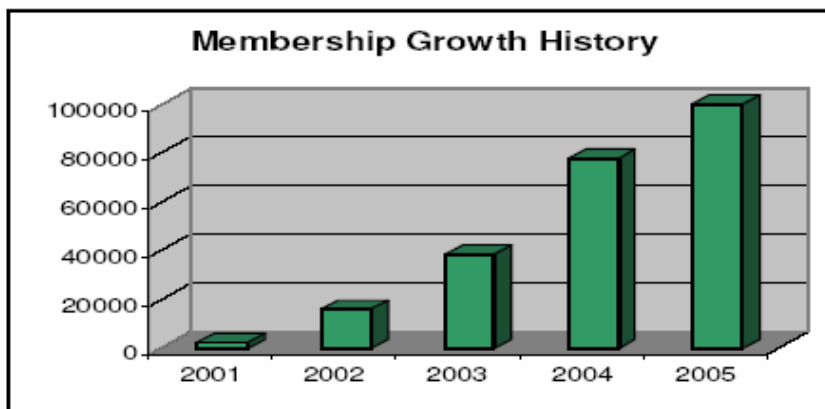
MMM Healthcare, Inc. (MMM) was incorporated in 2000 and began operations in 2001. Since then, MMM has distinguished itself in the Medicare Advantage healthcare market. MMM began providing services with an initial network of 135 providers. Today, MMM's network includes more than 5,000 service providers throughout the island, including Vieques and Culebra and serves more than 100,000 members who, as the plan's name, Medicare y Mucho Más, indicates receive the benefits of Medicare and much more. Medicare beneficiaries quickly perceived the advantage of joining MMM Healthcare's plan, Medicare y Mucho Más, since offers an economic option to Original Medicare. Other important factors for the plan's success have been recognition of the unique aspects of the Puerto Rican market, adjustment to its particular needs and prompt payment of provider claims. High levels of satisfaction among members and providers have transformed MMM into one of the ten fastest growing companies in Puerto Rico and one of the largest in growth in the past three years, according to the 2005 "Top of List" edition of the Caribbean Business. With the challenge to continue setting the

benchmark in this market, MMM is committed to providing outstanding service to our members and providers. A successful foundation and dedication to the population served and our providers is certainly the basis for a sound future.

Among the different departments that form part of MMM there are three that are directly related to the nature of the project, and that should be explained. These departments are:

Sales and Marketing

The MMM Sales and Marketing Department has developed and implemented effective sales strategies that have resulted in MMM's leadership position in the industry. With more than 100,000 members enrolled, MMM serves close to 80% of the total Puerto Rico Medicare Advantage population. However, this represents only approximately 20% of the total Medicare population on the Island. This untapped potential for growth serves as a motivation to continue developing successful strategies that allow us to offer the product to more people, thus allowing them to benefit from Medicare y Mucho Más.



Every sales interaction is performed in strict compliance with CMS guidelines. All proposed marketing material is approved by or filed with CMS prior to its use. The

proposed material is reviewed by the Compliance Department prior to submission to CMS for approval, as appropriate. No material is utilized without release from the Compliance Department, including a CMS approval number, on materials that will be received by members. At the time of enrollment and annually thereafter, MMM provides information as required by CMS, the federal agency that has regulatory oversight of MMM and all other Medicare Advantage Organizations. This includes distribution of a Provider Directory, Evidence of Coverage, Formulary and Summary of Benefits to all beneficiaries who enroll with MMMHC.

In an effort to ensure that potential members make informed decisions regarding plan membership, MMM's Outbound Unit cooperates with the sales and Marketing Department by calling applicants prior to their effective dates. In addition to discussing the plan rules and benefits, the calls serve to confirm that the information obtained upon enrollment is correct and to answer any questions about MMMHC benefits or rules. A call is also made to each Member after his/her effective date to identify members at high risk.

The MMM Outbound Unit also contacts new members to invite them to an orientation within one month of eligibility. These orientations include information about plan rules and benefits as well as advance directives and appropriate utilization of emergency services. Customer Service Representatives explain plan documents in detail at on-site orientations and make additional copies of the documents available upon member request. All of this detailed orientation and commitment to member understanding has set us apart in the way we do business. Within the group retiree

market, each individual eligible retiree will receive the same level of care, information and service.

Public Relations

The Public Relations Department is creative and accomplished at developing and implementing strategies to maintain an active relationship and awareness of MMM programs with its members, seniors and disabled persons who are not yet members, and the community at large. The department continually supports the message that MMM focuses on prevention, seeks to contribute to the physical and mental well being of its members and the community at large. The Public Relations Department also handles requests for presentations from outside entities, press interviews and the like. Many of our Community Outreach activities are initiated by our Public Relations unit with the support of the Health Services Department. One such initiative is the “Patitas Calientes” groups organized around the Island.

The groups consistently meet and receive talks from MMM’s exclusive physical trainer. This program focuses on education and well-being. Ambassador Program (Programa de Embajadores): Through this program, MMM members act as hosts for other members of the plan. Members have the opportunity to help with health education programs, exercise activities, employee and other activities in the community. Other activities coordinated for members include our annual “Field Day”, organized walks, and participation in the Teodoro Moscoso 10K.

Compliance

The Compliance Department as a service component within MMM strives to respond to the needs of internal as well as external clients in a competent and timely

manner that contributes to the integrity and values of our company and the satisfaction of those whom we serve. As a highly regulated company, MMM, through the Compliance Department, ensures that every employee knows, understands and complies with the regulations and contractual obligations to which we are subject. Finally, the Department ensures compliance with MMM policies and procedures, and ethical standards that promote our commitment to ethical business behavior and the law.

