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Why You Should Elevate Partnership Brand Marketing to the Strategic Level

by Gregory Pollack

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Today's smart marketers are turning to various marketing tools to grow and drive their brands and businesses. In the busy world of brand marketing, using the strength of marketing alliances or marketing partnerships to get product into new channels and venues is an essential marketing element in generating incremental sales.

As corporate and brand budgets are constantly scrutinized, partnership brand marketing programs can grow your business and acquire new customers and users in all distribution channels.

The power of partnership brand marketing brings two companies and brands together—each with its own brand equity and its own distribution channel strength. Whether teaming a car manufacturer with a theme park to capture the family segment, pairing ketchup with home video or aligning toys with food, corporations are looking to create strategic alliances that tap areas in which they may not normally compete—providing incremental marketing exposure and ultimately gaining new customers.

Many organizations often place partnership marketing under the promotions banner within the marketing mix; as a result, it can become more promotions-based and limited. Partnership marketing programs, however, are much more strategic and expansive, and therefore, more than just promotions.

For partnership marketing to deliver its full potential, it should be elevated to a more strategic level. The key reason is that partnerships can involve all elements of the marketing mix and thus have an impact on a company's overall marketing message and platform, its advertising program, as well as product packaging and merchandising. Partnership marketing programs can also establish a base on which to create joint sales and distribution opportunities, broader in-store merchandising, more compelling point-of-sale displays and overall stronger value for the consumer.

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To benefit from partnership marketing's full potential and reap all of its results and successes, it should be positioned at the top of a company's marketing mix, providing incremental value at all levels. Thus, partnership brand marketing can actually affect and contribute to all elements of the marketing mix, including product, price, place/distribution, and promotions.

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In fact, creating strong, relevant and effective partnership brand marketing programs can be a cornerstone of every company's marketing plan and marketing mix. For example, partnership marketing can affect the actual product, increasing the overall value and providing stronger benefits to consumers; partnership marketing adds value to the overall price element as it delivers a higher level of perceived value and provides consumers more reasons to purchase; partnership marketing impacts the place/distribution element, as it can open up new and alternative channels of distribution delivering new places to sell product and gain shelf space; and for promotions, partnership marketing delivers incremental marketing exposure and shares in the equity/strength of each partner's brand.

Key benefits of creating partnership brand marketing programs are far-reaching. Partnership marketing not only broadens the reach of a company's core target audience and extends its marketing budget, but also saves money and broadens the spectrum for the brand marketing group. The result is much-needed additional marketing exposure, which ultimately helps in gaining new customers. In addition, partnership brand marketing programs can also bring relevance and purpose to co-branding initiatives.

To ensure that partnership brand marketing programs become wider in scope and purpose, program overlays can be added. These can include all elements of a company's marketing mix, such as promotions, advertising, product, in-store merchandising, distribution, direct, online and public relations.

In addition, program overlays can include cross-company functions and disciplines, including corporate/general management, human resources and special events. By leveraging possible program overlays, companies can run employee-of-the-month programs, deliver special incentives and employee benefits with the partner company and create special product-launch events

As an example, we recently completed a national marketing alliance bringing Volvo Cars of North America to LEGOLAND California. To create the partnership marketing opportunity for LEGOLAND California, it was important to first understand the brand—what it stood for, the consumers it reached, the brand value and brand characteristics it delivers to its consumers.

When looking for the right marketing partnership, we needed to carefully align with another brand that delivered similar attributes and quality, while providing incremental marketing exposure in an alternative channel of distribution—and, at the same time, creating a synergy and balance in a relationship between two very different brands.

In creating a marketing partnership with Volvo, the LEGOLAND California brand was able to reach and market to consumers in the automotive channel, including dealers and auto shows in key cities nationwide.

In turn, Volvo was able to reach customers in the all-important family theme park channel. By exposing and introducing consumers to Volvo flagship vehicles at a theme park, Volvo could promote and expand on the corporate heritage and brand image that has defined the company as an automotive leader in safety, quality and performance.

And the marketing partnership between LEGOLAND California and Volvo now extends far beyond the promotional arena, as it includes cross promotions, joint advertising, a dealer component, marketing exposure on the national auto show circuit, a life-size Volvo LEGO car, Volvo cars placed at LEGOLAND California, LEGOLAND marketed in Volvo auto dealer channel, Volvo's becoming the "Official Car of LEGOLAND California," special events and corporate/employee programs.

As a result of the joint marketing partnership and a fully integrated approach, the overall value to the consumer has increased significantly. At the end of the day, it is important that the consumer be able to take a look at such a marketing partnership and say, "That makes sense."

In today's busy world of brand marketing, using the strength of partnership brand marketing to gain incremental marketing exposure and penetration of new distribution channels is not only smart but also an essential marketing tool for marketers who must remain ever more competitive in today's constantly changing marketplace.

Note: Register for Greg Pollack's upcoming virtual seminar, "The Power of Partnership Brand Marketing," to be held Thursday, January 12, at noon (Eastern). Greg shows how to connect your brand to another brand to gain new customers. [Get more information or sign up here.](#)



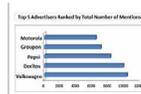
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