

FASHION MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

GAYNOR LEA-GREENWOOD

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Inspiration over the years has come from a wide variety of sources:

- my nan, who introduced me to the frustrating concept of window shopping, when the shops were shut
- my parents, who let me buy and hoard magazines and clothes, in their space, long after I had left home, who also encouraged and supported my choice of career, first in the 'rag trade' and then lecturing
- my visits to international fashion destinations for business or pleasure
- students past and present for looking like they were listening to my stories, during lectures, then telling me their stories
- the fashion industry for being a constant source of interest and indeed joy
- moleskine notebooks with lots of lists
- displacement activities, too many to mention
- my sister Madeleine and my friend Barbara for a lot of laughs along the way.

Dedication: this is for my son Max. May this little book keep you in the manner to which you have become accustomed or, if not, remind you of me sitting at the kitchen table writing, whilst you just brought me your dirty washing, asked if I'd had another 'productive day' in a sarcastic manner and then asked what was for tea. It was never going

to be the Harry Potter or blockbuster equivalent for which you had hoped.

Now, having finally finished this, I am off on another shopping trip. Do your own washing and make your own tea, Max!

My dear Mum would have been thrilled and organised a book launch.

—Gaynor Lea-Greenwood

April 2012

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I was the author of Chapter 9 in the seminal and popular textbook, *Fashion Marketing*, edited by Mike Easey, which is currently in its third edition. This book is a response to a request for more on fashion marketing communications (FMC) at a time of growing interest in the subject as a distinct and yet integral part of the fashion industry. It has also come from my own needs as a lecturer in the subject of fashion marketing communications. Need is the mother of invention, as the saying goes.

For me, and probably for others, the interest in FMC was driven by traditional and online content in magazines; an exponential growth in PR, including advertorials, editorials, product placement, sponsorship and bloggers; pop-up stores; the cult of celebrity and the rise of social media. This has coincided with an economic downturn, in which 'getting more bang for your buck' is a key issue. The book was also conceived when 'fast fashion' was at its zenith. It also reflects the wider range of roles that students and fashion professionals are taking up in the industry.

So, the starting point of this book has been a long interest in the literature on marketing communications and finding, in my teaching of fashion marketing, that there was nothing really tailored to my needs. I cannot by any means say that I am an expert in the area of marketing communications but I have adapted seminal works to my interests in fashion and to my teaching purposes. I expect that some of you using this book have done the same.

Description of the book

I assume some level of knowledge, so that this text will fit with lecturers and students: having developed and understood the concept of the marketing mix, both audiences (lecturers and students) are now looking for details of the promotional mix to apply to FMC.

'Fashion marketing communications' and 'promotion' are terms that I use interchangeably; in some cases, FMC encompasses a wider and more professional remit than the traditional 'promotional mix' with which we may all be familiar.

This book follows a typical lecture schedule for an academic year of one or two terms or semesters, with some seminar input and student-focused exercises. It, therefore, includes activities and some further reading. I hope these can be adapted by lecturers as appropriate.

I also hope that lecturers and students can use this book as a starting point, because it is by no means all-encompassing. By its very nature, fashion is about change and the fashion industry is different from many other industries; by the time you are reading this, things will have developed further. However, what has happened in the past is relevant for a historical understanding or underpinning of how we got to where we are today and, perhaps more importantly, why.

I know now why fashion is so under-represented in the academic literature found in text books and even journal articles (with their shorter lead times); they are often seen as outmoded because, as is the nature of fashion, it's all about change and obsolescence.

Structure of the book

The layout of each chapter follows the same format: chapter objectives; an introduction; a definition, if it is required; explanation and examples of the major themes and content; a summary; ideas for activities that can easily be adapted; and further reading, which can be a starting point for further research. There are also some in-depth case studies, which can be used at any stage in a programme.

Most terminology is explained within the text because many students will 'switch off' if they do not get an explanation immediately. Lecturers and students always like to start with a definition to set the scene; formal definitions don't always exist, so I have created them.