In order to comply with these objectives, the Compliance department participates in and oversees several activities such as:

- Training and education
- Auditing and monitoring
- Investigation, reporting, disciplinary actions and correction of non-compliant practices
- Grievances and appeals
- Approval of marketing materials

As a Medicare Advantage Organization contracted with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, MMM is subject to federal audits on a regular basis. As the first Medicare Advantage company established in Puerto Rico, it has already experienced three successful audits by CMS.

Logistics

Research objectives

The objectives of the study are to determine the following:

- Brand importance in terms of the market perception of company performance.

- Whether advertising and other promotional tools are perceived as offering long-term influence on the MMM brand, brand values = loyalty for MMM.
- Whether maintaining or increasing “the brand” is an important objective for marketing communication activity of MMM and, if so, how changes are measured.
- Whether MMM is appropriately and effectively using branding as part of the communication process of the organization

Based on an analysis of the findings from these exploratory objectives we will then attempt to contextualize these findings from an integrated marketing communications perspective.

Product Produce and Utilization

As previously explained, the effective way of branding in any market it is a vital part of the communication process of any organization, especially considering the competitiveness of the American health market during the last several decades. Consequently, this project will attempt to resolve some of the branding deficiencies MMM is currently facing. For this purpose, this project will produce a branding plan that will explain the current situation of MMM branding and a series of recommendations to the organization for the improvement of their marketing communications through their branding, which will result in the perception improvement of stakeholders, clients and potential clients, that MMM may have currently and in the future in Puerto Rico. This improvement will eventually be a determine factor in the consolidation of MMM as a primary reference organization for Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries and the leading of the HMO market in Puerto Rico.

This process will be formed by several components: the use of advertising to reinforce the knowledge of MMM by the potential and current Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries. The utilization of graphic design for the possible constitution of an alternative corporative logo and corporative identity. The collaboration of the PR department and the use of the sales and marketing department as channel of transmission and creation of the guide lines for the improvement of the communication of MMM with his stakeholders, clients and potential clients, and so on, as previously mention. However, my role in this process will be as a consultant; for this purpose I will create a branding plan as described above, which will help the improvement of the organization.

Budget

The following budget is an approximation of the expenses that this project will cost, including a four day trip to MMM headquarters in Puerto Rico doing the field study and survey.

- Transportation:
 - Airplane tickets: \$600
 - Ground transportation: \$200 (excluding gas)
 - Food: \$180
 - Stationary: \$20
 - Hotel: \$ 500
- Total: \$1500

Timeline for the Completion of the Project

The approximate estimation for the completion of the project will be a semester, although, that period of time does not include the time already invested in the

preliminary work undertaken and the time spend creating the body of literature corresponding to the following aspects of the project: introduction, literature review, background of the organization and the several meeting with the department committee. However, during this month the researcher will be spending a total of four days in Puerto Rico collecting information from MMM employees through personal interviews and a survey, that will produce a series of results in answer to the previously mention objectives of the project.

Methodology

A series of interviews and a survey at a company level will be done. These interviews will aim for all senior, middle and junior managers from the related departments (sales and marketing, human resources, etc). In addition, the researcher will survey a determined number of employees involved with the sales and marketing department of the organization (MMM). This method implies that the researcher will personally travel to the headquarters of MMM in Puerto Rico where the researcher will interview and give the survey to the sample target audience as well as collect the data. When the data from the survey is collected, the researcher will perform a statistical analysis and derive correlation measures from the data.

For the purpose of this project, a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods will be used. A series of in-depth interviews will be conducted with all senior, middle and junior managers from the related departments (sales and marketing, human resources, etc) as mentioned previously, as well as a survey that will be done by every member of those departments.

Qualitative and Quantitative Research

A quantitative method will provide enough data at a low cost to see if the employees as well as the managers realize the importance of the brand image of the company.

A quantitative method is characterized by the use of standardized questions, the use of ontological assumptions (to capture truth in a moment) and epistemological assumptions, which implies a more objective understanding of the results obtained. In addition, by choosing a survey, the researcher can choose a convenient sample. The data is analyzed after all the numbers are collected and carefully organized into the different topics studied.

On the other hand, a qualitative research implies a more flexible questioning approach that can be changed over time if the researcher finds it appropriate for the study. Furthermore, from the epistemological point of view, a qualitative research is more subjective. The researcher becomes part of the reality that he/she is studying. From the ontological approach, a qualitative research tries to explain a truth that is out there. The data can be analyzed during the course of the study.

Interviews

The qualitative method, specifically used for in-depth interviews, offers a deeper understanding of the topic or area of interest of the researcher and the research project. Moreover, it provides more specific and actual answers to the questions asked. However, the disadvantage of a qualitative method is that due to the reduced sample number used, the results may not be generalized, but since the project completely focuses in the branding situation of MMM, it is not a factor to consider.

Personnel interviews are done on a one on one basis and can be rigid, especially if the question is close-ended; therefore, the interviewee does not have much freedom. During flexible interviews, in which open-ended questions are predominantly used, the interviewee has more freedom. Subsequently, the researcher obtains more information and a deeper understanding of the subject. The mixed method, which combines the previous two techniques, uses both open-ended questions and more rigid close-ended questions.

Survey

A survey is a data collector tool used mostly for quantitative methods. There are two main types of surveys: descriptive and analytical. Descriptive survey, “attempts to describe or document current conditions or attitudes – that is, to explain what exists at the moment” (Wimmer & Domminick, 2003). An analytical survey, “attempts to describe and explain why situations exist” (Wimmer & Domminick, 2003).

