

6.5: Managing the Offering

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the people involved in creating and managing offerings.
2. Recognize the differences in organizing product marketing for consumer versus B2B companies.

Managing all of a company's offerings presents a number of challenges. Depending on the size of the company and the breadth of the company's offerings, several positions may be needed.

A brand manager is one such position. A **brand manager** is the person responsible for all business decisions regarding offerings within one brand. By business decisions, we mean making decisions that affect profit and loss, which include such decisions as which offerings to include in the brand, how to position the brand in the market, pricing options, and so forth. Indeed, a brand manager is often charged with running the brand as if it were its own separate business.

A brand manager is much more likely to be found in consumer marketing companies. Typically, B2B companies do not have multiple brands so the position is not common in the B2B environment. What you often find in a B2B company is a **product manager**, someone with business responsibility for a particular product or product line. Like the brand manager, the product manager must make many business decisions, such as which offerings to include, advertising selection, and so on. Companies with brand managers include Microsoft, Procter & Gamble, SC Johnson, Kraft, Target, General Mills, and ConAgra Foods. Product managers are found at Xerox, IBM, Konica-Minolta Business Solutions, Rockwell International, and many others.

The University of Georgia was the first to launch a graduate program in brand management, but the only major program now being taught in the United States is at the University of Wisconsin. The program is managed through the university's Center for Brand and Product Management. Most brand managers simply have an undergraduate degree in marketing, but it helps to have a strong background in either finance or accounting because of the profitability and volume decisions brand managers have to make. In the United Kingdom, a number of schools have undergraduate degree programs specializing in brand management, as does Seneca College in Toronto, Canada.

In some companies, a **category manager** has responsibility for business decisions within a broad grouping of offerings. For example, a category manager at SC Johnson may have all home cleaning products, which would mean that brands such as Pledge, Vanish, Drano, Fantastik, Windex, Scrubbing Bubbles, and Shout would be that person's responsibility. Each of those brands may be managed by brand manager who then reports directly to the category manager.

At the retail level, a category manager at each store is responsible for more than just one manufacturer's products. The home cleaning category manager would have responsibility for offerings from SC Johnson, as well as Procter & Gamble, Colgate-Palmolive, and many other producers.

Another option is to create a **market manager**, who is responsible for business decisions within a market. In this case, a market can be defined as a geographic market or region; a market segment, such as a type of business; or a channel of distribution. For example, SC Johnson could have regional insect control managers. Regional market managers would make sense for insect control because weather has an influence on which bugs are pests at any given time. For example, a southern regional manager would want more inventory of the repellent Off! in March because it is already warm and the mosquitoes are already breeding and biting in the southern United States.

In B2B markets, a market manager is more likely to be given responsibility for a particular market segment, such as all hospital health care professionals or doctor's offices. All customers such as these (retail, wholesale, and so forth) in a particular industry compose what's called a **vertical market**, and the managers of these markets are called **vertical market managers**. B2B companies organize in this way because

- buying needs and processes are likely to be similar within an industry,
- channels of communication are likely to be the same within an industry but different across industries.

Because magazines, Web sites, and trade shows are organized to serve specific industries or even specific positions within industries, B2B marketers find vertical market structures for marketing departments to be more efficient than organizing by geography.

Market managers sometimes report to brand managers or are a part of their firms' sales organizations and report to sales executives. Market managers are less likely to have as much flexibility in terms of pricing and product decisions and have no control over the communication content of marketing campaigns or marketing strategies. These managers are more likely to be tasked with implementing a product or brand manager's strategy and be responsible for their markets. Some companies have market managers but no brand managers. Instead, marketing vice presidents or other executives are responsible for the brands.

Key Takeaway

Brand managers decide what products are to be marketed and how. Other important positions include category managers, market managers, and vertical market managers. Category managers are found in consumer markets, usually in retail. Market managers can be found in both consumer markets and B2B markets. However, vertical market managers are found only in B2B markets. Some companies have market managers but no brand managers. Instead, a vice president of marketing or other executive is responsible for the brands.

Review Questions

1. What is a brand manager?
2. How do brand managers differ from category managers?
3. What is a market manager?
4. Which type of manager has the most marketing responsibility?

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