In Chapter 2, the book attempts to start at the beginning of the communications process, with the role of strategy in FMC: understanding where a company is now and wants to be in the future. This is fundamental to establishing promotional objectives that lead to promotional activities. I am acutely aware that an 'emergent strategy' is often the one which best suits what I have called the 'fast and fickle' nature of the fashion business in a busy, cluttered and extremely competitive retail fashion environment. There are many books on general business strategy but none solely on FMC strategy so, for the purposes of this chapter, the major themes and concepts of strategy are applied to fashion communications.

Chapter 3 identifies the major tools of communication relevant to fashion retailing and marketing communications. Despite an exponential growth in social media during the writing of this book, traditional tools (such as magazines and PR) are still as important.

Despite new technology, no other channel has been able to display the luxury and elegance of print ads like magazines.

—'Tatler tries on augmented reality to celebrate September Web relaunch', www.luxurydaily.com, 1 August 2011

The tools and media channels available are discussed in terms of their advantages and disadvantages, as I find this is a useful way to analyse their relative merits. Students seem to like this checklist approach.

I make no apology for giving television advertising a wide berth. There are many texts that deal with television advertising but it is seldom used by fashion retailers (although highly targeted satellite channels, such as MTV, do have opportunities for wider exposure and 'reach' in fashion promotion), so I merely touch on it.

Chapter 4 looks at our emotional connection with magazines, how they work and what fashion consumers get from them in terms of a combination of information and entertainment, called 'infotainment'. Magazines are often considered as a 'light and fluffy' aspect of fashion but I suggest that they remain a major communication channel, whether in glossy, two-dimensional, 'have and hold' format or in online content or moving both forward in parallel.

Chapter 5 looks in detail at public relations (PR), including product placement and the role of PR in various media and how it might be valued more robustly. PR was (until relatively recently) widely regarded as a poor relation to traditional promotional channels such as advertising. Chapter 5 demonstrates how important the role has become in a crowded and cluttered media environment; where the role of editorial acts as a credible source of information, particularly for the fashion consumer.

Chapter 6 discusses the role of celebrity in fashion marketing communications. Despite the various announcements that celebrity culture has become 'tired' or is 'dead', the evidence in society and the media does not support this. A model of the celebrity lifecycle is introduced.

Chapter 7 makes no apologies for being a long chapter about the role of communications within the retail environment itself. Visual merchandising and the whole in-

store experience that affects purchasing decisions is renamed 'visual marketing'. This is because I feel that this element in communications has not been covered in enough depth and rigour in relation to a holistic approach to marketing communications. It is much more important than simply 'dressing dummies'. This chapter also considers the difficulties of translating the in-store experience into an online experience.

Chapter 8 considers the role of trade marketing communications, that is, business-to-business (B2B) rather than business-to-consumer (B2C) communications. Much of the fashion industry is concerned with wholesaling and supplying the retail trade and this is an area which has hitherto been neglected. This chapter attempts to demonstrate the difference in communication strategy and tools, with a generally more knowledgeable trade or industry audience.

Chapter 9 takes a look at internationalisation in FMC and sets many of the preceding themes within the international context. This is most apposite considering the various push and pull factors that are driving fashion into the international arena.

Chapter 10 examines the often combinatorial relationship that fashion promotion has with the regulatory frameworks that exist in many developed markets. This is not surprising, as fashion is associated with symbols of sex and issues of size, airbrushing, the sexualisation of minors and nudity. This will be a continuing tension as fashion so often reflects contemporary culture.

Chapter 11 looks at how the effectiveness of FMC can be measured. This has been a particularly difficult chapter to write; to this day, I do not know whether anyone has discovered a complete answer to this question. I describe some methodologies, but who actually knows what goes on in the 'black box' of the subconscious? Many people have

tried but all have failed to make a rational or foolproof case for what can be considered totally irrational behaviour in fashion purchasing and the influence of marketing communications in fashion purchasing decisions.