Surveys have several advantages one being the cost. They are relatively affordable when considering the amount of data that the researcher can obtain. Large amounts of data can be collected, even in remote areas. Thanks to technology, a survey can be conducted anywhere, this advantage helps to investigate real issues in the area where is occurring. For the current project, the survey will take place in Puerto Rico.

However, there are also a number of disadvantages that the researcher has to consider when performing a survey. Some of these disadvantages are: the use of a survey in other languages, and surveying over the phone. These scenarios can create some translating conflicts that may affect the wording or questioning of the survey. To make sure the surveys are done accurately, the researcher will have to personally travel to

Puerto Rico and conduct the data collection process. Furthermore, “the independent variables cannot be manipulated the way they are in laboratory experiments” (Wimmer & Domminick, 2003), situation that can create a conflict when trying to explain the relationship between variables (independent and dependent).

Therefore, in addition to the questions asked in the survey, a number of questions will be asked during the interviews, although, in both cases, the questions should coincide with the following suggestions: Questions should be very simple, clear, and direct, without using complicated words or slang, avoiding bias, double barrel or double negative questions. The questions should be short and avoid embarrassing questions or subjects that could make the participants feel uncomfortable. Additionally, there are several techniques that could be followed to develop a more effective questionnaire, such as using more general questions at the beginning of the questionnaire and progressively narrowing the topic being investigated.

Any research method should include a pretest to make sure that the questions asked in the questionnaire are appropriate and that the sample used is correct; however, due to time and budget constraints, the survey and questionnaire will be limited to the supervision of several experienced professors. Consequently, when the researcher carries out the actual investigation, it will be more rigorous and accurate; plus, the researcher will increase the time efficiency and cost.

There are also numerous disadvantages that the researcher has to consider while doing in-depth interviews. For example, it is significantly important to emphasize the vital role of the person conducting the interview; the mediator. The mediator’s experience and skills can change the results of these interviews and consequently influence the

outcomes. Furthermore, the mediator should make sure that the people participating in the study feel comfortable expressing themselves in an interview. The mediator should be able to control these variables so that the interview will be objective and productive.

As part of the methodology the researcher must consider a number of components such as variables, data collection and interpretation, reliability, and validity.

A variable “is the empirical counterpart of a concept” (Wimmer & Domminick, 2003), a variable is a concept that “links the empirical world with the theoretical” (Wimmer & Domminick, 2003), or in other words; it is something that can be measured. This measuring tool is divided in two categories: independent variables and dependent variables. Dependent variables are those that actually represent what the researcher is trying to answer. For example, in this case the researcher is trying to analyze the importance of branding for an organization. Independent variables are those that are sometimes changed by the researcher, and in this particular case of in-depth interviews, they are very difficult to control. The dependent variable in this case will be the importance of branding for MMM and its employees, which is what the researcher is trying to resolve or answer through this study. Some of the independent variables for this research question include the lack of brand understanding or its power for MMM.

Once the researcher has figured out these ideas, the researcher will proceed with the data collection. For the survey, the researcher will have, under previous authorization/consent by the studied individuals, to use traditional paper. The researcher will make sure to create an atmosphere that will make the individuals comfortable enough to express themselves in order to obtain the most information possible. For this purpose, some of the interviews will take place in the offices of these specific individuals.

The researcher will have to use text as well as numerical representation of the results. In addition, we will have to test the reliability and validity of the research. The reliability refers to the consistency of the results over a period of time. It also involves three components: stability, which means that answers are consistent over a period of time; internal consistency, which implies consistency in the scale used; and equivalency, when two parallel forms of the test are done. Validity makes sure that the researcher is measuring what he/she thinks is measuring. Validity is subdivided into internal validity and external validity. The external validity explains how well the researcher is measuring what he/she thinks is measuring over a population, setting and time, by the use of a random sample, replication, and so on. The validity can be measured through four systems. Face validity examines if the researcher is measuring what he/she thinks it is. Predictive validity shows if the results represent what is going to happen. Concurrent validity checks the measurements' instruments with a present intention while construct validity relates the measure to a theory and is more complicated.

In the case of the survey, the reliability is probed over a period of time and the results are compared with other similar studies. However, the reliability in the case of in-depth interviews does not have as much significance as in other studies like content analysis. In the case of in-depth interviews, the biggest interest relies on the validity. Validity can be probed through several techniques: the use of external auditors, rich descriptions combined with the findings, the briefing of a peer, the feedback received by those who participated in the study (by showing them the results), the use of triangulation, and so on.

For this particular case, once the researcher has finished collecting data, the researcher should have a peer or an external auditor review the entire project to make sure that the researcher has been rigorous during the whole process.

As part of the methodology, the researcher will have to design a coding sheet or measuring method that will numerically represent our results. There are several measuring methods that the researcher could use in the questionnaire: nominal method that consists of the alphabetical order of the answers; ordinal method that consists of the positioning of the answers in relation to its importance according to the interviewee; ratio method, which consists of a numerical table where that number zero exists; and Likert Scale method where the different words or adjectives used (such as agree, disagree,...) have to be correlated with a number and interval where there is a numerical specification of the case.

The results of the study, as were mentioned before, will have to be reported in text, and also numerically, for which the use of graphs will be very convenient.

Survey Sample

The purpose of this survey is to analyze how effective branding is as a communication tool for MMM. The survey will consist of a number of questions to be answered in a Likert scale that will go from strongly disagree to strongly agree (strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neutral = 3, agree = 4, strongly agree = 5), in a private, anonymous and confidential manner.

The concept of brand has been defined as “a name, symbol, design, or some combination, which identifies the ‘product’ of a particular organization as having a

sustainable differential advantage” (Doyle, 1997, p. 4), understanding this definition, please, tell us how you feel about the following statements:

1	2	3	4	5
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1	I am be able to recognize the MMM logo when surrounded by other logos	1					
2	I believe that MMM is a brand as describe above.	2					
3	I do not think a brand can be used to evaluate a company performance.	3					
4	I consider branding as an important component of the overall communication process	4					
5	I think branding can influence MMM's performance	5					
6	I think brand awareness can help build brand image	6					
7	I think a brand can influence market share	7					
8	I think an effective brand can create consumer loyalty	8					
9	I do not think brand image is a priority for MMM.	9					
10	I think brand evaluation will improve the company's performance.	10					
11	I think brand evaluation and strategy can improve MMM's performance.	11					
12	I do not think brand evaluation will improve sales performance.	12					
13	I do not think brand evaluation can improve MMM value.	13					
14	I think MMM branding should be evaluated by an outside marketing consultant	14					
15	I do not think brand focus will improve the way resources are allocated in MMM.	15					
16	I think brand evaluation will improve the focus upon long term brand values rather than short term profits.	16					
17	I think branding should not to be used to asseses promotional effectiveness.	17					
18	I think advertising strategies are vital for the brand communication.	18					
19	I do not think advertising can influence brand image.	19					
20	I think advertising can influence brand loyalty.	20					
21	I do not think evaluating the MMM brand should be an important objective for pormotional activity.	21					
22	I think brand awareness should be an important objective for a company's communication activities.	22					
23	I think advertising can have a positive effect on brand image.	23					
24	I think brand advertising can make a difference in the performance of MMM	24					
25	I think the value of brand image can be changed over time.	25					
26	I think brand image is a long term invesment, rather than a short term invesment.	26					
27	I do not think sales and promotions have an important role when promoting a brand	27					
28	I think sales promotions are as important as marketing and advertising in the branding process.	28					
29	I think direct marketing plays an important role when promoting brand image.	29					
30	I think public relations has an important role in promoting a brand.	30					
31	I think brand image creates percived leadership in the market.	31					
32	I do not think MMM branding needs to be improved.	32					
33	I think brand consistency, coordination and compilance are critical corporate goals, but difficult to achieve in practice.	33					
34	There is an association between consumer beliefs and the brand image.	34					
35	There is an association between consumer expectations and the brand.	35					
36	A good brand image can create loyalty to a brand.	36					

37	I do not think a good brand image will influence a customer's recommendation to his friends, family and peers.	37					
38	I am likely to recommend MMM.	38					
39	I would support an advertising campaign to help build the MMM brand image.	39					

Evaluation

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the branding plan for Medicare and Mucho Mas will come from several sources:

- a) Improvement of the MMM branding in Puerto Rico through the implementation of different marketing and advertising tools like the production of an effective web page.
- b) The improvement of the market share according to the studies done by AC Nielsen.
- c) The response and feedback from the Senior Vice President, Sales and Marketing of MMM Healthcare, Inc.
- d) Evaluation of the project by the different members of the project committee.

These four indicators will help to evaluate the success of this project. The evaluation will have several phases that will be determined from the meetings that will be held in San Juan, Puerto Rico during my visit in March 2006.

Results

The Puerto Rican health market has experienced a significant change and increase of companies during the last few years. New organizations from the U.S. as well as from Puerto Rico, are trying to become part of the health Puerto Rican arena. This increase of competitors is making a direct impact in the market as well as in MMM.

In addition, “there are over 1.2 million trademarks registered with the U.S. government according to the United States Patent and Trademark Office. For most of these brands, the problem is not a shortage of production, but a shortage of buyers” (Rockwood, 2006). That is especially the case in Puerto Rico, where there is a large number of options but only few customers, especially in the competitive health market. These factors are making ‘branding’ an important tool of communication to obtain competitive advantage. According to Scott Rockwood, CEO of Richter7, “those who are winning are those who have created high brand equity. And that translates into higher sales, less price sensitivity, more customer loyalty, and higher profitability” (Rockwood, 2006).

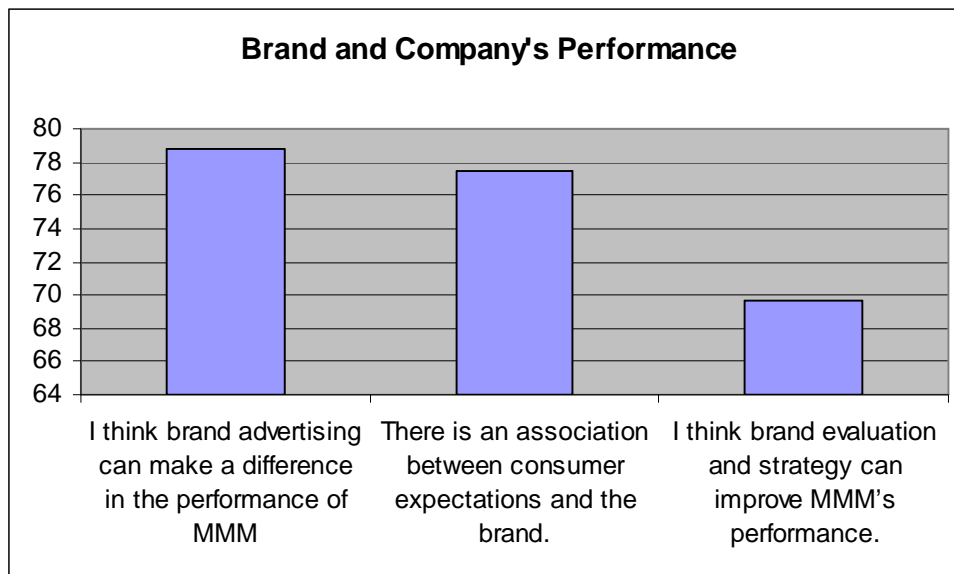
Puerto Rico is an “unincorporated, organized territory of the US with commonwealth status; policy relations between Puerto Rico and the US conducted under the jurisdiction of the Office of the President” (The World Factbook, CIA, 2006). This U.S. territory has a population of almost four million people out of which, “12.8% are 65 years or older” (The World Factbook, CIA, 2006) with a “life expectancy of 78.4 years” (The World Factbook, CIA, 2006) for their total population. Medicare y Mucho Mas target audience is the 65 and older population, the organization can realize the importance of becoming a brand leader, building brand awareness and equity, as a short and long