Chapter 12 contains some career guidance for people entering the fashion marketing communications industry. Knowing, understanding and being able to use the terminology is vital to demonstrating interest in the area. Work experience in whatever capacity is necessary and this begins with research, observation and an appropriate CV.

CHAPTER 2

MARKETING STRATEGY

If we fail to plan then we plan to fail.

—Anonymous

THIS CHAPTER:

- outlines the starting point for companies when faced with a competitive environment
- explains what strategy is in fashion marketing communications
- explains the models and tools of strategy
- gives examples of companies' strategies.

Introduction

Put simply, a strategy is an overarching plan for long-, medium- or short-term achievement of the company's objectives.

Corporate strategy tends to be long term and is often incorporated in the mission statement issued by an organisation in their communications with the public (customers, employees and shareholders). Its objective is to sum up the essence of what the company is and what it stands for. The following mission statement is for a company that sells family fashion at value prices:

To be a major player in fashion for the family, offering convenience, choice, value and quality

A corporate strategy should guide all aspects of an organisation's operations, into what are called functional

strategies – product selection, price architecture, distribution and promotional activities. The functional strategies incorporate all aspects of the marketing mix in order to fulfil the corporate strategy. To fulfil the statement above, the company will select products that match the target market's desire for quality fashion at affordable prices, available in high-street shops and online.

When product, price and place (or distribution, for example, shops or online outlets) are correctly managed, then the organisation can look at creating a promotional strategy. In the example, the functional promotional strategy would probably include television advertising.

The various acronyms introduced in this chapter are useful for memorising the parts of the process but they do not necessarily reflect industry practice or the reality of promotional planning.

Promotional strategy

Promotion is a term that is often used interchangeably with 'marketing communications'.

The promotional mix consists of:

- **advertising**
- **sales promotion**
- **personal selling**
- **public relations**
- **direct marketing**

The specific usage of each of these items is elucidated in Chapter 3; for now, we consider them in general terms.

- **Advertising** is considered to be 'above the line' activity, which means that it is clear to the consumer where the information originates from. It consists of paid-for communications from company to company or consumer.

- **Sales promotions** are in-store activities, which may include short-term discounts to stimulate demand.
- **Personal selling** is the use of sales personnel to communicate with potential customers.
- **Public relations** refers to less obvious forms of promotion, such as product placement in magazines, sometimes called 'below the line' activity as it is not always clear what originates with the company and what is editorial comment.
- **Direct marketing** consists of mail shots and, more recently, e-mail, SMS communications and immediate links to purchase, such as quick response (QR) codes.

Promotion should be integrated with the rest of the marketing mix. No amount of communications can sell a product which is not wanted by the consumer, is not at the right price point or is not readily available.

For any strategy, and it is no different with promotional strategy, there are three fundamental questions:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be?
- How do we get there or achieve it?

Deceptively, these appear to be simple questions. Their complexity should not be underrated or you will come up with simplistic answers.

We can expand this model to cover the whole promotional cycle with the acronym **SOSTAC**:

- **Situation analysis** (where are we now?)
- **Objectives** (where do we want to be?)
- **Strategies** (how do we get there?)
- **Tactics** (which tools do we use?)
- **Activities, actions and analysis** (what we do and how we measure it)
- **Control** (evaluation of activities and feedback).

Where are we now?

A brand-new company is unknown to the target market and its promotional strategy starts from a very low base: it has no profile and no previous perceptions. The start-up costs of promotional activity can be extremely expensive from this position as awareness of the company, brand and their product is non-existent. However, changing the public's perception of an existing brand is considered much harder to do. Perceptions and attitudes towards a brand are sometimes so firmly established in a consumer's mind that it takes a very expensive and sustained promotional campaign to make even a small shift in attitude.

An existing company must carry out a *situational audit*. This means undertaking research to attempt to understand the competitive environment and the perceptions of the brand held by past and present consumers. It also entails analysing previous and existing campaigns.

Such research can be undertaken by the company itself, if it has the skills. However, it is much more likely to be done by a professional research company or an advertising agency.