term investment. This asset will ensure the profitability, market share and long life of this organization.

After interviewing 27 executives and surveying 297 hundred employees that were directly involved with the marketing, sales and human resources departments of this company, several findings resulted.

The most relevant findings from the survey can be seen in the following graphs:

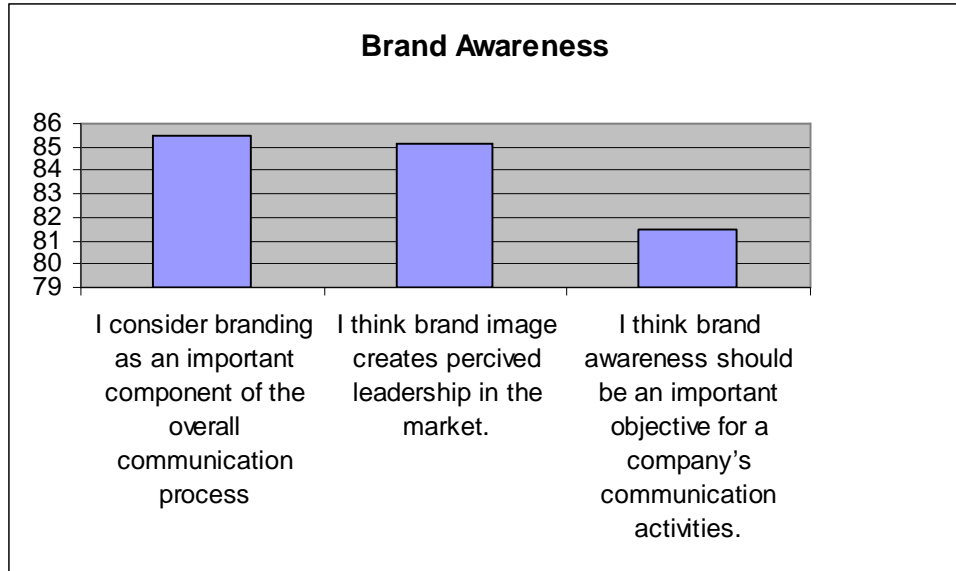
Graph 1



When talking about advertising and public relations, 91.6% of MMM employees believe that advertising can have a positive effect on brand image, in addition, 90.6% of MMM employees think that public relations has an important role in promoting the brand, and furthermore, 90.3% of MMM employees think that advertising strategies are vital for the brand communication process. It is obvious therefore, that the majority of MMM employees are aware of the impact that advertising and public relations have on

promoting the brand and consequently, the effect that the use of these communication tools would have on the company performance if they are used wisely.

Graph 2



In addition to the previous graph where it could be appreciated that MMM employees consider advertising and public relations as having a positive effect on MMM brand, it can be understood that 85.6% of MMM employees consider branding to be an important component for the overall communication process of the organization, furthermore, 85.2% of MMM employees, think that brand image creates perceived leadership in the market, and finally, 81.5% of MMM employees, think that brand awareness should be an important objective for the company's communication activities.

From the previous graphs can be understood that MMM employees appreciate the importance of branding for the improvement of the organization, and how branding should be a priority for the organization. However, MMM executives believe that brand

awareness is more important in the long run. Consequently, brand equity is not a core asset for the company's performance in the short run, although relevant, it is not vital.

This finding would explain the fact that 85.5% of people interviewed, even though they consider branding to be a significant tool of communication and a driver of performance, they do not believe that the company is using the brand as part of the marketing strategy for the improvement of the organizations image, revenues and performance. This interesting finding correlates with the fact that 69.7% of the employees do not agree with the importance given by MMM to its branding. In addition, and opposite to what a large number of scholars believe to be, one of the most effective ways of communication, advertising, marketing and influencing people toward the last step of the purchasing ladder, as well as the decision making process, are; 'word of mouth', the 'two step flow' technique and the brand recognition strategy, which are not a priority for MMM executives.

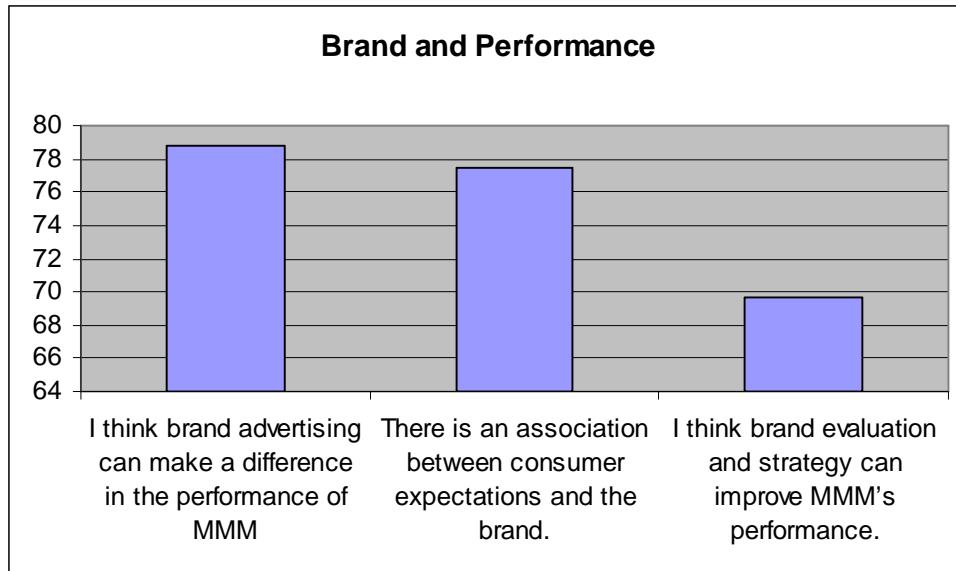
This finding explains one of the primary questions that the researcher was attempting to explain; how MMM perceives its brand importance in terms of the market perception of the company's performance. This is a question that is clearly resolved by the results obtained from the survey.

From the survey results obtained it is understood that most employees and executives realize and appreciate the importance of building a strong brand to be able to compete in the Puerto Rican Health market. Advertising and other promotional tools are perceived as offering longterm influences on the company's brand, since brand values equal loyalty for MMM. It is not a major priority for the organization's marketing strategy.

Aaker and Joachimsthaler stated that “brand building not only creates assets but it is necessary for the success (and often the survival) of the enterprise” (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000, p. 14). This important statement, in addition to the Social Comparison, Two-Step Flow, and Schema theories, highlights the importance of building a brand to be able to compete successfully in any competitive market.

This statement correlates with the following finding:

Graph 3



From the previous graph it is understood that 78.8% of MMM employees think that advertising can make a difference in the company’s performance, in addition, 77.5% of MMM employees believe that there is an association between consumer expectations and the organization’s brand, additionally, 69.7% of MMM employees think that MMM brand’s evaluation could improve the company’s performance.

Moreover, MMM executive’s main focus is direct response advertising. Direct response is understood as the lead generator for immediate and future growing

membership. It is also believed that the ability to generate leads and enrollments is more important than increasing the brand awareness, for the short run. On the other hand, there are some relevant discrepancies between what can be performance drivers for the organization among employees.

This finding led the researcher to believe that even though employees are aware of the fact that certain corporate activities may be more effective than others and may facilitate their job, they do not agree unanimously upon what they may be. This fact is directly correlated with the level of involvement in the decision process as well as with the education and working experience of the different employees.

One of the reasons for this dichotomy is the complexity of measuring precisely the value of a brand. Brand value is measured by a number of intangible assets, according to Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000), there are four major intangible assets that can be attributed to the brand earnings. These assets are: Brand Awareness, that “has been shown to affect perceptions and even taste” (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000, p.17). Perceived Quality; “it has been empirically shown to affect profitability (as measure by both ROI and stock return)” (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000, p.17). Brand Association; “anything that connects the customer to the brand” (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000, p.17), and Brand Loyalty.

These significant assets of brand equity can determine whether a person may refer MMM to another potential customer or not, and therefore, be an important tool for the organization that will evolve into improvement of the sales and consequently become more in demand. This especially important now where there is a larger selection of health

options where the potential customer can choose from. In addition, a careful look into this relevant asset, can determine the allocation of the marketing budget.

In addition to the previous findings derived from the survey a series of interviews took place. These interviews were done with individuals holding management positions in the Human Resources and Marketing/Sales departments of the company. The findings derived from these interviews show a significant dichotomy among managers when explaining their views in relation to the marketing approach of MMM. As explained previously, several variables contributed to this fact, however, most of the junior managers agreed on the fact that MMM needs to improve its presence in the market, to be more aggressive and consistent with its marketing – advertising campaigns, and that by doing so MMM brand equity will improve as well as its sales.

On the other hand, the senior managers tend to believe that the most effective way for MMM to do business is through direct sales (phone calls). This would explain the fact that the majority of the marketing budget goes towards the collection of leads for a later follow up.

Recommendations

After a careful examination of the organization's brand the researcher recommends a number of actions that will help improve the brand importance in terms of the market perception of the company's performance. How to use advertising and other promotional tools as long- term 'influencers' on the MMM brand, and how MMM can appropriately and effectively use branding as part of the communication process of the organization.

Recommendation 1

Conservation of the Logo: After an extensive study of the meaning, message and interpretation of the logo; it seemed like even though most of the target audience does not fully comprehend its intertextuality, they are capable of recognizing the logo when surrounded by other logos. This finding is parallel to the employee situation, where regardless of the subjective opinions on the effectiveness of the logo, most of them agree on the fact that the logo is well known among Puerto Ricans. Therefore, in the opinion of the researcher, the organization should continue using the same logo for the time being.

This recommendation derives from Schema Theory that states when an idea is connected with the previous experience of an individual; it has a stronger effect on the individual. Consequently, since MMM has all ready established an image through out the island that is recognizable by most people, the company should maintain the logo. It is understood by Schema Theory, that this schema can also be used not only to interpret but also to predict situations occurring in our environment, and the development of multiple schemas can guide our behavior. Furthermore, in order for the receiver to effectively process the information received, the existing schemas related to the new content need to be activated. Therefore, the company should regularly observe its corporate image.