In the late 1990s, French Connection discovered via research that the brand was no longer 'salient'. In other words, it was no longer uppermost in the consumer's mind. French Connection had lost its market position due to a number of factors, not least new entrants to the market and existing competition.

Where do we want to be?

Based on the research into its current position, a company can move towards setting realistic, precise and achievable objectives, such as:

- Introduce the brand to the market using a full campaign that integrates advertising across all available media channels.
- Raise consumer awareness of the brand amongst the core target market by targeting the media used by the core consumer.
- Drive sales through reducing prices in sales promotions in store, in magazines and online.
- Create exciting selling environments by refitting the retail environment.
- Deliver a quality-value proposition to customers that confirms low prices but good quality.

These are viable objectives that can lead to a functional or operational specific strategy.

Objectives of the promotional mix should be **SMART**:

- **Specific**, for example, to increase sales
- **Measurable**, for example, any increase in sales can be identified
- **Achievable**, for example, a discount coupon will encourage customers
- **Relevant**, for example, a discount coupon will be welcome in a recession
- **Timed**, for example, the campaign will run over specific dates.

French Connection decided to reposition the company as an edgy brand. Repositioning a company is about changing consumer perceptions and is often extremely expensive as it involves a great deal of promotional effort. French Connection wanted to communicate that it was an edgy urban brand but, because of falling sales, the campaign had to be done on a small budget. It did this by using 'fcuk' in slogans on T-shirts ('fcuk fashion' was the first one and was an instant sell out).

Customers were paying to advertise the brand out on the streets. Every time a new version of the fcuk slogan was

released, it was considered relevant to the target market, which enjoyed the iconic and cheeky slogans. The increased sales were both achievable and measurable. This was a very successful and cost-effective campaign – French Connection advertised solely on billboards, which are considerably cheaper than television or magazine advertising. The revenue from the sales of the T-shirts allowed French Connection to expand into international markets and new product categories (toiletries, fragrance) based on the return on the low promotional investment.

However, it became apparent over time that the consumer grew tired of the ‘fcuk’ innovation – it became stale. The idea of using the T-shirt as a tool of promotion should probably have been time limited.

How do we get there?

The choice of strategy must be realistic. For example, if sales are falling, it is unlikely that a single expensive TV advertising campaign promoting the store will either be financially viable or stimulate demand in the long term: the rest of the mix must be addressed.

The strategy must consider the **five Ms** involved:

- **Muscle, or men (and women)** – the people to undertake the activities
- **Money** – the budget for the activities
- **Minutes** – how much time will be allocated for the activities
- **Message** – the promotional message
- **Measurement** – how results will be measured.

Fashion promotion in a competitive environment must stand out from the bigger players with their large budgets. The main objective of the luxury brands is to stay in the consumer’s mind so they advertise continually with their

distinctive image as their theme. In contrast, most middle-market fashion brands do not have this type of budget. New designers and independent retailers also do not have large budgets for promotional campaigns.

An 'evoked set' refers to the brands which come first to consumers' minds when they are asked where they shop; they are also known as a consumer's 'repertoire' of brands. If sales are falling and the rest of the mix appears attractive to the target market but research has shown that the brand does not register in the consumer's mind, this would suggest the need for a promotional mix to create awareness. Budgetary constraints may make it appropriate to increase below-the-line activity:

- Link up with a charity
- Develop celebrity endorsement
- Sponsor a fashion event
- Increase product placement
- Upgrade the website to include video content
- Encourage bloggers to discuss the brand.

To achieve these objectives, a company may hire a public relations (PR) agency or develop in-house PR skills to gain coverage of these activities in the press.

If the brand has the finance, then a complete campaign including both advertising and PR activities may be appropriate.

French Connection did not have a large budget so they simply used the fcuk name (the abbreviation of French Connection UK). The 'fcuk' campaign got the brand talked about because it used what was called 'dyslexic daring'. It also managed to get a lot of free press coverage.

Models of advertising