Recommendation 2

Communication improvement between the Human Resources and Marketing/Sales Departments: To achieve this objective, the organization has to improve the communication and integrated communication efforts of both departments. In other organizations this situation is solved by hiring an account planner; a person that will connect both departments and maintain a balance in the marketing efforts of the

company. By doing so, the organization will gain a consistency towards potential customers as well as towards stakeholders and competitors.

Although it could look like common sense, it is one of the fundamentals of the Integrated Marketing Communications theory. This theory explains that through the integration of the different departments of an organization, or the creation of a job role such as an account planner, the efficiency of these departments (sales/marketing, public relations, etc) improves.

Recommendation 3

“Because customers and potential customers form their opinions of a brand based on a variety of brand messages (not just marketing communication messages), the brand position must be integrated in all brand contact points where it is reasonable to do so. The more a brand’s position is integrated into all the messages originating from all message sources, the more consistent and distinct will be the company’s identity and reputation” (Duncan & Moriarty, 1997, p.25).

Consequently, MMM has to look into developing customer relationships, creating more visibility and build associations that will help MMM image before the potential customers as well as their families and stakeholders. To do so, MMM should focus on the following areas:

Local activities – sponsorship and seminars: These types of activities attract large numbers of people who can create educational as well as brand involvement opportunities. One of the major advantages is the fact that people who attend seminars are normally highly interested. A relevant disadvantage is the CPM, however, the participation of a co-sponsor can reduce the cost. MMM has been getting involved in

these types of activities already, nevertheless, it is important to maintain as well as to increase these activities as a long term brand equity investment.

This recommendation is directly connected with the Social Comparison Theory. This theory states that the cognitive information includes an assessment of how our ideas, opinions, characteristics and attitudes match up against the desired ideas of important referent groups. For example; the Caribbean culture is well known for its social habits and human interactions. This idea implies several corollary statements, for example, Puerto Ricans are members of many reference groups depending on their social status or the social status they may believe they belong to. In addition, the value of reference groups may vary individually. Not all Puerto Ricans think the same way, have the same education or have been exposed to the same experiences. And finally, as Social Comparison Theory states, the comparisons Puerto Ricans make can be conscious or unconscious. Therefore, the increase of activities will increase the popularity of the organization and consequently people will feel more convinced about the choice they have made, and additionally, feel more inclined to recommend the company products to other individuals.

Recommendation 4

Advertising: “is the nonpersonal communication of marketing-related information to a target audience, usually paid for by the advertiser and delivered through mass media” (Burnett & Moriarty, 1998, p. 279). Advertising has a number of strengths that if used wisely can increase and foment the sales, and recognition and brand value of a company. However, there has to be a consistency in the messages sent by the organization. This consistency in the messages not only refers to the actual logo, campaign, and so forth, but

to the general corporate image. This image is build through different marketing efforts over time. Although MMM is trying to maintain this consistency, there are instances when the pantones used for the stationary in general do not match the company's logo. In addition, promotional tools are used as an "incentive technique for consumer and trade audiences to generate a specific, measurable action or response" (Burnett & Moriarty, 1998 p.312). With the understanding that CMS sets a max price for promotional tools, there is a lack of consistency and efficacy on what should be more effective promotional tools.

This recommendation is directly connected with the Social Comparison Theory as well, and is also directly linked to the Two-step Flow Theory of communication. The theory that is explained in the literature review shows that the primary social relationship plays a significant factor in the way people behave. Furthermore, through advertising opinion leaders that could be difficult to reach or influence, can be exposed to MMM through the media. The media can get into their homes, families, friends, and so forth to raise topics of conversation, and indirectly influence opinion leaders' schema.

Recommendation 5

The main objective of these promotional tools should be to increase the brand recognition so consumers will act. Furthermore, these promotional tools primarily aim towards an audience older than 65 years of age. Nevertheless, in a large number of instances these individuals lack the capacity to make decisions on their own, delegating this action to a member of the family who is generally younger and more capable of making decisions for them. As a result, the promotional tools used are generalized for everyone, not just to smaller market segments.

This notion is directly connected to the Two-step Flow Theory, the theory that explains the process of communication between individuals. Specifically relevant to this recommendation is the theory's so called "gatekeeping" concept. This term was first used by Kurt Lewin in the late 40's. This expression states that in a social system, a 'gatekeeper', "decides which of a certain commodity – materials, goods, and information – may enter the system" (Communication Theories 2006). It is of significant importance to consider expanding the target audience so those 'individuals that are making the decisions - 'gatekeepers', for the beneficiaries of Medicare parts A and B, can be reached in an effective manner.

Expanding the target audience: MMM is primarily focusing on an audience older than 65 years of age, as mention previously, however, but as it was explained earlier they are not the ones making the decisions all the time. Therefore MMM should consider expanding the target audience aiming towards younger individuals that will be making decisions for the older individuals. This will be a long term investment since these younger individuals would have had done some research and had been experienced with the company, when their time comes they will be able to make a more educated decision as well as having had a good experience with MMM, a fact that will benefit MMM.

Recommendation 6

Marketing strategies help to improve an organization on different levels. "The American Marketing Association defines marketing as the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy the perceived needs, wants, and objectives of the customer and the organization" (Wells, Burnett, & Moriarty, 2003, p. 64). One of the

main objectives of MMM is to satisfy the needs of its customers, in addition to the prevention of the use of medical aid, another idea for MMM would be to invest in the creation of a clubhouse where the seniors could exercise free of charge. The creation of this clubhouse will not only transmit an image of care to the seniors in the community, but it will also influence the perception of the gatekeepers, showing that that MMM has the good health of its customers and potential customers in mind..

This clubhouse could include a recreation area as well as a gym with professionals that could help senior citizens to learn exercises, eating habits, and so forth that will help them in their daily lives. This club house will improve MMM branding and recognition through out Puerto Rico, reaching several target audiences as well as being an innovative marketing strategy in Puerto Rico, giving MMM competitive advantage, since they would be the first to implement such an action.

Creating this clubhouse will be directly connected to the Social Comparison, Two-Step Flow, Schema Theories, and the concept of gatekeeping. The image that MMM will send to all audiences and the newness of this marketing strategy will also help improve the branding of the organization.

Limitations and Possible Changes to the Project

The methodology used for the research process of this study was a combination of the qualitative and quantitative research methods. This combination of methods allowed the researcher to gather a significant number of data on the subject, however, every research method has certain limitations. For this particular project there were several limitations that could be considered for future studies: examination of the entire

marketing campaign, understanding the customers and potential customers' point of view, and consideration of the competitor's perception of MMM marketing campaign.

The first limitation found was the lack of participation on the marketing campaign over the entire process. A careful examination of the marketing campaign over the entire process would have allowed the researcher to be exposed to different criteria used during the decision process. Second, the customers and potential customers of MMM were not considered to be part of the study. By considering them in future studies, even though it would be much more expensive, will allow the researcher to learn about the perception of customers and potential customers of MMM in relation to its marketing campaign, branding and so forth.

Finally, it would have also been interesting to learn what the competitors think about MMM marketing campaigns. However, most organizations do not cooperate with competitors for their improvement.

Effects on the Theories Considered

Social Comparison, Two-Step Flow and Schema theories, were the theories considered to investigate a more effective way of using and improving the brand perception of an organization. These theories, as explained in the literature review, derive from the social and psychological fields how certain behaviors and elements can more effectively affect individuals when making decisions. They all directly refer to communication and how the wise usage of communication, in all its forms, can help an organization improve. For companies this improvement can be reflected in a number of areas in both the long and the short term. However, some of the more obvious reflections of the effective use of these theories can be perceived in their sales revenues and brand

recognition. Both areas are directly connected to using the Social Comparison, Two-Step Flow and Schema theories. In the professional world, despite the scholarly world, the names with which these theories are referred to, may vary.

The different naming of these theories does not affect the fact that these theories, as well as many others, were the origin of the understanding of the communication process, and what marketing is, but the “effectively communicating product information or ideas to target audiences” (Burnett & Moriarty, 1998, p. 3).

Moreover, even though the names by which these theories may be called, and the way different organizations may implement their marketing/communication towards a target audience, the basics and intertextuality of these theories, remain within the plans, strategies, and so forth of the marketing/communication approaches.

From the research done for this project, it can be observed that even though individuals are social by nature, the way they interact and the culture in which they may live, affects the way they communicate and therefore, the way they should be approached through marketing. It is vital to consider the operating environments for the success of the organization as well as having a consistent brand image. This understanding has a pyramid effect on the customers and potential customers as explained in the literature review when talking about Social Comparison, Two-Step Flow and Schema theories. During different periods of time, different approaches may be taken, and different environment may be considered. This may affect the use given to the previously mentioned theories. Although from the results obtained by the researcher, it can be observed how in the Puerto Rican culture social comparison is significantly important during the socialization of individuals. Consequently, developing a positive and

influential schema of MMM will enforce the effectiveness of the organization in both short and long terms.

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Appendix

Correspondence



Medicare y Mucho Más

350 Chardón Avenue
Suite 500, Torre Chardón
San Juan, PR 00918
Tel: (787) 622-3000 Fax: (787) 620-2399

February 9, 2006

Dr. Kenneth Plowman, PHD.
Assistant Department Chair of Graduate Studies
Brigham Young University
Provo, UT 84602

Dear Dr. Plowman,

Please allow this correspondence to serve as MMM's agreement to pay for all of Javier's travel accommodations while he is conducting his Branding project with Medicare y Mucho Más.

I look forward to working with Javier and reviewing the results.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Gullino', is written over the typed name.

Douglas Gullino
Senior Vice President, Sales and Marketing
MMM Healthcare, Inc.



Medicare y Mucho Más

350 Chardón Avenue
Suite 500, Torre Chardón
San Juan, PR 00918
Tel: (787) 622-3000 Fax: (787) 620-2399

February 14, 2006

Dr. Kenneth Plowman, PHD.
Assistant Department Chair of Graduate Studies
Brigham Young University
Provo, UT 84602

Dear Dr. Plowman,

Please allow this correspondence to serve as my approval of the proposed project involving Javier Camaño. As the person responsible for all sales and marketing efforts for MMM Healthcare, Inc., I am very interested in participating in Javier's Field study of MMM's branding in Puerto Rico.

I look forward to working with Javier and reviewing the results.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Gullino', is written over the typed name.

Douglas Gullino
Senior Vice President, Sales and Marketing
MMM Healthcare, Inc.



Medicare y Mucho Más

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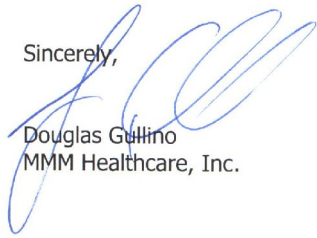
May 18, 2006

Dr. Kenneth Plowman, PHD.
Assistant Department Chair of Graduate Studies
Brigham Young University
Provo, UT 84602

Dear Dr. Plowman,

Please allow this correspondence to serve as my intention to implement some or all of Javier Camaño's field study of MMM Healthcare's branding in Puerto Rico, if upon completion, it appears to benefit our company and our plan.

Sincerely,


Douglas Gullino
MMM Healthcare, Inc.